

## Analysis

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**Summary:** The past few months have been marked by critical developments in Turkey, where corruption allegations against the government ignited a power struggle between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gulen movement over control of the state. We contend that the AKP's increasing tendency to rule through domination instead of governing through leadership in the ongoing political predicament exacerbates the crisis by undermining the rule of law and political pluralism. Political leaders may be tempted to rule and dominate rather than to govern and lead. However, as we see in Turkey (also in Egypt), this temptation makes incumbents weak and vulnerable while governing through leadership makes them stronger.

## Ruling vs. Governing: Pluralism and Democracy in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia

by *Sebnem Gumuscu and E. Fuat Keyman*

### Introduction

The past few months have been marked by critical developments in Turkey, where corruption allegations against the government ignited a power struggle between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gulen movement over control of the state. We contend that the AKP's increasing tendency to rule through domination instead of governing through leadership<sup>1</sup> in the ongoing political predicament exacerbates the crisis by undermining the rule of law and political pluralism. This erosion, accompanied by increasing reliance of both parties on ontological politics, ultimately signifies a dangerous deviation from democracy. Meanwhile, the ongoing struggle between two major Islamic movements — and former allies — in Turkey points at the primacy of politics over political identities and shows that the way power is exercised by the political elite has critical implications for democratization in the region. This observation is pertinent not only to Turkey but also in Egypt and Tunisia. We will

compare these countries to pinpoint what needs to be done to resolve the crises and enhance democratization in the region.

### Turkey

Since it came to power in 2002, the AKP gradually shifted its mode from governing through leadership based on rule of law to ruling through domination justified by extraordinary situations that rest on existential struggles. More specifically, in its first two terms in office, the party was motivated by a desire to govern Turkey through solving its perennial economic, social, and political problems to the extent possible. However, this willingness to govern has been replaced by a desire to rule, manifested in the increasing monopolization of power in the hands of one man, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This shift from governing to ruling also signified a shift from leadership to domination, for governing is only possible through political leadership and sharing of power with other political and social actors. As such, the AKP between 2002 and 2010 took on the role of leader of a broad societal alliance, which included liberals, conservatives, religious networks, and movements as well as some social democratic circles, and recognized

1. The distinction between ruling and governing has been made by Steven Cook, *Ruling but not Governing*, Council of Foreign Relations, 2007 and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, Basic Books, 2004. The distinction can also be seen in the writings of Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, on which we rely in this paper.

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political pluralism within and outside the party while taking steps to transform the existing political system. However, since 2010, partly due to its electoral hegemony and increasing self-confidence, the AKP sought domination over the political and social realm. As a result, the party broke up its political/societal alliances with liberals and some religious movements, i.e. Fethullah Gulen movement, explicitly signaling that it would cease building its politics on compromise, and instead establish itself as the hegemonic actor who will dominate the terms of future political change.

The increasing tendency of the AKP to rule through domination brought with it the tendency to formulate political crises as extraordinary situations that justify, and even require, suspension of the rule of law. Originally formulated by Carl Schmitt, politics in extraordinary situations rely on a high degree of polarization that rearticulates the political world in terms of friends and foes. The AKP's new rhetoric, whose early manifestations appeared during the Gezi Park protests, reached a new climax after December 17, when the prosecutors launched a graft probe against the party. This investigation, allegedly launched by the followers of Gulen movement in the police force and the judiciary, ignited a cruel power struggle between two conservative forces with clear Islamic tendencies. However, the struggle is not about Islam. Instead, it is a struggle for power in Turkey insofar as both sides desire to consolidate their control over the state. The party depicted this graft probe as an extraordinary political situation where the "national will" is under an "enemy" attack. In order to fight against this vicious assault, Erdoğan invited all "civil" actors to engage in a second "war of independence," the first of which was fought in the aftermath of World War I.

This heightened level of polarization within the framework of exceptional situations ultimately shrinks the political space and transforms politics into an existential struggle that leaves only two options: survival or extinction. So it did in Turkey. Since the parties to the conflict formulated the struggle in ontological/existential terms, they ended up justifying the use of all instruments — including frequent violations of rule of law — for the sake of "survival." Now there is no place left for political pluralism, dissent, criticism, discussion, or democracy. Politics in Turkey is a zero-sum game.

## Egypt and Tunisia

Politics was a zero-sum game under the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa before the onset of the Arab Spring. When the people revolted for bread, dignity, and freedom, they also called for governance through leadership, political pluralism, and the rule of law. Yet, these expectations were frustrated in Egypt when the Muslim Brothers preferred to rule through domination rather than to govern via leadership. Former President Mohamed Morsi ruled unilaterally, denying pluralism and inclusion in the transitional process. Politics quickly returned to a zero-sum game between friends and foes. Trusting no one but the Brothers, the Morsi administration treated the independent judiciary as an obstacle before its domination, and declared the president's and the constituent assembly's decisions immune to judicial oversight in late 2012. This desire to dominate politics and monopolize power proved to be a critical source of vulnerability for the Brotherhood amid economic trouble. As Marwan Muasher argues, it was not possible for the regime to deliver progress and prosperity without pluralism.<sup>2</sup> Once it was clear that the Brotherhood's domination had failed to deliver governance, the country entered into a major political crisis, which led to a military rule that preferred to dominate like its predecessors, albeit with more violence and repression. The military elite created "an enemy" out of the Muslim Brotherhood and rapidly shrank the political space where existential struggle overtook pluralist politics. Not surprisingly, the military allowed for no public debate or room for any political dissent during the campaign for the new constitution, which passed with 98 percent approval in January 2014, pointing to severe lack of political pluralism in the country.

In contrast, Tunisia managed to finish its new constitution in three years following the fall of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime. The process has been incomparably more inclusive, participatory, pluralist, and consensus-based than the process in Egypt. Tunisia has succeeded in performing the most difficult of democratic practices, writing a new foundational document to set the rules of the game in the future, despite severe security, economic, and political crises throughout 2013. Overall, the process remained a positive-sum game where different actors engaged with each other in a pluralist manner, and built a mutual understanding for

<sup>2</sup> Marwan Muasher, *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014



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consensus politics by making critical compromises. The game remained positive sum insofar as political actors with different ideological positions preferred to cooperate and unite against the return of dictatorship to Tunisia rather than struggling for power and domination among themselves.

A conclusion important to note here is that the difference between the trajectories of Egypt and Tunisia does not emanate from the differences in their electoral power. In the 2011 elections al-Nahda received 41 percent of the votes while its closest rival — Congress for the Republic — received only 14 percent. In Egypt, on the other hand, in the first round of the presidential elections, Morsi received only 25 percent of the votes, and could beat his rival, the former prime minister Ahmed Shafik, with a very narrow margin. Given this distribution of electoral support, one would expect al-Nahda to display greater tendency toward domination than the Muslim Brotherhood. However, despite its electoral strength, al-Nahda has embraced pluralism and compromise, while the Muslim Brotherhood resorted to domination.

Political leaders may be tempted to rule and dominate rather than to govern and lead. However, as we see in Turkey (also in Egypt), this temptation makes incumbents weak and vulnerable while governing through leadership makes them stronger. Those who seek domination pay an extraordinarily high price for this choice as manifested in popular protests against the government in Turkey and Egypt in the summer of 2013. It would not be a mistake to claim that the AKP government would have commanded greater popular support in the ongoing crisis if the party had not shifted from governing toward ruling in its third term. That said, the prospects are better for Turkey than for Egypt, for Turkey witnessed swings between domination and leadership in the past, and the pendulum may swing back to governance again.

Finally, the obstacle before democracy is not identities or Islam per se, but a particular mode of governance that incumbents adopt through ruling instead of governing. The parties to the ongoing conflict in Turkey, the former allies of the AKP and the Gulen movement, are both conservative Islamic groups, and their disagreement is not about identity, Islamic values, or Islamic ideologies. Instead, it is about hegemony and power. The swings in the AKP experience

since 2002 — as well as the difference between Tunisian and Egyptian Islamists — clearly show that power and politics make for a much greater difference than do identities.

### About the Authors

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