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COMMENT WAR IN TURKEY ELECTIONS 2023:
A POLITICAL NETNOGRAPHY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have recently emerged essential to electoral politics and democratic processes worldwide. The uninhibited flow of ideas and opinions between fans can frequently be seen in the comment areas of social media platforms. This article analyzes the Instagram Middle East Eye (MEE) comment war, emphasizing the 2023 Turkish elections. We use political netnography to evaluate one of David Hearst's thoughts on Instagram MEE. We categorize comments based on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. We discovered that public opinion is divided into two camps: secularists and Islamists. Groups advocating secularism use arguments about the Turkish economy's collapse and the freedom of the media in Turkey during Erdogan's rule. On the other side, Islamists argue that only Erdogan has the guts to speak out boldly in support of freedom for the Islamic community that is currently at odds. According to them, Turkey protects Muslims all around the world. They also claimed that the West and Europe interfered in Turkey's elections in order to weaken Islam. They stated that the intervention was taking place. The research is critical because the election in Turkey in 2023 is one of the most important elections that will change the map of Islamic power against the West.

الملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية:

**انتخابات تركيا؛
الديمقراطية؛ تحليل وسائل
التواصل الاجتماعي.**

برزت منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في الآونة الأخيرة كعنصر أساسي في السياسة الانتخابية والعمليات الديمقراطية في جميع أنحاء العالم. ويمكن رؤية التدفق غير المقيد للأفكار والآراء بين المعجبين في كثير من الأحيان في مناطق التعليقات على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي. يحلل هذا المقال حرب التعليقات على موقع إنستجرام ميدل إيست آي (MEE)، مع التركيز على الانتخابات التركية لعام ٢٠٢٣. نستخدم علم الشبكات السياسية لتقييم أفكار ديفيد هيرست على إنستجرام MEE. وقمنا بتصنيف التعليقات على أساس رجب طيب أردوغان وكمال كليتشدار أوغلو. اكتشفنا أن الرأي العام منقسم إلى معسكرين: العلمانيون والإسلاميون. وتستخدم الجماعات المدافعة عن العلمانية حججًا حول انهيار الاقتصاد التركي وحرية الإعلام في تركيا خلال حكم أردوغان. وعلى الجانب الآخر، يجادل الإسلاميون بأن أردوغان وحده يملك الشجاعة للتحدث بجرأة لدعم حرية المجتمع الإسلامي الذي هو على خلاف حالياً. ووفقًا لهم، فإن تركيا تحمي المسلمين في جميع أنحاء العالم. كما زعموا أن الغرب وأوروبا تدخلوا في الانتخابات التركية من أجل إضعاف الإسلام. وذكروا أن التدخل كان يحدث. البحث بالغ الأهمية لأن الانتخابات في تركيا في عام ٢٠٢٣ هي واحدة من أهم الانتخابات التي ستغير خريطة القوة الإسلامية في مواجهة الغرب.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey Elections 2023 is a pivotal year for Turkey, involving two dominant political parties with great emotion. According to Soner Cagaptay, Turkey is a democratic Muslim nation (Cagaptay, 2020). Nonetheless, in the democratic nation of Turkey, the 2023 presidential election features a political conflict. The political right wing dominates the vote with the mission of defending the Muslim world. Meanwhile, the political left uses narratives of the collapse of the economy and media freedom in Turkey during Erdogan's reign psywar. Turkey's current political dynamics are not only a concern of the Turkish public but have developed into world attention. This is because the election of Turkey is considered to change the world political map. By applying a two-round system (Nugroho & Safa'at, 2022), The first round of voting was carried out on May 14, 2023. Because none of the candidates obtained votes above 50%, it continued in the second round held on May 28, 2023, which ended with Erdogan's Victory.

In a democratic country, the people have the right and authority to speak and express their opinions (Nasution, 2020). One way to vote is to determine their political opinion. Initially, the community expressed their opinions traditionally, such as by demonstrating or writing them on murals in public facilities. However, in the digital era, most people voice their opinions in various media. Instagram is one of the media outlets that allows for the free expression of public opinion. Voicing opinions through social media is a legitimate thing. This is reinforced by the opinion of (Engesser et al., 2017) who said that during mass media adhere to professional norms and news values, social media serves as a direct linkage to the people and allows populists to circumvent journalistic gatekeepers. In this way, social media allows populists to articulate their ideology and spread their message unquestionably.

Numerous researchers have examined the role of media permeation in mainstreaming political opinions. Cornbug and Fatimah, in their article "From Networked Nominee to Networked Nation: Examining the Impact of Web 2.0 and Social Media on Political Participation and Civic Engagement in the 2008 Obama Campaign, explain how social media played an essential role in the election of Barack Obama. It was further explained how direct communication with the public can improve the political process. Obama has moved information technology into mainstream American politics (Greengard, 2009). Web 2.0 and social media are cost-effective ways to build social capital, as they reduce the investment required to build a network. In addition, Gunn Enli in Twitter as an arena for the authentic outsider: exploring the social media campaign of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential Election, explains that the influence of social media on elections is enormous. Since 1970, in the general election, the candidate's image has been exciting for the holders of voting rights to know. In this case, social media is an opportunity to build and maintain the candidate's image. Even without social media, it would have been difficult for Trump, who lacks political experience and political party structure, to attract media coverage. Previous research has shown that social media is crucial in providing space for the public to have a voice, election campaigning candidates, and interactive tools between the public and political candidates.

This study employs the political netnography methodology initiated by Dino Villegas (Villegas, 2020, p. 100). This method investigates the contemporary relevance of social media in politics and then explores existing research into issues related to these politics. This research focuses on the analysis of Comment War and what happened to Middle East Eye's (MEE) related Instagram posts in Turkey Elections 2023. In detail, this research is included in Netnographies of Lived Political Experiences (Villegas, 2020, p. 105). This study classifies comments on the MEE Instagram page into two categories: pro-Erdogan, anti-Erdogan, and pro- and anti-Kemal Kilicdaroglu. This study's indicators include remarks about economic issues, freedom of expression, Muslimism, and secularism. Phantombuster.com was used to collect comment data, which was then analyzed using

Parabola.io. Through in-depth analysis, it is anticipated that this study will be able to address research questions regarding how media commentary wars relate to Turkey's Elections and how Instagram becomes part of the media political battle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Turkey Elections 2023: Between Muslimism vs Secularism

The Ottoman Empire (1300-1923 AD) was the last Islamic caliphate and contributed to the spread of Islamic teachings. However, the Ottoman Empire had its style of state administration. Led by a head of state called the Sultan and assisted by two institutions, namely Shaykhul Islam and Shadrul A'zham (Sodiqin & Radiamoda, 2021). interestingly, it has been ruled by the Ottoman government for 100 years (Malik, 2017). However, over time, changes in the constitutional system of the Turkish Caliphate also changed from a parliamentary system to a presidential system (to become a Republican State). On January 20, 1921, a new constitution was passed, which gave legislative and executive powers to the Supreme National Assembly. Through this constitution, the Supreme National Assembly abolished the Turkish Sultanate in 1922, followed by an amendment on October 23, 1923, the contents of which changed the form of the country to a republic and appointed the President as the head of state. The peak of Turkish renewal occurred on March 3, 1924, namely the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (Maryam, 2003). This is what finally changed the face of Turkey Islamists to a secular state.

Changing this constitution also changes the way the country's leader is elected. The method of electing leaders with a new style has been implemented, namely by way of General Elections or the so-called *Turkey Elections.* Historical facts say that the beginning of general elections in Turkey was held before changes to the form of the constitution. The first general elections 1912 earned the designation *"Sticky Choice"* (Tepekaya, 2013), where many parties and ideologies fought for power. Both the Unity and Progress Committee and Hürriyet and İhtilaf harass each other verbally, in writing, and even with actual attacks to get more representatives using all their means in the election box. However, the general election at that time gave rise to many incidents. Constituents experienced rape in several areas, such as in Eskişehir (Ihsan Gunes, 1912) and in Trabzon (Kudret Emiroglu, 1992). With this incident, the 1912 general election became the beginning of Turkey's Elections, which were not running well.

Seeing the chaotic political problems, the Turkish government passed the general election law contained in the Republic of Turkey Anayasasi 1 Number 2709 of 1982 (Fajrian & Kurniawan, 2021). This law was passed by the 1982 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey to discipline general elections in Turkey from the perspective of the elected candidates, organizers, and constituents. One example of disciplinary intent is the 1912 general election. There is no provision in the Kanun-i Esasi regarding the specific election conditions outlined in Articles 65 and 80 of the Kanun-i Esasi concerning Parliament and its election, except for male gender. Article 101 of the Turkish Constitution, it is explained that "The President of the Republic is a Turkish citizen who is over forty years of age, has a higher education, and fulfills the requirements, is directly elected by the people from among his citizens, and the term of office of the President is five years."

The general election law enacted in 1982 seems to have become the basis for general election legislation held in Turkey today. However, the idea of a Draft Law (RUU) has emerged over time. As happened on April 16, 2017, Turkey held a referendum on constitutional reform with a majority of constituents agreeing with the bill, which contained, among other things: *First,* Presidential elections will be held every five years. *Second,* political parties or alliances that received at least 5% of the last election are eligible to put forward their candidate as a presidential candidate. *Third,* The president will have executive powers and titles to the state representing Turkey, the unity of the Turkish people, and guaranteeing the implementation of the constitution and the harmonious

implementation of state organs. Moreover, the results of that policy are used in every general election to date.

Turkey Elections 2023 is currently narrowed down to 2 prominent candidates, namely Erdogan, who has led for 20 years with his rival Tolicdaroglu. Erdogan, whose full name is Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is a big-time politician who founded (Adavalet ve Development Partisi) AKP in 2001. In the 2002 general election, AKP won a landslide win of nearly ⅔ of parliamentary seats where many parties withdrew (Cumhuriyet et al.) As the second largest party, CHP only won 19.4% of the vote. The AKP's vision and mission, which is in the spotlight of the Turkish people, is to change the secularism that is happening in Turkey with Muslimism. At that time, Erdogan was not yet allowed to participate in politics because the courts still outlawed him for his speech in Siirt. His political career increased when the AKP promoted him to become a presidential candidate in the 2014 general election. Recep Tayyip Erdogan successfully became President of Turkey by obtaining 51.79% (187) of the vote. However, his policies are often controversial. The opposition argues that Erdoğan will continue to pursue his political agenda, controlling the government, while the new Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu will obey and submit. Furthermore, the domination of Erdoğan loyalists in Davutoglucabint speculates that Erdoğan intends to exercise substantial control over the government (Erdogan, n.d.).

Despite Erdogan's policy of wanting to monopolize government, Erdogan successfully ran for the second time in 2017 and became the incumbent in the 2023 election. However, in the 2023 general election, he met a well-known rival named Kemal Kilicdaroglu, a politician who carried the rival party AKP. Interview In his discussions with the media, Kemal revealed that the CHP emphasizes continuity with the founding principles and values of the Republic of Turkey by supporting democracy, secularism, social state, the rule of law, human rights, and freedoms. In an interview with Kilicdaroglu, he said that Turkey had suffered a setback during the last decade under AKP rule. Moreover, the AKP must want to bring Turkey to a golden age by returning to the past, while the CP will bring Turkey to a golden age in the future.

The exciting thing about the 2023 general election is the policy of Muslimism and secularism, which are the mainstream of each presidential candidate. Turkey's Elections in 2023 will be the arena of a fierce battle between Muslimism and Secularism, reflecting fundamental differences in the role of religion in the country's political life (Cevik, 2015). On the one hand, the adhering group Muslimism struggles to maintain Islamic values as the primary foundation in political decision-making. They believe religion must be a moral and legal guide in government running. On the other hand, groups that adhere to secularism emphasize the separation of religion and state and the importance of maintaining religious freedom and equality before the law. They struggle to maintain Turkey's secular democratic foundation, which has existed since its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk(Kuru & Stepan, 2012).

In general, the 2023 Turkish elections reflect a deep ideological battle between the two, with each side trying to secure Turkey's political future per its vision and principles. The results of this election will significantly impact the direction of the country's policies and identity in the coming years, as well as affect Turkey's relations with the rest of the world. In this case, the majority of Turkish citizens who are Muslims certainly want Muslimism to continue to occur in Turkey. However, if they vote for Erdogan, the unresolved economic policies are a reason for not wanting to vote for Erdogan, especially after the earthquake that devastated Turkey last February, which claimed more than 50,000 victims where the Erdogan government was less agile in responding to this. Meanwhile, Kilicdaroglu expressed policies in the economic field by stopping the increase and spread of poverty and corruption and hindering AK's despotic ambitions. (Kilicdaroglu, 2010).

Regardless of whom the candidate will lead power in Turkey in the coming period, there is modernization in the Turkish general election system, resulting from intervention

from the West. In the second half of the 20th century, campaign modernization resulted from the Western campaign system. It can be said that the increase in the application of modern campaign techniques occurred after the 1980 period when Turkish adaptation to the West was both political and economic. Because intense campaign system changes often occur, each dominant candidate tries to get valid votes and be recognized by the state. This struggle was carried out by civilian parties who tried to seize power against the military bureaucracy, especially in the 1983-2007 elections. In the following period, Kurdish politics, trying to find a place for itself in the political arena, tried to capitalize on these techniques, especially with the CHP and MHP, which also supported the army, against the civilian AKP government, which made significant gains. However, Turkey implemented an imported campaign system to a certain extent and limited the modernization of elections, such as the traditional political threshold rule of 10%, which was created by political conditions(Blacksmith, 2016).

In addition to intervention in the general election system, the West seems involved in saving the atmosphere ahead of the Turkish general election. One is content dissemination deep fake, *which was annulled and stemmed* from Russian interference. This made Erdogan's opposition so angry that he openly criticized Russia through his Twitter tweet @kilicdarogluk:

> *"Dear Russian friends, you are behind the montage, conspiracy, Deep Fake content, and footage exposed in this country yesterday. If you want our friendship to continue after May 15th, take your hands off Turkey. We still support cooperation and friendship."*

Figure 1. Display of Kemal Kilicdaroglu's uploads on his personal Twitter

The tweet uploaded on May 12, 2023, at 00:00 WIB is counter to the distribution of deep fake content and conspiracies that took place before the 2023 election. This can be reasonable, considering the misuse of fake has the potential to hurt society, including the expansion of the spread of manipulative hoaxes and hate speech (Novyanti & Astuti, 2021).

Comment War in Turkey Elections 2023; A Case Study from Middle East Eye Instagram Account

Middle East Eye (MEE) was established in April 2014 as a digital news platform. It is independently funded to cover news from the Middle East and North Africa and related content outside the region. Its distinctive coverage provides live news, commentary, and analysis emphasizing local perspectives. Journalists are encouraged to read between the lines and go beyond the official narrative when reporting a story. MEE has broken several major stories, including the end of the siege of east Aleppo; the investigation into the death of Jamal Khashoggi, a former MEE writer who was assassinated on the orders of the Saudi

Crown Prince; how the British government allowed British-Libyans to oppose Gaddafi; a secret Arab plot to overthrow the Palestinian president; the role of Iranian-backed militias against U.S. forces in Iraq; and the role of "awakened" MEE's coverage is driven by a significant number of journalists, freelance correspondents, opinion writers, and analysts from the Middle East and North Africa, despite its London-based headquarters. His American team consists of journalists from New York and Washington. The media also has a Jerusalem bureau and a French digital platform.

In particular, this article analyzes the war of comments in one of the Opinions posted by MEE on 11 May 2023. David Hearst wrote this opinion titled "Turkey elections: Why Europe is desperate to see Erdogan lose." In his opinion, Hearst commented on the opinion written by The Economist who said that "Most important, in an era when strongman rule is on the rise, from Hungary to India, the peaceful ejection of Mr. Erdogan would show democrats everywhere that strongmen can be beaten." To Hearst, this is an insane opinion. He further countered through his opinion that The Economist made a big mistake in his analysis of Turkey. He emphasized that Turkey, under the hyperpresidential government of Erdogan, whom he called a "strongman," was a country where free elections could still take place. His opinion seemed to confirm The Economist's mistake in calling Erdogan a dictator. Figure 2 explains that his opinion has received many responses with more than 7000 likes.
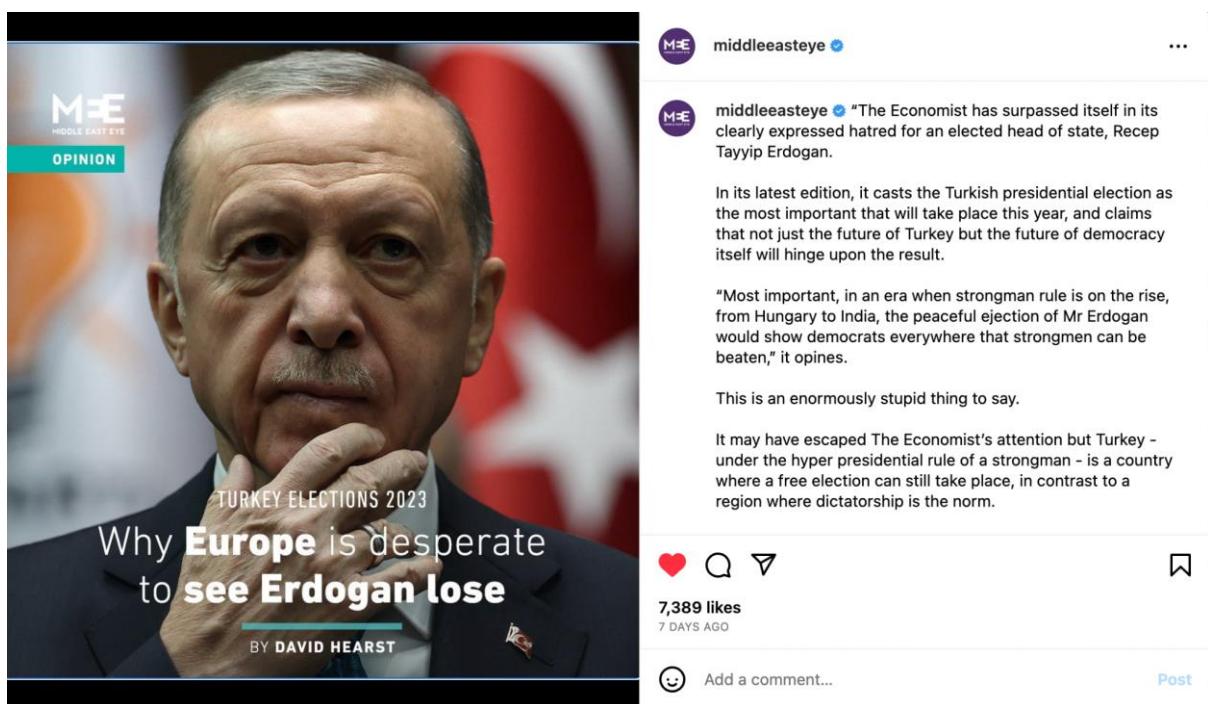

Figure 2. David Hearst's Opinion Display on Instagram Middle East Eye

The data as of May 13, 2023, took data obtained as many as 207 comments, with 52% of the votes pro-Erdogan, 42% of the votes Contra Erdogan, and the remaining 6% Neutral. This data cannot be used as a reference for predicting the results of the 2023 Turkish election. However, at least it can be evidence that the contestation of issues in the media between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is quite balanced. This data is in line with the results of data analysis, which show that the intensity of the top comments was obtained by the account @abdullagloria, who wrote the comment "May Allah make him win the elections again," with 215 likes and 46 replies. This comment is included in the Pro

sentiment towards Erdogan. As seen in Figure 2. comments from @abdullagloria received various responses by saying "Keep Dreaming," as written by account @eikurd. Some agree, as written by the account @rholda_gosain, which says, "Ameen: We stand by our leaders; West, stay out.". Various interesting comments also adorn this comments column. As the account @mmlisp wrote, Erdogan has taken away his freedom in education because currently, Turkey is at a low economic level, so he cannot pay for his education. From various kinds of comments, the issues being debated are the problems of Freedom of Democracy, Economy, Muslimism, and Secularism.

Meanwhile, on Contra Erdogan's side, there is an account @lorenzostefani_ which received 135 likes and 11 replies for his comment, which he wrote, "Why Middle East eye is desperate to see Erdogan win" would be a better title. You are blatantly doing propaganda in his favor; you are not an independent media outlet 🤭 🤭 🤭 . He accused the MEE of becoming a propaganda medium by leading the issue to win Erdogan. His writings also drew comments on various issues such as Muslims, Secularism, Free Democracy, and the Economy. This can be seen from the comments of @aisha_saikh.19_, who said there was a fear that if Erdoğan lost, Muslims would feel insecure, as was the case with the harassment incident against removing the hijab some time ago.

The existence of comment wars on social media can become a reference for people's choices and a source of incitement by presenting opinions that corner each other. This is in line with (Hermawan & Gassing, 2023) Which says that comments on social media play an essential role in shaping perceptions of someone. Not only that, social media has become a free space for opinions that can be accessed efficiently without limitations of place and time. (Arsyad & Nadjib, 2011).

yasin.zaree1365 52 ming
I am an Iranian. Use the experience of the Iranian nation, don't let your country become the experience of others. Avoid religion.
As Iranians, our fathers chose religion and deprived us of all human rights. Now we have become a backward country that has so many natural resources but has the most miserable and worthless money and weakest economy in the world. Be careful, religion is a destructive drug, it will destroy Turkey.
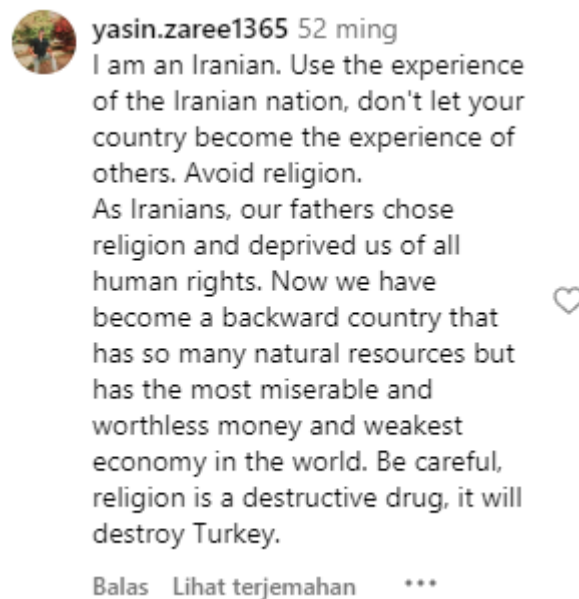
Balas   Lihat terjemahan   ***

Figure 3. Display of comments from another country

As in the comments in Figure 3, these comments are from citizens who are not involved in the 2023 Turkish elections, but they provide opinions in choosing leaders that refer to facts happening in their country.
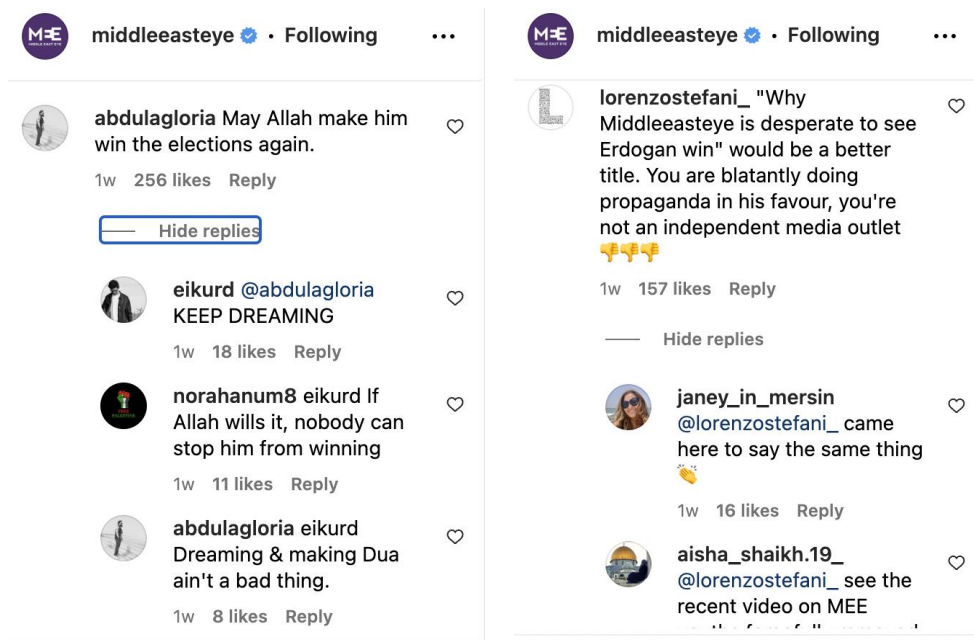
Figure 4. Display of comment wars on the Middle East Eye page

The comment war on David Hearst's opinion page demonstrates that social media has become a new forum for political expression. They shared their perspectives on the Economy, Freedom of Democracy, Secularism, and Muslimism. Erdogan's supporters are overtly concerned about what will occur if he loses the election, for instance, regarding the West's interference with the Turkish government, which poses a growing hazard to their nation. If Erdogan does not become president of Turkey, the safety of Muslims is also a concern for his supporters. On the other hand, pro-Kemal Klcdarolu groups consistently cite Turkey's current economic instability problems. They explicitly state that they are unconcerned with Western interference so long as Erdogan loses and the Turkish economy recovers.

The Power of Comment: Understanding Relation Between Media and Politics

The media play a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse in the present day. The influence of social media comments cannot be understated, as they have the potential to impact public perception and even the outcomes of political contests. Lengauer (2014) states that media, in all its forms, serves as a crucial instrument for political communication due to its tremendous influence. The comment war on the MEE page demonstrated that social media has become a new arena for political competition by appealing to the emotions of political supporters. Actors and political commentators can readily express their opinions and interact with the public through the comments column. Therefore, media comments can affect public opinion and generate both support and opposition to political agendas. Mainly when influential public figures or characters communicate their opinions, they often resonate with a large audience, forming public opinion.

The MEE commentary war shows that the media can evoke emotional responses and foster a sense of community among individuals who share a common viewpoint. In some of the comments, however, there are typically buzzers who purposefully use specific comments to isolate or even provide support for one of the candidates. The comment war demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between media and political interests. Based on the

interactions within the comments column, political policies and strategies can be formulated. In turn, these remarks can impact the political discourse and affect the actions of political actors. For instance, the public's response to media commentary can compel politicians to reconsider their policies or alter their course of action. Therefore, media commentary not only reflects political events but also has the potential to influence the political landscape of the future. The influence of media commentary is evidence of the emotional conflict between supporters of political actors. By evaluating media commentary critically and engaging in informed conversation, individuals can actively shape the political discourse of our society.

The power of media commentary, in turn, influences political narratives. The media can emphasize, choose a specific point of view, or provide different interpretations of political events. In some cases, the media can also be a means of propaganda or manipulating information to achieve specific political goals. The opinion piece written by David Hearst in MEE is just one example of this. Therefore, critical analysis and understanding of how media commentary is formed and presented are essential to avoid biased or limited understanding. The findings in this article can be an initial overview of elections in other countries, for example, Indonesia, which will face a general election in the coming year 2024. The author believes this comment war will also increase, especially in the three months approaching the election.

CONCLUSION

This article highlights the significance of online remarks and discussions in shaping the political landscape during the 2023 Turkish elections. Analysis of political xenograft Politics offers valuable insight into cyberspace dynamics and power struggles, where individuals and groups engage in heated debates and convey their opinions regarding electoral processes. We believe that the digital space has become the primary arena for commentary battles and a battleground for political discourse. In these commentary conflicts, supporters of various political ideologies frequently engage in heated debates, arguments, and sometimes even personal attacks. Netnography facilitates a greater comprehension of various political actors' emotions, motivations, and strategies by analyzing this commentary on the conflict through a political lens. By comprehending the dynamics of commentary warfare, political actors can better tailor their strategies and messages to their intended audiences.

Overall, this article is crucial for comprehending the complexity of political communication in the digital age. This provides researchers and stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the power dynamics, propaganda techniques, and polarization that occur on online platforms during the electoral process. By analyzing these dynamics, it is possible to identify opportunities to promote constructive dialogue, promote media literacy, and strengthen democratic practices in the context of the impending 2023 Turkish or 2024 Indonesian elections.

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