

Representation of Politics or Politics of Representation?

Patterns of Western Mainstream Media Coverage during Turkey's 2018 Elections

By Dr. Tarek CHERKAOUI

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Executive Summary

In this paper, articles published by established mainstream media organisations from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France were analysed in the context of Turkey's 2018 elections. The period that was studied stretched from April 18 to June 5, 2018. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there was a media bias in the reporting and treatment of the related information, and determine its extent in the overall coverage.

Subsequently, the framing methodology that was applied revealed the existence of dominant narratives underlying this coverage. These narratives misconstrue Turkey's political system and the leadership of the country by denigrating

Turkish democracy and painting an image of an authoritarian state that stands in contradiction with Western norms. There were also other narratives which denigrated Turkey's economic success story by building an image of a country in crisis, instilling fear and panic among investors and the business community.

The findings of the study uncovered patterns in Western mainstream media coverage and offered a perspective of how these media organisations frame their information in relation to Turkey's June 2018 elections. The findings could contribute to a deeper understanding of how Turkey is represented in the media in general, more specifically in key political moments, such as this.

Media bias and news research

Media bias is a term used to describe selectivity in the reporting of information and the coverage of events in a way that contravenes the standards of high quality journalism. The body of research surrounding media bias and related techniques of opinion manipulation flourished in America during the 1920s and 1930s. By 1935, a bibliography that included several thousand works on the subject was compiled (Cmiel, 1996: 89). From the 1960s onwards, a fairly extensive body of research was produced which primarily focused on the lack of objectivity in the reporting of international events by American media organisations (e.g. Dahlgren 1982; Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harrison and Palmer 1986). These studies showed that news outlets were inclined to provide better coverage of countries considered close to the West, culturally or politically, whilst coverage of other regions (such as the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America) was scarce, decontextualized, and negative in substance because it was centred mostly on wars and natural disasters

Scholars like Daniel Hallin, Edward Herman, and Noam Chomsky went further to reveal the extent of ideological bias in U.S. mainstream media, and how the latter either implicitly or explicitly supported U.S. foreign policy interests. For instance, in his analysis of the Vietnam War reporting, Daniel Hallin argued that the closer the information is to the truth, the further buried it will be (Hallin, 1986: 78). Such a perspective was further elaborated by Herman and Chomsky in their seminal work *Manufacturing Consent* (1988). In their view, instead of looking at journalistic conduct and public opinion as the main determining variables for media behaviour and performance, the U.S. media was seen as heavily and uncritically dependent on elite information sources and acting on behalf of elite interests. The model they put forward helps us to understand the complex relationships between U.S. news media companies, political elites and the public in debates over U.S. foreign policy. The Herman and Chomsky model proved all the more valid in the post 9/11 period, when U.S. mainstream media acted as mere conduits for U.S. foreign policy objectives (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Miller, 2004; Klaehn, 2002).

Given the constant scrutiny that Western media apply to the Middle East and related concerns regarding issues of representation, it is essential to produce studies that closely examine the subsequent news coverage and framing. Such research will discern any given negative or positive orientations toward specific issues or events, and determine the degree to which these media organisations can be viewed as objective and impartial reporters of truth. These types of studies remain desirable not only

within journalism and communication studies, but also in other disciplines such as sociology, political science, and political psychology because of the cross-disciplinary nature of framing research.

Since its emergence in 1923 as an independent and modern nation-state, Turkey has been an essential player in the Middle East, as the country constitutes one of the leading examples of institutional modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation. Turkey has also been in the scene of a noteworthy move toward democratisation and departure from the military's domination over the state. This shift was spearheaded by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party hereafter), which achieved consecutive electoral wins since 2002 and played a key role in transforming Turkey into one of the key actors in world politics, as well as global political economy. Thus, research on how Western media represents these dynamics, and especially during times of high political contention such as elections, is necessary.

Therefore, the key question that will be investigated in this paper is how did Western mainstream media represent Turkey's June 24 2018 elections? While seeking answers to this question, the following sub-questions will also be asked: How were the news texts (e.g. titles) constructed? How were those involved in the story represented? (e.g. the president, AK Party, news sources), and what narrative structures and language choices (e.g. metaphors, catchphrases, lexical selections) were utilised?

To this end, the wide-ranging LexisNexis database was searched and existing literature about the role of Western media in representing Turkish elections was reviewed. For the sake of definitional clarity, this paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive study on the entire coverage of Western mainstream media regarding the aforesaid elections, rather it is an attempt to detect certain patterns in the coverage by some of the largest media organisations in the U.S., U.K., and France, such as *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *Agence France Press (AFP)*.

It should also be noted that the bias investigated henceforth is not related to a few random cases of individual subjectivity, in which some journalists and pundits favour their own ethnic, racial, religious, political affiliation, and class status over others. Instead, this study is solely interested about the impactful, sustained, and systemic type of media bias, which typically stems from large entities, business interests, and other lobbies which can effectively have an influence upon the way stories are featured and framed.

Media bias and framing

The detection of ideological traces in communication is necessary to understand how the mobilisation of media bias operates, which led scholars to also investigate the concept of ideology. For academic John Thompson, "[ideology is] primarily concerned with the ways in which symbolic forms intersect with relations of power" (Thompson, 1990: 56). Similarly, French sociologist Jacques Ellul argued that media bias has an unequivocal relationship to ideology, and necessarily begins with ideology (Ellul, 1965: 193-202). In the same way, scholars Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, recommended that the first step when analysing media bias is "to look for ideology in both verbal and visual representations" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1992: 213-214).

The mobilisation of media bias works as concerted efforts to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and mobilise the emotions of the targeted public for a specific political end. This is done whilst the real intentions and sources behind the communication are concealed, supporting evidence is ignored, and discursive means with little or no appeal to reason are employed (Sproule, 1994: 8). In addition, it was argued that the essence of the framing process is 'to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists' (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198). This takes place by highlighting certain aspects of social reality while concealing others. The strategic purpose of framing is thus to orient the mass public towards a particular set of political objectives.

Numerous scholars have observed the strong link between framing and the mobilisation of media bias (McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Parenti, 1995). American political scientist and cultural critic Michael Parenti (2000) argued that if spin doctors, media pundits, public relations executives and the likes are involved in a campaign of public opinion manipulation in the U.S., they often resort to framing. For this reason, framing analysis is a powerful tool when it comes to examining the contours of the media's role in the service of structural and institutional power, as it provides a solid platform for analysing the orchestration of discourse, including its semantic and syntactic aspects, and allows a close scrutiny of the sources of communication. Therefore, this study will analyse media coverage from the prism of framing analysis.

In terms of typology, frames can be classified into three types: deep frames, meso-frames, and story frames. The first type represent deep seated beliefs stemming from dominant narratives and myths in any given society. They shape "an internalised power structure, a deep-rooted belief system or a shared culture in a society" (Hyun, 2004).

This means that a multitude of ideological, political and cultural contexts are combined and subsequently produce pictures within the minds of individuals that construct their conception of "us" and "them" (Kellner, 1995).

The second type, namely the meso-frames, represent the transition from the deep frames i.e. high-level deep-seated ideas and ideologies to pre-packaged positions and views. Academics Holli Semetko and Patti Valkenburg discerned a series of meso-frames, such as the conflict frame, the human-interest frame and the economic consequence frame. In addition, political communication professors De Vreese and Boogaarden (2003) discerned another important meso-frame, namely the dictatorship frame, which acts in opposition to the democracy frame and aims to galvanise a clear polarisation of the subjects between friends and enemies, dictators and democratic leaders.

The third level of frames is formed by story framing. Academic Paolo Donati (1994) discussed story frames, which he termed "surface structure" that contain "codes." According to Donati, these codes are discernible text segments that contain - within a specific context - a deeper meaning beyond what the basic dictionary would indicate, when this text segment is studied in separation. Story framing is also about organising the story into a set of shorter stories as per the storytelling techniques (Hallahan, 1999: 207).

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Earlier framing of the AK Party in Turkey

Before delving into the above-mentioned subject, it is essential to note here that there is generally a latent negative coverage surrounding the Middle East region. A rhetoric of "otherness" is regularly used by news media outlets when reporting about the region, and Orientalist clichés regularly find their way to a worldwide audience (Said 1981; Suleiman 1988; Kamalipour 1995; Wolfsfeld 1997). In the past decades, Islam and Muslims were fashioned as a single cultural entity without internal complexities, and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures were stigmatised as violent, whilst audiences were constantly reminded of their backwardness and irrationality (Karim 2000).

In the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, this process accelerated even further and the aforementioned myths were circulated by Western media at a much greater pace and frequency, to promote an agenda primarily grounded in the clash of civilisations paradigm, even if the theory is deeply flawed (Said, 2001). Amongst the most regurgitated clichés was the purported incompatibility of Islam with modernity and democracy. Accordingly, whenever popular democratic forces in the region win in free and fair elections, if these parties have any connection to Islam - irrespective of how nominal this connection is, the ensuing reporting will reduce these electoral victories to questions of "fundamentalism," and the purported backwardness and irrationality of these masses. More worryingly, such electoral wins will be framed as an enduring threat to the Western world. The subsequent combination produces an explosive mix of highly detrimental media representation, to wit anti-democratic, anti-modern, and anti-West.

The AK Party was established in Turkey in 2001, and is considered among the most successful democratic parties in the Muslim world. The party made substantial steps to implement high standards for individual freedoms, assuaged constraints on Kurdish cultural manifestations, and more importantly stopped the military's dominance over political life. In fact, AK Party did not enforce any religious rules and left it to the individual whether to be more observant of Islam or not. In a similar way, women's rights were not only preserved but also enhanced, and their participation in politics was subsequently boosted. Additionally, AK Party played a vital role in the makeover of Turkey, transforming the country into an essential actor in international affairs and global political economy. In short, AK Party can be best described as a conservative party and which could easily be compared to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany for example. The

latter is a centre-right political party that supports a free-market economy and social welfare programmes but is conservative on social issues. This argument was put forward by the AK Party's senior leaders, who stated that their party was not "religion centric" but "conservative and democrat" (Dagi, 2006: 2).

Yet, instead of representing AK Party along similar lines, and in spite of all the goodwill this party has shown since its inception, the vast majority of Western media coverage pertaining to the elections of 2002 framed AK Party as an "Islamist" or "Islamic" party. This led author Christian Christensen to assemble a series of print media headlines in his study of the aforesaid elections:

Islamists Celebrate Landslide Victory

(Times of London, November 4)

Islamic Party Sweeps Turkish Poll

(Guardian, November 4)

Islamic "Clean" Party Sweeping Board in Turkey

(Daily Telegraph, November 4)

Turkey's Islamic Leader Moves to Reassure West

(Guardian, November 5)

Turkish Elections Landslide for Pro-Islamists...

(Independent, November 5)

Moderate Islamic Party Wins Vote in Turkey

(Los Angeles Times, November 4)

Party Tied to Islam Wins Big in Turkey

(Washington Post, November 4)

Turkish Party of Islamic Roots Wins Election

(Boston Globe, November 4)

Turkey, Too, Sees Gains by Islamists

(Christian Science Monitor, November 5)

(Christensen, 2005: 117)

Christensen acknowledged indeed the existence of some variance between the different newspapers. However, the fact that this party was framed either as an Islamic, Islamist, or Islamicist party, combined with the failure of the same media outlets to explain what this actually means in practice, and their neglect to identify the magnitude of

such roots and beliefs, while leaving intentionally a lot of blanks for the audience to fill, was in itself a potent negative framing vis-à-vis audiences in the West. For a long time, these readers were subjected to a process whereby Islam was not only demonised, but also portrayed as an external peril to Western identity and interests, and a perpetual threat to the West's freedom, economy, and culture. Nevertheless, even with such considerable negative coverage from Western media, AK Party went on to succeed in consecutive elections and score commendable political victories against its opponents in 2002, 2007, 2011 and 2015.

About a decade later, Turkey's democratic system came under severe threat by the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ), which is led by U.S.-based cleric, Fetullah Gulen. The latter used its elements within the military to attempt a coup d'état on July 15, 2016 against the existing constitutional order. During this bloody event, 249 people including 170 civilians were killed and over 2,191 were wounded. One would normally expect Western media, which spend substantial airtime and print space on lecturing non-Western nations about the benefits of democracy, to condemn this subversion as it represented a frontal attack on democracy. However, after a period of silence from most Western capitals in the first hours (and days) following the attempt, Western media went on tirades against the legality in Turkey, criticising the government rather than the putschists.

Against this background, researcher Enes Bayrakli, analysed the media reporting pertaining to that bloody episode. He argued that Western mainstream news organisations shifted the blame to the authorities in Turkey, producing headlines such as: "Accusations of torture against soldiers"; "Turkey to proceed against Journalists" etc. This negative and one-sided attitude increased dramatically after the Turkish government declared a state of emergency" (Bayrakli, 2016: 1). Acting in a similar manner, Fox News stated that "Friday night's failed coup was Turkey's last hope to stop the Islamisation of its government and the degradation of its society," whereas The New York Times tweeted a story on its Twitter account stating that "Erdoğan supporters are sheep and they will follow whatever he says" (Bayrakli, 2016: 3). These type of biased and partisan statements raise concerns about the standards of journalism regarding this episode.

Double standards is another issue that warrants further scrutiny. Bayrakli identified such conduct from the German

television ARD in its coverage of two comparable events, namely the declaration of state emergency in Turkey and France following violent incidents (The attempted coup d'état in Turkey and The Charlie Hebdo episode in France). Bayrakli observed that the German broadcaster framed the two emergency situations, which were very similar in nature, very differently on its Facebook account:

- "Turkey: "Emergency Rule in Turkey: Now Erdogan has so much power"
- France: "The French National Assembly has decided: State of Emergency to be prolonged for six months"

The coverage of the French situation clearly represents France as a civilised democratic country where the rule of law is respected, and offers an unemotional image of France. But in the case of Turkey, political processes are reduced to a personality, suggesting that this would strengthen only one person" (Bayrakli, 2016: 2).

These examples reveal the existence of media bias from established Western news outlets in their coverage of AK Party and key events involving this party. Paradoxically, such comportment undermine the very same rhetoric of objectivity that these media organisations use, to legitimise their status and mission.

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Western mainstream media framing of Turkey's 2018 elections

Against this backdrop, a search was conducted for articles on the subject of the Turkish elections written between April 18 (the day President Erdogan announced the elections) and June 5, 2018. Using the LexisNexis system, data was acquired from newspapers and international news agencies in the U.S., U.K., and France about Turkey's 2018 elections. Subsequently, there were 2209 hits in the database, which were narrowed down by filtering the data and limiting the news agencies and newspapers (including - but not limited to - Agence France Press (AFP), The Associated Press, The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Times, and the Guardian). As a result, 296 articles were retrieved, of which 67 are leading articles (see table 1 in Appendix 1).

Applying a qualitative approach, each leading article was examined, and framing research was used as the main analytical tool. This method involves a close scrutiny of the media political economy, media sources, as well as the study of thematic, rhetorical, syntactic, and discursive structures. Such approach is necessary to uncover the frames that project particular political leanings, strategic agendas, and cultural values. However, by reason of practicality, only meso-frames were investigated.

The decision to hold elections was made on April 18, 2018 and the media salvo began immediately afterwards. The Associated Press (AP) published a wire on April 18 under the headline: "Erdogan Catches Turkey off Guard by Calling Early Elections." This press release went to great lengths to use the word "power," so as to portray the Turkish president as a power hungry dictator. Yet, in spite of making such assertion, the article quoted only one source i.e. Soner Cagaptay, who is known for his political engagement against President Erdogan, without attempting to balance this perspective effectively. There was a shallow attempt to insert some sparse and decontextualised quotes from the Turkish president to give a semblance of journalistic objectivity. Then again, relying on one source and surrounding it with an aura of respectability without acknowledging that same source's partisan views is a very old trick in the media spin book. In a book entitled, *The News Shapers*, author Laurence Soley noted that journalists routinely add touches of deference to statements made by politicians, who have vested political interests in the issue at stake, by describing them as "leading experts" or "noted foreign policy observers." Soley considered such "expert" advice to be merely a subterfuge (Soley 1992: 27).

Interestingly, Time Magazine published on April 24, 2018 an article penned by Soner Cagaptay, who is incidentally quoted by U.S. media outlets on a regular basis. This article was titled "How President Erdogan is Turning Turkey into Putin's Russia," and the author portrayed President Erdogan very negatively. Employing the dictatorship frame at every turn, he depicted the Turkish president as a dictatorial and repressive ruler, who is allegedly out of touch with a modern sub-urban electorate. Going through this article, the normal reader would assume that the writer is a diehard pro-democracy crusader. However, a quick glimpse at the author's own writings following the failed putsch in Turkey reveals a troubling fact. Cagaptay seemed indeed utterly disappointed with the failure of the coup d'état against the democratic institutions; a rather contradictory stance for someone claiming to care so much about democracy in Turkey.

In an article published by the Wall Street Journal on 17 July, 2016 titled "Turkey Faces Its Iran 1979 Moment," instead of criticising the coup plotters in their quest to usurp the Turkish people from their democratic rights, Cagaptay unleashed his wrath on the civilians who heroically stopped the putsch at the cost of sacrificing their own lives. This event, which was one of the very rare moments in history in which the people stood out to protect their democratic rights, did not fare well in the writer's agenda. The latter was clearly displeased about the civilians' role and described them as "Jihadists." Cagaptay wrote in this context: "Erdogan supporters--who took to the streets to defy the coup, and who have continued to rally throughout the country since then--are not the garden-variety conservative AKP supporters, but rather Islamists, and even jihadists."

The author went on with his diatribe using vitriolic language and employing the word "Jihadist" several times. Obviously, such labelling was aimed at inciting the Western reader, who is already predisposed to this kind of rhetoric against Turkey, the AK Party, and the entire region, so as to build an extremely dark picture about the Turkish president and his policies. It is also evident that the labelling game, which is part of several psychological ploys involved in stereotyping and media bias, is utilised ad nauseam by the writer. "Jihadist" was merely deployed here to demonise his political adversaries, as this label discredits by default any individual or group to which it is attached, and puts them outside the sphere of consensus and the norms of acceptable social and political behaviour.

A comparison with Cagaptay's recent piece about the June 24 elections shows the utilisation of a similar tactic, only this time he used the Russian president as a referential to whip up anti-Russian and anti-Putin feelings, that are prevalent amongst Western audiences, given the decades-long process of negative media portrayal of Russia and its leadership. Through this rhetorical device, the author aims to capitalise on the existing supercharged environment against Russia and mix it with the latent anti-Turkey bias so as to create analogies in the readers' minds – even when comparing two completely different political situations. This approach builds an image of Turkey as a country allegedly departing from democratic principles and heading towards an authoritarian state.

Likewise, the Financial Times (FT) put forward an editorial on April 29, 2018 an article titled "President Erdogan is trampling on Turkey's freedoms," which regurgitated many of the previous assertions and pre-packaged them in alignment with the dictatorship frame. Not many people are aware of it, but FT was founded in the late 1880s "in the heydays of British imperialism and colonialism, which has had a strong impact on the paper" (Kantola, 2006: 193). In fact, Finnish professor Anu Kantola produced an in-depth study about FT and the discourse they use, which plays a big role in shaping national imaginaries concerning democracy. Hence, she investigated the FT coverage on national parliamentary elections from 2000 to 2005, including 32 general parliamentary elections between 2000 and 2005, which consist of countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as some of the most notable non-OECD countries.

Kantola's findings paint a bleak picture about FT: "The political imaginary of the early twenty-first century FT is founded on democracy and on market liberalism. However, when the hierarchy between these two discourses is analysed, it becomes clear that the central element in the political imaginary of financial journalism is its priority for liberal market reforms. When in conflict, democracy, elections, voters, and politics are subservient to them. The FT strongly promotes democracy both in western and non-western countries, but in cases where the proponents of market liberalism are not on the winning side in elections, the paper gets deeply critical of democracy" (Kantola, 2006: 207).

In other words, empirical research shows that FT is not dedicated to democracy per se, but has a rather biased approach. Accordingly, the newspaper picks and chooses who it deems as the good democrat and who is not according to its own market liberalism agenda. Furthermore, the above-mentioned FT article discussed the threat of sanctions against Turkey by Germany and the U.S., and concluded: "As Mr Erdogan mires Turkey ever deeper in autocracy, the gloves are coming off. Not before time." This phrase reveals a lot about FT's political leanings, as this newspaper was not just commenting on the possible sanctions that may or may not be applied against Turkey, but went further to incite Western decision makers to take this course of action, and complain that it was in reality long overdue. Such demeanour stands in contrast with the principles of objectivity, balance, and the mere reporting of the facts on the ground.

The dictatorship frame is also detectable outside of the sample used in this research. For example, a controversial article by French weekly magazine *Le Point* pushed the boundaries of criticism to literally libel the Turkish president. Its front cover article was published on May 24 with the headline (in French) "Erdogan, the dictator." This article caused a stir in France when a few individuals of Turkish descent were offended by the cover and tried to tear down posters of the story on kiosk billboards in Avignon (France). This incident led to a diplomatic spat involving French President Macron, who criticised this action via Twitter, triggering responses from Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (Turkish Minute, 2018).

In its article, *Le Point* pointed to some purported "delusions of grandeur" and other "crimes" allegedly committed by the Turkish President. If *Le Point* had indeed a reputation for genuine investigative journalism and for exposing the many real dictators in the Middle East, one would have perhaps paid close attention to this piece. Then again, the recent history of *Le Point* does not really inspire confidence. For example, the magazine was exposed by French investigative news outlet *Mediapart* in 2017, for masking evidence and trying to kill a story on Gaddafi's funding for Nicolas Sarkozy. In addition, *Le Point* tried to impede a second well evidenced story about a scandal surrounding Boris Boillon (a former adviser to Nicolas Sarkozy), who was stopped with a bag stuffed with cash (Arfi & Laske, 2017).

One of the main points that seem to have offended Le Point the most is President Erdogan's charm offensive towards Algeria. The French weekly highlighted this point among its key subheadings. It goes without saying that the North African country has long been the privileged domain of France, strategically and economically. French decision makers are certainly fuming to observe that Turkish products and services, which are more cost effective, compete efficiently with the declining French industry, thus taking sizable market shares in Algeria and elsewhere in Africa. It is interesting to observe also that Le Point's article comes after a series of French official provocations against Turkey, including the increasing support to the PYD/PKK terrorist group in Syria, and could hypothetically signal the tacit (if not overt) support to this kind of vitriolic media attacks from the top echelon of the power circles in France.

It would not be the first time for French media to act in this manner. Academic Raymond Kuhn, who has written extensively on French media policy and political communication, argued that there is a substantial degree of state intervention in the politics-media nexus in France. According to Kuhn, "the state has traditionally taken a close interest in the country's media through the exercise of its ownership, policy-making, regulatory, and financial patronage functions..With reference to their relationship with the state, it should also be noted that many of the commercial companies that own a stake in the French media are conglomerates that often bid for state contracts in France, and/or their interests are subject to state regulation, and/or they have business ventures in overseas countries where the French state traditionally exercises political influence" (Kuhn, 2014: 32).

In a similar vein, and as part of the sample analysed, The Washington Post published an analysis on 24 May with the headline "Erdogan's push for power creates new chaos." Two key frames can be observed in this article. The first one aimed to depict once more President Erdogan as a dictator, even when the subject is about the organisation of free and competitive elections in Turkey. The second frame was the "chaos frame", a sub-frame of the "economic consequence" frame, through which the author exaggerated the recent currency volatility to attribute negative adjectives and themes to Turkey's political and economic realm.

Singing similar tunes was an opinion piece published by the New York Times on June 2 and titled "The Millionaires Are Fleeing. Maybe You Should, Too." Author Ruchir Sharma put forward a rather curious claim, which formed the basis of his article, namely that 12% of Turkey's millionaire population migrated overseas in the past year, dubbing this phenomenon as "exodus." In the same piece, another connection was made to Venezuela in order to create parallels with the crisis rocking the South American country and insinuate that the economic situation in Turkey was fast deteriorating in a comparable manner. According to Sharma, "Turkey's millionaires appear to be fleeing both deteriorating financial conditions marked by very high inflation, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's crackdown on his critics, including those in business." However, for such big claims, Sharma used a methodology of dubious nature.

Sharma relied on a report produced by "New World Wealth" (NWW), a market research group, based in South Africa. While one would have expected more rigorous data gathering process and methodology overall, NWW is said to track "millionaire migrations by culling property records, visa programs, news media reports and information from travel agents and others who cater to the wealthy." Many questions come to mind as to how many wealthy people would speak to travel agents about their plans, or how would media reports effectively track such movements. In reality, substantiating trends about Turkey's millionaires (and other millionaires as well) in a genuine and accurate manner is very challenging, if not quasi-impossible, given the extremely limited access to this niche community, and the related predicament of data collection.

Further scepticism arises when knowing that the NWW report is linked to the Mauritius-based "AfrAsia Bank." The bank operates in a tax haven environment and thus directly benefits from fund movements of the rich and famous. Under this light, the whole report seems likely to be a publicity stunt. With a shallow argument in essence, the wealth-management bank is pushing a self-serving narrative with the hope to attract new clients. By instilling fear and exploiting any resulting frenzy at the level of Turkey's millionaires, this whole operation is designed to capitalise on the old adage "capital is a coward," in the sense that whenever there are some signs of upcoming problems, rich people tend to become hypersensitive and look for alternatives.

Additionally, the article was written in a sensationalist manner. Even with a largely anecdotic story, the writer moved to consolidate it into broader narrative structures with the help of metaphors and imagery (e.g. the use of the word "exodus" which signifies mass departure of biblical proportion, in addition to the comparison with Venezuela). He also benefited from the fact that the story was carried by a well-known media outlet (in this case the New York Times). Starting from the title, Sharma tries to create a sense of disarray, and his call to action is straightforward and unambiguous.

The New York Times was not the only media outlet to use the economic consequence frame (including the chaos sub-frame). This happened frequently, especially by outlets specialised in reporting financial affairs, such as FT, Forbes, the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg, in addition to news agencies such as Reuters. In light of this, Bloomberg published a whole array of articles on Turkey, including articles titled "Lira Plunges as Japanese Investor Exodus Adds to Turkey's Woes" (May 23), "Can Turkey Regain Market Credibility?" (May 26), and "Turkey's Lira Didn't Get the Memo on Rate Hikes" (June 4).

Besides the similarities noted in the frequent use of "exodus" to spread a sense of panic, the key connecting argument in these articles is that President Erdogan has allegedly committed a big mistake by giving directions to Turkey's Central Bank, which in their view should be totally independent. This purported interference narrative has been pushed again and again as the main factor why the Lira has been depreciating. In addition, there was such sacrosanctity associated with this line of reasoning that the normal reader would take it at face value.

A closer look, however, demonstrates that such viewpoint is far from being unanimously accepted. As a member of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank, Yves Mersch, argued that there have been many scholars and even one national court (the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany) which contended that the independence of central banks is in contradiction with the principle of democratic legitimacy. This perspective considers that central banks have overstretched their mandates and ventured into areas which should be under democratic legitimacy and control (Mersch, 2017). In addition, research has revealed that governments have the right to

give instructions to the Bank of Canada, the Bank of Japan, and the Bank of England, and that there is no possibility for these central banks to appeal in case they receive a governmental instruction (De Haan, Amtenbrink and Eijffinger, 1999: 8). Therefore, if such instructions were given in Turkey as reported by the media, they have not departed from the acceptable norms adhered to by prominent central banks at an international level.

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Conclusion

All in all, the aforementioned texts represent examples of patterns of representation observed in the total sample analysed. The latter uncovered discernible bias in relation to the reporting of Turkey's June 24 elections. The framing analysis that was applied show that two key meso-frames, namely the dictatorship frame and the economic consequence frame (with its sub-frame the chaos frame) were heavily utilised in the related coverage.

This study reveals that the dictatorship frame was present in one of every two news texts examined, and more precisely 56% of the sample. This frame misconstrues Turkey's system of governance as dictatorship and President Erdogan as an allegedly repressive, power hungry, and archaic dictator who is out-of-touch with the realities of the country. In truth, this frame can be readily debunked because the current political context in Turkey is far from a dictatorship. On the contrary, Turkey has witnessed the organisation of free and competitive elections regularly since the early 2000s, and AK Party had to fight for every vote in the country since then. In point of fact, a few articles had frictions within their own framing when they allured to times that the AK Party may lose these elections. For example, The Washington Post published an article on June 5 titled "Another win for Erdogan is no longer a foregone conclusion." Would the outcome be in doubt if the elections were held in a dictatorship?

As part of the same framing, another major line of criticism by Western media has been Turkey's shift to a presidential system (which is used in many countries including the U.S.). This vantage point is also flawed for many reasons, including that this choice of governance was debated in Turkey since the 1970s (Gülener & Miş, 2017: 28) and was adopted recently by the Turkish people via a democratically-held process that was tightly contested. In addition, several checks and balances were introduced in this constitutional change that prevent any potential drift towards a "one man administration" (Gülener & Miş, 2017: 29).

Moreover, the sound standards of Turkey's election system have been confirmed by recurrent reports of international organisations, including the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The latter, which is the organisation responsible for monitoring European elections, praised Turkey's legal framework in 2015 and noted its very suitability for the conduct of free and democratic elections. In effect, OSCE has been monitoring electoral integrity in Turkey since 2002

(including presidential elections), deploying strong teams of international experts throughout the country to check the elections' compliance with international standards for democratic elections, and has regularly issued a clean bill of health to Turkey in this regard, in the past and up until May 2018.

It is important to note that because the dictatorship frame has structural weaknesses in relation to Turkey, this frame was at times amplified by including additional features. The latter involved the focus on incidents and events that were decontextualised in essence to paint an image of an authoritarian state. Accordingly, examples were inserted about the curtailing of civil liberties and media freedoms, or even terror-related cases, whereby law enforcement agencies had to intervene in accordance with the laws of the country. Little or no explanation was given in the media texts about the major challenges the state faced (regarding the attempted coup d'état), which took place in Turkey, July 2016.

This complex plot represented a potent challenge because the subversive organisation behind it managed to infiltrate key nodes of the state, including the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches as well as other political, economic, and social domains. Furthermore, the country is also facing other terrorist activities that are fuelled by external forces. Hence, the state has to protect its citizenry and resort to strict law enforcement measures. But this context is rarely - if ever - provided, which leads the Western reader to adopt a negative image of the country and its governance.

In some particular cases, such as the FT example outlined earlier, the dictatorship frame is used by the news media as part of its role as "machinery of incitement." The latter, as described by Professor Andrea Teti, is a rather prevalent model in Western countries. Teti, whose research combines Michel Foucault's paradigm and the discourse on Orientalism, argues that Western nations use democracy as a way to establish their norms, then establish several "apparata for observation" to police them. These institutions become tools of incitement against nations in the Middle East and put in motion "disciplinary machinery," through which violations of the expected norm can be legitimately punished via economic sanctions, and even military interventions (Teti, 2007: 16).

Another attempt to delegitimise Turkey's President and AK Party occurred via the deployment of the economic

consequence frame, which was detected in 38.8 % of the sample under study. This frame negatively portrayed the Turkish economy in an attempt to downplay Turkey's economic success story. The latter is among the key factors underpinning the popularity of the president and the AK Party.

Consequently, the recent volatility of the Turkish Lira was used as the basis for the representation of Turkey's economy in a bad light. In this respect, key aspects were omitted; for example, references to the strong fundamentals of the Turkish economy, the solid economic performance over the past fifteen years, and the strength of the country's foreign currency and gold reserves were all rare. Additionally, nothing was mentioned about the source of these attacks on the Turkish Lira. Worse, the reader was induced to believe that the situation was chaotic by drawing parallels with Venezuela and Argentina; countries that cannot be compared to Turkey given the very different nature of their economic indicators. Moreover, similar to the dictatorship frame, there was little effort to offer more context, balance, and other perspectives (journalists seem to omit perspectives that oppose their views), in addition to resorting to dramatisation and sensationalism.

It should be noted here that news media outlets covering economic and financial affairs crave for dramatic events (real or imagined), such as crises, recessions, and other fiascos. Suffice to say that Turkey's economic fundamentals are strong and, according to a Bloomberg article, statistics confirm such strength since the gross domestic product (GDP) of Turkey expanded 7.4 percent during the first quarter in 2018 from a year earlier, beating even the median estimate of 7 percent that Bloomberg itself published earlier. Even so, several news media outlets want to create the impression that the Turkish economy is in a bad shape, hunting for any piece of news to create a wave of panic. By doing so, they hope that this topic gains even more traction and becomes newsworthy (Kitzinger & Reilly, 1997) in order to increase their viewership and ratings.

This study's findings echo some of the existing media scholarship, namely that journalists adopt some frames of reference that include certain facts and representations whilst excluding others. For linguistics scholar Norman Fairclough, media texts "constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them" (Fairclough,

1995: 103-104). The negative pattern of coverage of Turkey's political system also mirrors the Herman and Chomsky model (1988), which uncovered the existence of several layers within U.S. news media that filter out news in accordance to the interests of U.S. corporations and powerful political entities. The tensions between Turkey and the U.S. administration about several issues in the past few years is an additional factor to consider in order to understand the prevalence of certain frames of representation about Turkey, in U.S. news media (which has parallels in the U.K. and France).

Finally, in the patterns of coverage investigated in this paper, there was some difference in the degree and amount of bias between the different news outlets. Given the limitations of this study, this dissonance could not be examined in detail as such an endeavour would require more in-depth research. A key recommendation here would be to produce more comprehensive studies, which combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies, examine larger samples, and investigate longer time periods to find out whether the observed patterns are reproduced, and if positive - to determine their evolution over time. Furthermore, research about the effects of media consumption regarding this kind of news discourse on audiences is also desirable.

Therefore, it is paramount for Turkey's academic institutions and think tanks to dedicate more attention to similar studies, and orient additional efforts towards the body of research surrounding Western media coverage of Turkish affairs in general, and in the context of key events in particular. These type of studies will shed light on the numerous factors influencing coverage, including aspects connected to culture, ideology, professional values, bureaucratic norms, economic interests etc., which combine to produce dominant narratives and imagery about Turkey. The politics of these representations, particularly during critical moments and events may have political, economic, social, and even national security ramifications. Hence, such research will allow for more understanding around strategic agendas at play, and provide additional tools for analysis and policy recommendations.

Appendix 1

No.	Title of the article	Media organization	Date
1	Turkish president calls snap elections for June	Associated Press	April 18
2	Erdogan catches Turkey off guard by calling early elections	Associated Press	April 18
3	Erdogan 'needs every vote' and is looking to Turks in U.S. for support	NBC News	April 19
4	U.S. has 'concerns' about Turkey holding fair vote under state of emergency	Reuters	April 19
5	Erdogan's shock election call brings cherished powers within reach	Reuters	April 20
6	Turkey's Erdogan says emergency rule good for economy as stops terrorism, strikes	Reuters	April 21
7	Why has Turkey's president called early elections?	The Economist	April 21
8	Turkish opposition leader says Erdogan will lose at polls	Associated Press	April 21
9	Turkish fledgling party to run in June polls after membership boost	Reuters	April 22
10	Turkish lawmakers switch parties in challenge to Erdogan	Associated Press	April 22
11	Turkey is succumbing to collective insanity	The Washington Post	April 23
12	Erdogan moves quickly to strengthen his grip on power	Financial Times	April 24
13	Erdogan's push for power creates new chaos	The Washington Post	April 24
14	How President Erdogan is Turning Turkey into Putin's Russia	Time Magazine	April 24
15	Turkey Surprises With Bigger Rate Hike to Bolster Lira	Bloomberg	April 25
16	Erdogan's Motley Opponents Have United to Take Him Down	Foreign Policy	April 25
17	Turkish Lira Seen Outperforming Peers on Central Bank Backstop	Bloomberg	April 26
18	Here's why Turkey's snap election won't solve all the lira's problems	Market Watch	April 26
19	Turkey's Gul Says He Won't Run Against Erdogan in June Election	Bloomberg	April 28
20	President Erdogan is trampling on Turkey's freedoms	Financial Times	April 29
21	Erdogan rival pulls out after army chief's visit	The Times	April 30
22	Turkey's Pro-Kurdish Opposition to Nominate Jailed Ex-Leader for Presidency	Reuters	May 2
23	Turkey's iron lady: 'It's time for the men in power to feel fear'	The Guardian	May 3
24	Turkish inflation surges again in April ahead of polls	AFP	May 3
25	Turkey opposition names fiery lawmaker as Erdogan challenger	AFP	May 4
26	In election manifesto, Erdogan vows new military campaigns	Associated Press	May 6
27	Neither Free nor Fair; Erdogan has silenced all opposition to ensure victory in Turkey's coming elections	The Times	May 7
28	Turkey blames 'bots' for anti-Erdogan Twitter campaign	Reuters	May 9
29	Lira slumps after Turkey's Erdogan says interest rates 'evil'	AFP	May 11
30	Campaigners call for UK to act on rights as Turkish president arrives	The Guardian	May 13
31	Erdogan's 'crazy' canal alarms villagers and environmentalists	Reuters	May 14
32	Turkey's president blames US for returning world to 'dark days'	The Guardian	May 14
33	Turkish Currency Woes Put Erdogan in Tight Spot in Re-Election Bid	VOA	May 14

No.	Title of the article	Media organization	Date
34	Erdogan Wants to Be Turkey's Lone Strongman. What If He Gets What He Wants?	FPIF	May 14
35	Turkey's lira hammered after Erdogan says wants greater economic control	Reuters	May 15
36	Turkish Lira Reverses Losses as Central Bank Vows to Take Steps	Bloomberg	May 16
37	Erdogan Woos Voters With Billions in Spending Before Election	Bloomberg	May 17
38	How Turkey fell from investment darling to junk-rated emerging market	The Economist	May 18
39	Tumbling Turkish lira tests voters' support for Erdogan	Financial Times	May 18
40	Turkey's President Erdogan holds an election rally in Sarajevo	Euronews	May 20
41	Turkey's Erdogan seeks expatriate support for re-election -	The Washington Post	May 20
42	Fitch warns Turkey credit profile at risk after June elections	Financial Times	May 22
43	Lira Plunges as Japanese Investor Exodus Adds to Turkey's Woes	Bloomberg	May 23
44	Turkish lira freefall amid concern of Erdogan's central bank influence	Business Insider	May 23
45	Tumbling lira casts shadow over Erdogan's June election	Reuters	May 23
46	Turkish Lira Recovers After Rise in Key Interest Rate	Wall Street Journal	May 23
47	Erdogan says Turkey will take 'different measures' against inflation after election	Reuters	May 23
48	Erdogan's Flying Carpet	Foreign Policy	May 24
49	Turkey tried to save its currency. It worked — for a day.	The Washington Post	May 25
50	The unorthodox theory behind Erdogan's monetary policy	Reuters	May 25
51	Turkish economy faces crisis ahead of election	Euronews	May 25
52	Can Turkey Regain Market Credibility?	Bloomberg	May 26
53	Turkish lira firms towards 4.6 against dollar after cenbank policy simplification	Reuters	May 28
54	Speculators Won't Break The Turkish Economy, For Now	Forbes	May 29
55	Can Turkey's Economic Turmoil Derail Erdogan's Reelection?	Wall Street Journal	May 31
56	Turkey's Erdogan Ramps Up Nationalist Rhetoric	VOA	May 31
57	Erdogan opponent warns of Turkey's 'society of fear'	Financial Times	May 31
58	The Desperation to Keep Turkey Different	Bloomberg	June 1
59	Lira falls almost 2% after gloomy manufacturing survey	Financial Times	June 1
60	Erdogan's nationalist rival faces uphill struggle after breakthrough	AFP	June 2
61	Turkey says it is addressing market concerns after ratings put on watch	Reuters	June 2
62	Turkey's Lira Didn't Get the Memo on Rate Hikes	Bloomberg	June 4
63	Inflation rise poses challenge to Erdogan as election looms	Financial Times	June 5
64	The Jailed Kurdish Politician Set to Determine Erdogan's Future	Bloomberg	June 5
65	Poll shows Turkey's Erdogan falling short of election majority in first round	Reuters	June 5
66	Turkey opposition launches Google ads campaign to target Erdogan	AFP	June 5
67	Another win for Erdogan is no longer a foregone conclusion	The Washington Post	June 5

Table 1: List of media articles closely examined in this study

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