

Turkey elections: a glimmer of hope?

21st June 2018

The time is running out and Turkey is now prepared to face the presidential and parliamentary elections on Sunday 24th June. Millions of voters have been bombarded with all sort of (fake/real) news. In the past debates had been raised regarding the impact fake news had on elections in other countries, such as in the US; today the question is whether Turkey will follow this pattern and whether this time Erdoğan is facing a real possibility of losing.



Fake news, often spread through social media, represents a powerful tool capable of distorting and influencing people's beliefs and opinions - we have seen the effects in the American elections - especially in a country that reaches vast numbers of social media users like Turkey. In fact, it is the ninth in the world with 52 million Facebook users, meaning that 89% of the population utilises social media as a primary source of information.

In Turkey the situation is slightly different, not just limited to the meddling of fake news at election time; in fact. It is not much about the propagation of this but rather about the media monopoly exercised by pro-government sections and the state. The media, the expression of freedom, is not free anymore.

Recently, in March, the largest media conglomerate in the country, the Doğan group, comprising the newspaper Hurriyet as well as CNN Turk, was bought by one of Erdoğan's close supporters, shifting the numbers with more than 80% of the media now in the hands of the government, either directly or indirectly.

The government is exploiting this situation to its advantage hoping to win the elections. Given that the mainstream media is under the control of the state or deliberately focusing and favoring one side rather than the other, social media is the only way left to the opposition to contrast this biased narrative and level the playing field. The mainstream media has become in a way, fake news in itself – although it does not mean that social media on the other hand has turned into reliable sources.

The situation is critically complicated; citizens are stripped of their right of information, left in a society where they cannot distinguish between real and fake news. What is affecting Turkey is not just the spread of fake news in itself but also, most worrying, the disinformation divulged by conventional media. The media only portray one side of the debate, discarding the other and spreading biased knowledge amongst the population.

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Four possible scenarios can be predicted for Turkey's future. First, Erdoğan will win both the presidency and the parliamentary majority, consolidating even more his grip on the country and turning it into a legitimate autocracy. His victory will even further deteriorate Turkish economy and the media monopoly will persist (restricting freedom even more). Second, the opposition will overthrow Erdoğan and take meaningful power; although the most desirable it is very unlikely to happen. Third, the least likely, the opposition will obtain the presidency, but the parliamentary majority will go to Erdoğan's AKP party. Fourth, Erdoğan will win the presidency but the opposition will obtain the majority in parliament; a very likely solution, even though it won't represent a full victory for the opposition it would still have a great impact and would be the starting point for the deposition of the current autocratic president.

The results cannot be predicted; although bets point at Erdoğan winning all again, this time there could be a 50/50 chance of him losing at least parliament control as the opposition has proven to be strong and with a substantial following. However, an opposition majority in parliament could spark instability overall.

On the foreign policy side, little is expected to change. Relationships with Europe are not forecasted to heal soon neither is the one with the US, although desirable. The opposition candidate Ince has posed great focus on the matter as part of his campaign.

In a climate of turmoil where the freedom of expression has been eroded almost completely and corruption and a lack of transparency and fairness have taken over, Turkish citizens seem to have not lost hope, and these upcoming elections could determine the end of Erdoğan's reign once and for all.

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