

Adam SZYMAŃSKI

University of Warsaw

Jakub WÓDKA

Polish Academy of Science

Manipulation of Vote Choice – Impediment to the Electoral Integrity in Turkey?¹

Abstract: Turkey has had a fairly long tradition of regular, competitive polls and multi-party democracy begun in 1946. However, in the last decade, with the consolidation of Justice and Development Party's (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) grip on power, there has been a growing concern about the integrity of elections in this state. In subsequent elections the ruling party resorted to a plethora of means inhibiting their competitiveness. Thus, the article seeks to survey the extent of election malpractices in Turkey with the focus on manipulation of vote choice as most disturbing group of electoral malpractices and, without prejudging, to address the fundamental questions about whether elections in Turkey, notwithstanding the irregularities, still meet democratic, international standards, or whether Turkey is sliding into electoral autocracy.

Key words: elections, electoral malpractice, democratisation, Turkey, Justice and Development Party

Turkey has had a fairly long tradition of competitive polls and multi-party democracy begun in 1946, with the then decision to hold “regular [...] free and fair elections, a major turning point in Turkey’s recent political history” (Sayarı, 2012, p. 183). Some students of modern Turkey claim that the 1950 elections were a “more important divide in Turkish political history than the more commonly recognized official demise of the Ottoman Empire and declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923...usher[ing] in a new political era” (Tachau, 2000, p. 130).

Ever since, altogether 19 parliamentary ballots have been held, as well as numerous local elections. As a result of a 2007 nation-wide referendum and an amendment introduced to the Turkish constitution, the presidential elections in August 2014 were the first direct ballot of the president of the Republic of Turkey by popular vote, hitherto elected indirectly through a parliamentary nomination.

Indeed, in the last decades, Turkey has been a country where ruling parties – the incumbents have been losing elections, ceding power to opposition political forces – a fundamental attribute of a democratic system, according to the classical definition of Adam Przeworski (Przeworski 1991, p. 10). Suffice to say that in the post-war era, alternation in power and government turnover has taken place through elections, with no single party in Turkey staying in power (either in a single party government or in a coalition cabi-

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net) for more than 10 years. Naturally, Turkey's democratic trajectory has been upset by military interventions, direct or indirect, yet, in times of civilian rule, there was a genuine competition between political parties, with the elections as the only means of acceding to political power and their fairness never seriously questioned (Erisen, Kubicek, 2016).²

Notwithstanding the fact that Turkey has been holding elections which genuinely reflect the popular will, in the last decade, with the consolidation of AKP's grip on power there has been a growing concern about the integrity of the electoral process whose deficits supplement the long list of the current Turkish problems in the democratization process. It is not that the AKP does not enjoy public support; it does, and probably – as the public opinion shows – even without the election swindles, it would garner the largest number of votes. Yet, tinkering with ballots, we believe, contributed substantially to AKP hitting the jackpot in subsequent elections, which leads to an ever increasing domination of the AKP in the Turkish political system.

The existing scholarship on Turkish elections (for example by Ali Çarkoğlu; Kerem Yıldırım; Sabri Sayarı) (Çarkoğlu, Yıldırım, 2015, pp. 57–79; Sayarı, 2016, pp. 263–280) concentrates rather on the traditional description of the elections, their results and political ramifications, implications for the inter-party rivalry and cultural or sociological aspects.³ Thus, the article seeks to fill this gap and survey the election malpractices in Turkey and, without prejudging, to address a fundamental question about whether elections in Turkey, notwithstanding the irregularities, still meet democratic, international standards, or whether Turkey is sliding into electoral autocracy. The goal is to investigate the phenomenon of “electoral malpractice” understood as the violation of electoral integrity, which means the violation of internationally accepted standards of elections throughout the whole electoral cycle. There is a difference between the notion of “malpractice” and “mispractice” – the flaws in elections that are not deliberate, but resulting from an unintentional error or other impediments. Flaws in one of the phases of the electoral cycle mean that the elections have been flawed. It is particularly important in the case of Turkey because the observation of elections in this state leads to the conclusion that most problematic in the context of electoral integrity are not manipulations of the voting act but malpractices concerning voter's choice. The article is aimed at confirming this observation through a thorough analysis of different types of manipulation of vote choice in Turkey. It will help us to answer the question about their impact on the electoral integrity in this state.

We vet primarily the March 2014 local elections and August 2014 presidential elections, as well as the June and November 2015 general parliamentary elections, as our aim is to catalogue AKP's electoral stratagems as comprehensively as possible. For the sake of objectivity, we put our analysis in a broader historical context, as Turkey has a legacy of undemocratic electoral institutions, with the 10 percent election threshold as only one example of the designs, inherited by AKP (and unsurprisingly unaltered by the ruling party), which have distorted the broadly understood fairness of political competition.

² For a more cautious and skeptical assessment of the fairness of the elections in Turkey in the last 50 years, see: Sayarı, 2002; Sütçü, 2011, pp. 341–356.

³ There are only a few exceptions of articles concerning electoral integrity as the main research topic, e.g. Aygül, 2015, pp. 181–201. Most of them have not been even published yet. See e.g. Akkoyunlu, 2017, forthcoming.

To begin with, we offer a snapshot on our understanding of electoral malpractices, underpinning the analysis. Next, the empirical part follows, with a detailed scrutiny on the manipulations of vote choice. Finally, in the closing section, we synthesize the findings and draw generalisable conclusions.

Theoretical Framework of Electoral Malpractice

At the beginning of the 21st century we can observe an increasing number of states in which elections are held but which do not meet standards of liberal democracy. This has led to the proliferation of theoretical studies, published e.g. by Andreas Schedler as well as Sarah Birch, Pippa Norris and Alberto Simpser (Birch, 2011; Schedler, 2002; 2006; 2013; Norris, 2014; 2015; Simpser, 2013), who focus on the issue of the electoral integrity vs. electoral malpractice, including their conceptualization, indicators and typologies. What is particularly interesting from the point of view of science political is the case of the extensive use of different types of measures (legal, procedural and administrative instruments, financial resources, communication tools, first of all media and other measures influencing the voters) by the most influential political forces, usually the incumbent to distort the level playing field between the parties and to enable the forces holding power to keep it for the next legislative period. In electoral autocracies or other regimes of this kind, electoral laws, as well as the procedures favour the ruling party, giving it a leverage over rivalling parties; there are limitations on voter and party registration; the dominant party is also favoured as far as the electoral campaign and the financial resources are concerned; there are irregularities in the voting process, including the counting of votes; and the electoral officials lack impartiality and independence. The use of these measures in turn leads to the domination of certain political forces within the party and political system in a long-term perspective.

Researchers of electoral studies have come up with different taxonomies and categorizations of electoral malpractices, which merit a brief review. Norris, in her broad-ranged Electoral Integrity Project, on the basis of expert surveys, gauges the legitimacy of elections across 11 categories reflecting all stages of the electoral cycle: pre-election, campaign, polling day, and its aftermath.⁴ Schedler, on his part, presents the “chain of democratic choice”, comprising seven “links” which, for the elections to be “democratic”, have to remain unbroken – “no links to be added, none to be taken away” (Schedler, 2002, pp. 36–50).⁵ These conditions lead Schedler to define the “menu of manipulation” – various forms of norm violation, such as reserved positions and reserved domains – limiting the scope and jurisdiction of elected offices; exclusion of opposition forces;

⁴ These 11 categories are: election laws; electoral procedures; boundaries; voter registration; party and candidate registration; campaign media; campaign finance; voting process; voting count; results and electoral management bodies.

⁵ These are: empowerment – the elected must wield real power; free supply – the voters have to have a real choice – a pool of candidates to choose from; free demand – voters must shape their preferences freely; inclusion – the franchise must be universal; insulation – voters must be able to cast ballots freely without being coerced or intimidated; integrity – casted votes must be counted honestly and weighed equally; irreversibility – those winning the franchise must be able to access office and exercise effective decision-making power till the end of the term.

repression and unfairness with regard to access to media and financial resources; formal and informal disenfranchisement; coercing and corrupting the voters; electoral fraud and institutional bias; tutelage and reversal – preventing the winners from assuming power. Finally, Alberto Simpser enumerates the following incidences of electoral manipulation: stuffing ballot boxes; falsifying results; tampering with voter registration lists; vote buying before and during the election; creating obstacles to voter and candidate registration; intimidating voters before and during elections; intimidating candidates; voting multiple times; voting by those who are ineligible (Simpser, 2013, pp. 35–36).

Our paper, drawing on the vast scholarship on the electoral integrity gauges the electoral malpractices in Turkey according to Birch's threefold categorization (Birch, 2011, pp. 29–38). Birch singles out three areas of electoral manipulation:

- a) manipulation of the law: it is about the manipulation of electoral legislation, such as gerrymandering and malapportionment; additionally, this category could cover the manipulation of the criteria that determine the active and passive right to vote, campaigning as well as standards concerning opinion polls;
- b) manipulation of vote choice: this category pertains to the violation of the right of the voters to access to adequate information about the policy proposals. Most manipulations of vote choice take place during the electoral campaigns (unbalanced media coverage of electoral campaign favoring the ruling party/candidate), mishandling of resources (breaching of the regulations governing the use of campaign resources), vote buying and voter intimidation;
- c) manipulation of the voting act: this dimension deals with the violation of the principle that all votes must have equal weight. The dimension of “effective aggregation” includes the counting and tabulation of votes and their appropriate conversion into seats. This component may include the obstruction of ballot access by potential candidates; the manipulation of voter registration and/or the electoral register; the manipulation of voting and of the process of counting and tabulation of votes.

In our analysis we would like to focus on the second group of the electoral malpractices as, in our opinion, they have been the most extensive ones in recent years and at the same time most disturbing in the context of the electoral integrity.

Electoral Malpractice in Turkey in Reports and Surveys

Although there is no consensus among those studying Turkish politics as to the assessment of electoral integrity in Turkey, most of them share the opinion that their fairness in the AKP era leaves much to be desired (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, p. 162; Çarkoğlu, Yıldırım, 2015, p. 62). Such mistrust of the fairness of the Turkish elections is confirmed in more comprehensive studies, such as those run under the Electoral Integrity Project,⁶ which takes elite opinions as a point of reference. The presidential elections in Turkey in August 2014 were ranked 86th out of 127 states, with both parliamentary elections in 2015 assessed even more critically – Turkey was ranked 101st among 135 states (Norris, Martinez, Nai, Grömping, 2015, pp. 10 and 17; 2016, pp. 22 and 51–53). When it comes

⁶ For methodology and empirical findings, see: <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>.

to the elements of the electoral process, the lowest scores were given to media coverage and campaign financing – the issues included in the second category of malpractices presented by Birch (manipulation of vote choice). The third most important problem is the content of electoral laws. The OSCE reports on subsequent elections in Turkey (also parliamentary election in 2007 and 2011) correspond to these findings. Although they recognize some positive legal changes concerning different phases of the electoral process (e.g. lowering voting age, giving voting rights to Turkish citizens living abroad, the possibility of use of other languages than Turkish in the election campaign, etc.), the broad-ranging electoral legislation still contains regulations which undermine electoral integrity. On the one hand, this pertains to some provisions which are not in accordance with electoral integrity rules. On the other hand, the lack of certain regulations (e.g. with reference to use of media in campaign, financial matters, including reporting on campaign expenditures or appealing procedure in the case of the decisions of the Supreme Board of Elections) and ambiguous provisions (e.g. the regulations on competences of election authorities) should be mentioned. All of these laws lead to a different type of electoral malpractice. The OSCE reports also point out to substantial problems with regard to the use of media and financial resources in electoral campaigns. However, what is even more important, they show that together with the growing authoritarian tendencies in the AKP era, Turkey has seen a significant increase in the electoral malpractices, limiting more and more fair competition between parties and favoring the incumbent (*Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election, 2014; Early Parliamentary Elections, 2016*).

Manipulation of Vote Choice in Turkey

The second category of electoral malpractices singled out by Birch, i.e. the manipulations of the voter (vote choice), show very well the problems with the fairness and competitiveness of elections in Turkey. Birch divides these malpractices into two groups: “manipulation of genuine preferences” and “undue influence”. AKP, very often abusing incumbency advantage, takes various measures to keep its support intact or even to increase it – to the detriment of other parties whose resources are limited. It should come as no surprise then that, as mentioned before, some malpractices within this category are classified as the most disturbing for electoral integrity in Turkey.

Manipulation of Genuine Preferences

Without any doubt **media bias** belongs to the “manipulation of genuine preferences”. The OSCE reports concerning subsequent elections in Turkey show that different media outlets were not impartial during the election period, which was also due to the ambiguity of the term “impartiality” as it stands in the election laws. Apart from some media that tried to be more or less objective (e.g. newspaper *Hürriyet*), there were such media as public TV channel TRT1, private channel ATV or newspaper Sabah, which clearly favored AKP, the government and President – both when it comes to airtime/length of the text devoted, and the tone (positive or neutral), while being very critical of the opposi-

tion parties (*Republic of Turkey. Parliamentary Elections 7 June 2015*, 2015, pp. 15–18; *Limited Election Observation Mission*, 2015).

This reflects the de-democratisation process in Turkey which also includes the freedom of media, which implies that the ever increasing number of media outlets is under the government and AKP's *de facto* control. One would struggle today to find independent TV channels, newspapers or even individual users of social media which dare criticise the government. The ban on websites or publications, the seizure and closure of media, censorship or self-censorship, increasing number of lawsuits against journalists and other persons for defamation, insulting the President as well as legal cases against journalists based on the Criminal Code and Anti-terror law are only a few examples of restrictions on the freedom of expression and media – with a rising tendency after 2011 (Yılmaz, 2016, pp. 147–161).

This creates a substantial problem for the fair competition regarding the use of media in the election period. The incumbents are favoured in an increasing number of TV channels and newspapers during this time (the tendency has been growing since 2011 elections). Other parties and candidates very often have limited access to the media (with the worst situation of independent candidates who e.g. have not been granted any free TV airtime) (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, pp. 161–162; Çarkoğlu, Yıldırım, 2015, p. 77). When it comes to the presidential elections in 2014, it appeared that there was no regulation clarifying whether the broadcasting time should be provided to the individual persons or political parties. This, in turn, gave rise to irregularities connected with the use of the office by the president and Erdoğan's impact on the media. It resulted in a triple presence in the TV news of the AKP leader in comparison with the main opposition candidate – Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. Erdoğan had over 47,000 broadcasting time units, İhsanoğlu – 16,000 units (*Erdoğan*, 2014). When the election campaign in June 2015 is taken into consideration, there is an impression that there was actually only one party running – the incumbent AKP. It was so because Erdoğan's party dominated the private advertising in many channels – with such extreme cases as ATV (100 per cent of political adverts) and TRT1 (91 per cent of political adverts). It was possible due to the gaps and ambiguity of the election law (blurred regulations on the proper implementation of the definition of equal or equitable coverage, limited media reporting and sanction mechanisms) and the privileged financial position of the governing party (*Republic of Turkey. Parliamentary Elections 7 June 2015*, 2015, pp. 15–18). The most critical situation was during the November 2015 election period due to the particular election environment (fight against PKK, terrorist attacks) when also the anti-terror law and Criminal code were used against the media. The pro-Kurdish media were raided by the police and many Kurdish journalists were arrested. It substantially limited the use of media in the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) campaign. All this makes the Electoral Integrity Project assess the fairness of media coverage in Turkey lowest among all indicators (Norris, Martinez, Nai, Grömping, 2015, p. 10).

The second and third type of electoral malpractice within the manipulations of genuine preferences of voters concern the financial issues. It pertains to **the misuse of state resources** during the campaign and **violation of campaign finance regulations**, which can be traced during the election periods in Turkey. It is clearly indicated by different reports, including the Electoral Integrity Project surveys in which the campaign financ-

ing is the second worst indicator (Norris, Martinez, Nai, Grömping, 2015, p. 10). For instance, Erdoğan as the Prime Minister and the presidential candidate in 2014, used his public appearances, some of them state-financed, for election purposes. To give a few examples – the opening ceremony of Istanbul's third airport in June or the launch of a high-speed train line in late July. He used his prime ministerial jet to address supporters, actually beginning his campaign before the formal date of the beginning of the election campaign. It was not in accordance with articles 64–66 of the Law on Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers (*Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election*, 2014, p. 13). He managed to take advantage over other candidates beforehand, as they had to wait to raise the funds and make expenditures until 11 July 2014 – the date of the official announcement of the list of candidates. As Kalaycıoğlu claims, “it appeared the AKP candidate was able to use the resources of his governmental office while the other candidates were not. This seems to have undermined the fairness of the election and its democratic credentials” (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, pp. 161–162).

Similar phenomena could be observed during the 2015 parliamentary elections. During the election campaigns Erdoğan as the President took part in different gatherings. Officially, they were labelled as national rallies with Turkish flags, which the president held to meet citizens and thank them for voting for him at the presidential elections, in reality though they were part of AKP's election campaign (Bardakçı, 2016, p. 7).

The AKP used its privileged position as the governing party as well. The ceremonies of opening of infrastructural projects, which helped to show the government's effectiveness, were organized before the beginning of official election campaigns both in 2011 and 2015 (Aslan-Akman, 2012, p. 89). The AKP “made the most out of its access to state resources in its election campaign: the governing party used public employees to inform and mobilise the voters, its officials travelled in planes and cars belonging to the state, and its campaign activities benefited from free access to the resources of municipal and local governments” (Sayarı, 2016, p. 271). When it comes to public employees, they were more eager to help the party in elections, e.g. when they had their permanent status extended (in cases of work on a contract basis) or when they were paid from the public resources for gasoline in the case of travelling on their own to election rallies (Aslan-Akman, 2012, p. 89).

When it comes to the violation of campaign financing regulations, it usually pertains to overspending and/or failing to declare expenditure or contributions. Again, the August 2014 presidential election provides a very good example. The financial regulations in the relevant election law stipulate that financing candidates by parties or through loans is not possible and that the individual support with the use of special bank accounts is allowed. However, the lack of well-defined limits (“up to the highest monthly salary of the best-paid civil servant” could not serve as a clear indication) could in practice lead to large disparities between candidates, depending on their “fund-raising” potential. It was noticeable during the 2014 election campaign, in which Erdoğan, being the Prime Minister, received much more financial support than other candidates, with the support from companies being part of the patronage system (which we will tackle in more detail below) and the aforementioned public resources. When it comes to the individuals' support, he received about 24 million Turkish liras while İhsanoğlu – 2.1 million Turkish liras (*Turkish Elections. Presidential Elections*, 2014).

The violation of campaign finance regulations is possible also in the case of parliamentary elections due to lack of some important limitations and sufficient reporting on expenditures. The OSCE report from November 2015 elections indicates that: “There are no limitations on general party and campaign-related expenditure. Political parties are required to declare their campaign funds solely through annual party financial reports submitted to the Constitutional Court. Independent candidates declare their campaign funds through personal tax declarations. [...] Incomes and expenditure of parties and independent candidates during the campaign were not publicly available” (*Early Parliamentary Elections*, 2016, p. 13). During the same elections some parties which were under particular attack from the governing party did not receive on time the state funds they were supposed to receive according to the relevant regulations. Only after the elections did the HDP get the funds. As the authors of the OSCE report rightly state, “it limited their campaign abilities and placed them at a disadvantage compared to parties entitled to state support” (*Early Parliamentary Elections*, 2016, p. 13).

The advantageous financial position of the AKP having large state and private financial resources (the latter thanks to the developed patronage system in Turkey) is visible at the election rallies, which can gather thousands of people transported with the use of the party resources. They take part in the mass events during which they can get free party gadgets, toys for children, or food and drinks, which may seem negligible, but indeed attracts voters. The same refers to the election campaign in the streets of towns. AKP is the most visible party thanks to numerous flags as well as big posters and banners placed almost everywhere, also on special election vehicles – buses or vans. Other parties, though also present in the streets, are far less visible. The voters can have a similar impression as in the case of the media coverage dominated by the AKP – there is actually only one main party to vote for. The same observation can be attributed to the August 2014 presidential elections. The OSCE observed in its report that campaigns of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş “have been active, but with limited visibility” (*Early Parliamentary Elections*, 2016, p.6).

The next feature of election campaigns in many countries is the **“black arts” of manipulative campaign tactics**. It is not a key issue in Turkey in comparison to previous aspects but it can also shape the preferences of voters. As it goes beyond the scope of this paper, we would like to give just a few examples. In the case of the August 2014 presidential elections the smear campaign took place against the journalists opposing the government (*Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election*, 2014, p. 13). When we take a look at the November 2015 elections, there were cases of untrue media coverage regarding some parties. For instance, the Rights and Liberties Party was reported to have withdrawn from elections while it was still taking part in them. When it filed a complaint to the Supreme Board of Elections, the Board did not take any decision. It was an example of the lack of effective handling of election complaints. This dilemma and the problems indicated by a number of organizations monitoring elections in Turkey related to the quick rejection of complaints by the Board without sufficient examination or their too long considerations led to a disadvantageous position of candidates or parties lodging complaints (*Early Parliamentary Elections*, 2016, p. 6). It did not have any impact on the results but it looked different when the manipulation of electoral preferences

took place as the result of spreading information concerning the main opposition parties as it was the case of pro-government media outlets, which, during the November 2015 elections, presented the opposition parties, namely the Republican People's Party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), Nationalist Action Party (MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) and HDP as factions responsible for the rise in instability in the country (Çarkoğlu, Yıldırım, 2015, p. 75).

However, the cases of **intimidation of candidates or obstruction of their campaign activities** are more disturbing in terms of fairness of elections. We can identify the most striking example thereof during the November 2015 elections, with measures taken against HDP, which became the main adversary of the governing party following the June 2015 elections. The AKP aim was to bring the support of the HDP below the 10 per cent threshold, which would give the former a sufficient majority to govern on its own again. It must be underlined that political parties held only limited campaigns at the time of conflict with PKK and terrorist attacks, concentrating their efforts on strategic provinces where they had lost or won seats in the previous elections with slight vote margins, and in large cities that host a significant proportion of the electorate. However, the HDP campaign activities were even more limited by different actions against its candidates and members (it is also the case of the 2017 constitutional referendum campaign). The intensification of negative media coverage was very clear in the pro-government media reporting on HDP, in comparison to the June 2015 elections (*Early Parliamentary Elections*, 2016, pp. 2–5 and 8). It can be pointed out that from 187 attacks against political parties during the election period, 168 were directed against HDP politicians. More than 5,000 members of the party were taken into custody. This substantially limited HDP's campaigning potential and also had a negative impact on electoral choices in the situation of charges of a terrorist organisation membership against more than 1,000 HDP activists (Çarkoğlu, Yıldırım, 2015, p. 62; Bardakçı, 2016, p. 14). In many provinces, the attacks against the activists of HDP supporting its candidate Demirtaş for President were observed also during the August 2014 elections (*Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election*, 2014, p. 14).

Undue influence

The second group within the category of “manipulation of vote choice” is undue influence which has two forms of so the called “carrots” and “sticks.” In the first case it pertains to **vote buying**, having different forms in the Turkish case. On the one hand, there are many examples of distribution of goods to citizens, who are becoming party supporters thanks to the goods received. This has created an advantage for the AKP, which has large financial resources at its disposal. Apart from the above mentioned goods handed out at the election rallies, during the whole election period the AKP governments have distributed consumer durables, coal and food to the poor, vouchers as well as substantial agricultural subsidies (Akarca, 2015, p. 88).

On the other hand, there are many examples of particular forms of vote buying on a larger scale, resulting from the well-developed patronage system in Turkey. As Ali T. Akarca writes:

“the incumbency advantage involves the ability to indulge in transfer activities such as providing services, subsidies and patronage, and picking locations for government investment and public work projects to attract supporters of other parties. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence of all Turkish incumbent parties, especially those in coalition governments, engaging in such activities. Financial support, interest-free loans and tax advantages promised to women and young entrepreneurs, and reductions in the social security and health insurance premiums promised to small business owners and their elimination for new university graduates, increases in the scholarships given to university students by the AK Party before the November 2015 election are some examples of these” (Akarca, 2015, p. 88).

The patronage system is then not the AKP specificity. Yet, Erdoğan’s party has been able to use the particular kind of patronage relationship to its electoral advantage perfectly. A very good example, reflecting both the patronage and clientelism mechanism, is the work of the Turkey’s Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ), with the mechanism of distributing different material means (contracts, jobs and subsidised housing) for consolidating and expanding the electoral strength of the AKP. Construction companies have been receiving contracts from the government and in return have been more eager to support and finance the governing party activities and election campaigns. All this leads also to boosting the local economy. Thanks to these mechanisms the incumbents have regular supporters during the elections (Marschall, Aydoğan, Bulut, 2016, pp. 201–212). Surely, in Turkey the patronage mechanisms are much more developed than the ones that we touched upon, and guarantee the electoral support of broader groups of conservative economic elites as well as religious brotherhoods and movements which, for example, receive land for their dorms and schools. Their support will not cease as thanks to the AKP staying in power they can survive and develop their activities (Taş, 2015, pp. 785–786).

The “sticks” in turn concern **voter coercion and intimidation**. Already in the case of the 2009 local elections many examples of this kind of electoral malpractice could be observed. Apart from attacking and fining the liberal media (Doğan Group) for not reporting correctly, similar measures were taken against individuals. Citizens ready to express their dissatisfaction with the economic policy of the government were not allowed to do it, with police clamping down on protesters at the election rallies. Apart from using physical violence or arresting people, the AKP politicians threatened citizens that in case they did not vote in local elections for the AKP candidates, the municipalities would be deprived of public services (Eligür, 2009, p. 478). The atmosphere of fear was prevalent among civil servants or public sector employees, threatened they would lose their job should AKP lose the franchise. When it comes to the presidential campaign in 2014, Erdoğan and other AKP politicians threatened the conservative electorate that they would be discriminated by the secular elites (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, p. 169).

Conclusion

Turkey under the AKP has witnessed many legal deficits and “mispractices” concerning different stages of the electoral process. However, different types of malpractices can be identified as well. A lot of them refer to the manipulation of vote choice (the second

category of the electoral malpractice according to Birch's categorization) with particular negative role of the use of media coverage and campaign resources. These most important electoral malpractices are usually connected with activities of the single-party governments of the AKP, which uses the incumbency advantage (through the use of different resources being mainly at the disposal of the governing party) in order to preserve the support of the electorate or even increase it and at the same time restrict the area of party competition and electoral chances of the opposition. These manipulations go much beyond the time of the official election campaign and even the whole election period. They also include long-term measures taken during the whole legislative period, such as the strengthening of clientelistic and patronage networks, embracing a growing number of social groups being to a large extent dependent on incumbents and, therefore, forced to vote for the AKP. This would be the case with coalition governments, with the coalition partners, political contenders after all, check and mitigate one another.

The manipulations of vote choice calls the electoral integrity in Turkey into question. However, the long- and short-term electoral malpractices also contribute substantially to the process of shifting of pre-dominant party system to the dominant one. It is the next phase of the long-term process of strengthening majoritarianism after the 1980 military coup in Turkey – through such measures as introduction of the 10 percent electoral threshold in general elections and regulations of Law on Political Parties (Aslan-Akman, 2012, p. 81). The AKP era brought about the development of the aforementioned malpractices connected with incumbency advantage, leading to increasing domination of the governing party in the party system (together with gradual marginalization of the opposition) and political system as a whole. This poses a challenge for unconsolidated democracies, particularly when the malpractices are also about the use of clientelistic networks and are accompanied by populist policy (Aslan-Akman, 2012, pp. 80–81).

This negative impact in Turkey is twofold – direct and indirect. The electoral manipulations are themselves manifestations of authoritarian tendencies developing in Turkey particularly in the second decade of the 21st century (Esen, Gümüüşçü, 2016). However, even more dysfunctional is the indirect effect of malpractices on the political regime. An ever increasing domination of the AKP in the Turkish party and political system consolidated as a result of subsequent elections as well as more and more restrictive political “level playing field” have an adverse effect on the political regime due to specter of “tyranny of majority.” According to such authors as Leah Gilbert and Payam Mohseni, when the competitiveness is minimised, the regime cannot be called hybrid any more and is becoming authoritarian (Gilbert, Mohseni, 2011, pp. 281–293). On behalf of the majority the measures are taken by the AKP to strengthen the authoritarian tendencies. The 2017 referendum campaign on the constitutional changes introducing the so called presidential system became a new arena of different malpractices (again with particular negative role of the manipulation of vote choice) connected with incumbency advantage, which can be decisive as far as the change of the regime is concerned.

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Manipulowanie preferencjami wyborczymi – czynnik ograniczający uczciwość wyborów w Turcji?

Streszczenie

Od 1946 r., Turcja jest demokracją wielopartyjną – w państwie tym regularnie odbywają się wolne, konkurencyjne wybory. Jednak w ostatnim dziesięcioleciu, wraz z konsolidacją władzy przez Partię Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju, pojawia się coraz więcej wątpliwości co do uczciwości wyborów. Partia rządząca zaczęła uciekać się do szeregu środków, ograniczających ich konkurencyjność. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie skali nadużyć wyborczych w Turcji, z naciskiem na jeden z trzech głównych obszarów manipulacji wyborczych, to jest manipulowanie "preferencjami wyborców" (*vote choice*), który wydaje się być najbardziej problematyczny. Ambicją autorów jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy wybory w Turcji, mimo obserwowanych nieprawidłowości, nadal spełniają międzynarodowe standardy, czy też Turcja staje się 'wyborczą autokracją'?

Słowa kluczowe: wybory, nieprawidłowość wyborcza, demokratyzacja, Turcja, Partia Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju

