



# Framing of the 1MDB financial scandal: A comparative study of the coverage by *The Star* and *Malaysiakini*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the framing of a financial scandal involving top government officials by a mainstream news medium (*The Star*) and an alternative news medium (*Malaysiakini*) before the historic change of the country's ruling party. In particular, the paper reveals why a financial scandal became politicised, and how a controversial issue was framed within the context of lawsuit threats and newspaper permit suspension. A total of 815 straight news articles from 1 July to 30 September 2016 published in *The Star* (185 articles) and *Malaysiakini* (630 articles) were analysed. The quantitative content analysis revealed that headlines generally contained two to three dimensions, and *The Star* had typically longer and more multi-dimensional headlines. The political, constitution and jurisprudence dimensions dominated the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) news headlines, accounting for 56.7% of 1,619 dimensions identified. Although 1MDB was a financial scandal, only *Malaysiakini* framed it as such while *The Star* downplayed the effect of the alleged embezzlement of 1MDB funds on the Malaysian economy. As for the crime and justice dimension, *The Star* focused on details of the unfolding events whereas *Malaysiakini* highlighted suspects of the alleged embezzlement and sacking of high-ranking government officers assisting the investigation. There is a stark contrast evident in the framing of the morality dimension of 1MDB news articles with *The Star* presenting the government voice, whereas *Malaysiakini* carried the voice of the opposition leaders and religious heads. The findings indicate that *The Star* was more guarded in framing 1MDB news compared to *Malaysiakini*.

Keywords: *The Star*, *Malaysiakini*, framing, 1MDB, financial scandal