



Dear Hasret,

The pre-election atmosphere in Turkey seems to be very tense. What is the responsibility of President Erdoğan in the current crisis of Turkish democracy?

The Latest Turkish Innovation: 'Repeat Election'

After three consecutive periods in power, the reign of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*), a conservative party with an Islamist pedigree, came to an end in June 2015. Since 2002, the party won each and every local and general election with comfortable majorities. During the years in government, an expanding partisan press has helped to construct the innovative, efficient, honest and anti-militarist party.

But in recent years the AKP myth was shattered. First by the state violence against the peaceful environmentalist demonstrators during the Gezi Protests of June 2013, then by the obsession with power of its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and last but not least by corruption allegations against cabinet members.

A drop in the AKP's share of the vote was therefore not unexpected at the elections last June, but the real surprise was the performance of the Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi, HDP*). With the support of the secular Turkish liberals and socialists the HDP got more than 13% at the national level, while the AKP lost its parliamentary majority.

As President Erdoğan had been extremely involved with the AKP's election campaign despite the constitutional designation of his post as a neutral arbiter of the parliamentary system, the election results have been interpreted as a blow dealt to him in person. And the unprecedented silence he kept after the elections confirmed this impression.

When he finally counter-attacked it was with an innovative conceptual contribution to the political terminology: the 'repeat election'. From the very beginning Erdoğan declared that the coalition negotiations following the elections were bound to fail, and brilliantly diagnosed that a new election would be needed, which would give the voters the chance to think twice.

Over the years, Turkish citizens have become accustomed to the neologisms introduced by their president such as 'chapullers' (marauders) to define the Gezi protesters, or 'advanced democracy' (which seems to refer to a country with large-scale imprisonment of opposition and journalists). But 'repeat election' is certainly the most cutting-edge contribution to democracy he has ever made.

Since then, he has even done better, in formulating the concept of 'collective terrorism', following the tragic events of recent months. While the bombings of Suruc – at a meeting of young socialists on their way to convey humanitarian aid and gifts to the war-ruined Kobane – and Ankara – at a peace demonstration to put an end to the violence between the state and the Kurdish insurgency – were most likely perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), the president seems to insinuate that the responsibility lies with a wide coalition of terrorist organizations, including in addition to ISIS the separatist PKK, but also the leftist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front and the religious and neo-nationalist Gulen movement. In other words, the slightest criticism from any ideological group now carries the risk of being affiliated with being part of the 'collective terrorism' that threatens the Turkish state.

If the situation was not as serious, one might be tempted to laugh at Erdoğan's attempts to re-invent democracy according to his taste. With a government like this, the Turkish electorate has no reason to be anxious about the election results, but all the more about the surprises of their aftermath.

*With all best wishes,
Hasret*



Hasret Dikici Bilgin is assistant professor in political science at Okan University, Istanbul.