

THE STATE

of

INFORMATION DISORDER

2023 Turkish Presidential and General Elections



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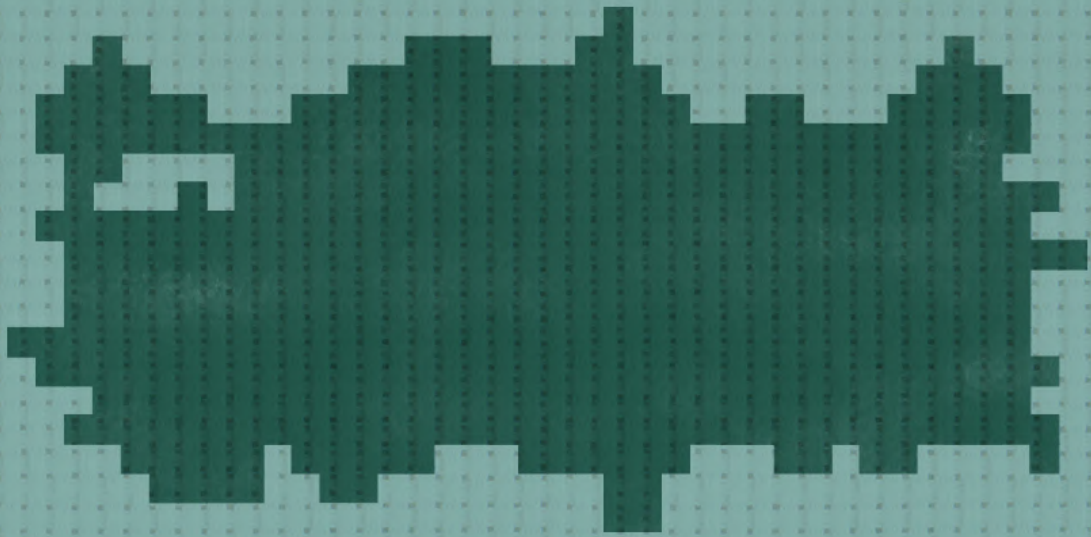
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Foreword

Elections in Türkiye have always stood as pivotal moments in its journey towards democracy. Since our inception in 2016, we at Teyit have been committed to fortifying the electoral process and deepening our adherence to factual information. As we navigated the latest election season, our focus sharpened on promoting transparency, tackling false information, and safeguarding the truth.

Our guiding principle throughout the election period was to cultivate an informed and engaged electorate. The ensuing report, which dissects the electoral climate of the most recent elections, emphasizes the necessity for equipping citizens, media professionals, and civic representatives with the tools for discerning credible information in an inundated informational landscape. It also stresses the need to amplify the voices that stand for truth amidst the clamor.

Our strategy is geared towards the amplification of truth and the dismantling of obstacles in the search for reliable information, such as the proliferation of mis- and disinformation. By way of rigorous fact-checking, data-driven analysis, and partnerships with subject-matter experts, we aim to offer a transparent lens for citizens to scrutinize the narratives presented to them. Our actions

are rooted in the principles of objectivity, transparency, and accountability—values we hold as fundamental to a robust democracy. Consistent with this philosophy, we not only engaged in combating internet-based falsehoods but also initiated our Politicians’ Statement-Checking Project to hold public figures accountable. Parallel to these endeavors, we have explored strategies for assisting university students in obtaining accurate information as they cast their ballots for the first time.

As engaged citizens, it’s our inherent right to scrutinize the information we come across, regardless of its origin, to insist on data-driven accuracy, and to expect apologies for any inaccuracies. The ramifications of internet-borne disinformation and misleading political statements during election campaigns are glaringly evident. Therefore, as with every election since 2016, we prepared this report by meticulously investigating the hotspots of misinformation, identifying targeted groups, and spotlighting the narratives politicians propagate through misleading information.

We are steadfast in fortifying our collaborations with digital platforms to swiftly counter misleading or deceptive content, disseminate fact-checking resources, and circulate verified facts. Concurrently, we aim to elevate media literacy and foster an environment conducive to substantive dialogues that transcend polarized political discourse. Our enduring objective is to guide voters in discerning fact from fabrication so they can make sound, informed decisions. This is a mission we intend to pursue in all upcoming elections.

We are confident that the data and insights we offer during election periods will serve as a cornerstone for both academic research and policy advocacy. The alliances we’ve forged with journalists, scholars, non-profit organizations, and individuals yearning for impartial reporting will contribute to a more transparent and trustworthy election environment.

Accurate information begets accurate decisions.

Gülin Çavuş

Co-Founder & Head of Strategy

Executive summary

- Türkiye has completed yet another election cycle in 2023. The proliferation of misleading information during this election season has further weakened public faith in the truth and allowed disinformation to become deeply rooted in the political landscape.
- Between January 1 and May 31, Teyit prepared 201 analyses focusing on suspicious content related to the election agenda. 50 of these were drafted under the umbrella of our new Politicians’ Statement-Checking Project, with the express aim of scrutinizing the claims made by political figures.
- Teyit adhered to established methodologies in both traditional fact-checking (FC) and statement-checking (SC), prioritizing the verification and scrutinization of information while also considering how such claims are presented and received.
- This report aims to highlight trends in misleading statements by politicians and prevalent social media posts, as gleaned from Teyit’s scrutiny of election-related content in the initial five months of 2023.
- While this report does shed light on certain patterns concerning specific candidates and political parties, its primary focus isn’t to single out any group or political entity as the main purveyor of misleading information. Statements by politicians that were too ambiguous to verify, or that fell outside the scope of our established methodology, were also encountered but not included in our analysis. This explains why some politicians don’t appear at all in the SC analyses.
- Within the SC framework, we observed that politicians frequently engaged in suspicious claims under the categories of “misleading,” “exaggeration,” and “true, but...”. In our FC analyses, where we scrutinize misleading information circulated on social media, the prevalent types of deceptive content were “false connection,” “manipulation,” and “misleading.”
- In our FC efforts, it appears that some false claims concerning the elections target specific political alliances while endorsing others. For example, false claims that are detrimental to the Nation Alliance while being favorable to the People’s Alliance are notably prevalent. In this context, there has also been a marked increase in asymmetrical propaganda materials directed against the Nation Alliance.

- Concerns have previously been raised regarding artificial intelligence’s capability for generating deepfake videos. However, this election season saw a prevalence of “cheapfakes”—simpler, less sophisticated manipulated content. Politician statements accompanying such content, especially those related to national security, could have influenced voter decisions.
- The polarization fanned by false information aimed at refugees and asylum seekers persisted. Moreover, LGBTI+ individuals remained the recurrent “other” in false narratives, continually targeted by both disinformation and certain politicians.
- Among the trends observed, one of the most eye-catching was the spread of misleading claims about Muharrem İnce and his party officials leading up to his withdrawal from the presidential race. Election security concerns that rose to prominence between the two voting rounds were accompanied by a stream of false information. Post-second round, old footages from the Al-Aqsa Mosque were incorrectly linked to the celebrations of the election outcome.
- Much like previous electoral seasons, this one too witnessed how disinformation served to exacerbate political divisions. Politicians aimed to expand their base of supporters through misleading rhetoric. The cyclical repetition of these false claims worked to mold the public’s understanding of truth—a process in which the role of mass communication channels cannot be denied.
- Social media platforms are conducive not only to general political messaging but also to the occasional dissemination of misleading statements that augment political propaganda. The advertisements that political entities place on these platforms carry enough weight to potentially impact the way voters behave.

1 Introduction

Introduction

Polemics, unfounded allegations, and groundless claims... Türkiye has wrapped up yet another election season. Following the parliamentary and initial presidential elections on May 14th, the second round took place on May 28th. The political discourse during these elections often seemed to value rhetoric over substance, with truth taking a back seat at campaign events and superficial topics dominating the media.

Such tactics weren't specific to any single party or candidate. Across the political spectrum, there appeared to be a collective resolve to muddy the waters of information. The elections fell short of being free and fair. This atmosphere further facilitated the information disorder, eroding public faith in factual discourse.

Philosopher Harry Frankfurt, in his 1986 article "On Bullshit," provides us with a useful lens to scrutinize the suspicious claims made by politicians. Frankfurt argues that "bullshit" exists in a realm that's neither inherently true nor false. It's more insidious than a mere lie or a simple piece of misleading information.

Those who engage in the propagation of bullshits are often inventive, forming statements far removed from factual accuracy and advocating for them. Such individuals show little concern for the essence of truth. In a political landscape where the act of voting has been stripped of its core democratic values, becoming a shallow gesture, politicians find this form of discourse useful. The logic appears to be, “If my misleading assertions help me achieve my goals, does their misleading nature really matter?”

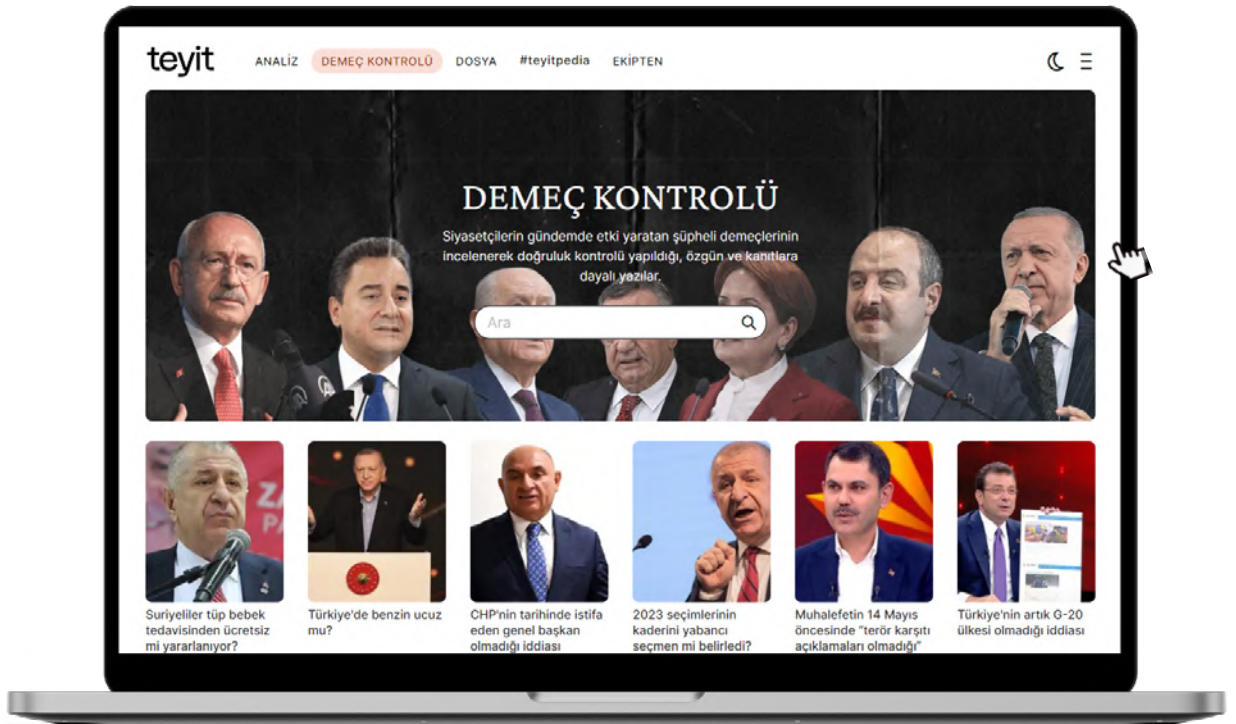
We observed in this recent election cycle that politicians are increasingly employing this approach, especially when discussing issues that lie at the fractures of Turkish society. Perceptions are distorting the truth and concurrently clouding our understanding of reality. This dynamic could potentially influence voter behavior to a certain extent.



Teyit has always opposed this development and will continue to do so. After releasing a [report](#) following the 2019 local elections, we have prepared another focused on the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. One of our objectives is to bolster voters against information disorder by highlighting patterns we’ve discovered in misleading political statements and social media posts. Encouraging politicians towards truthfulness and steering political discourse towards a more objective ground is indeed achievable.

From the beginning of 2023 until the end of May, we have been actively engaged in challenging the information disorder in our digital ecosystem. We had conducted a total of 201 analyses that center on suspicious narratives and content related to the electoral agenda. Out of these, 151 were written under our traditional fact-checking framework, following our established methodology. In this report, you'll find these efforts categorized under the umbrella of Teyit's 'standard fact-checking' (FC) activities.

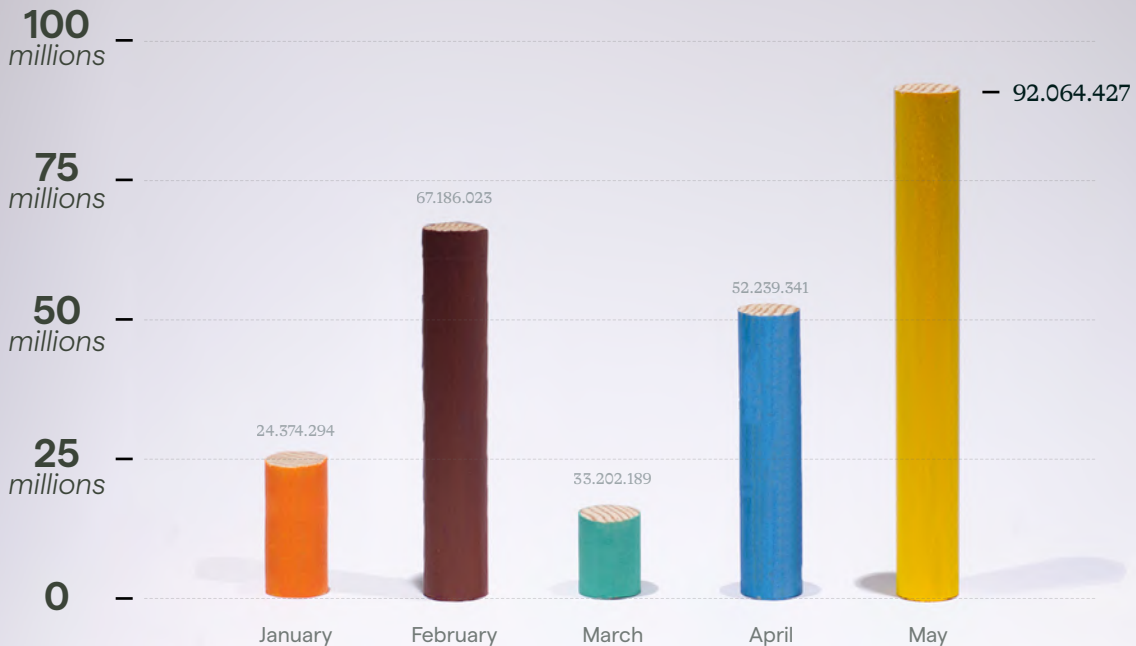
Additionally, we pioneered a new initiative for Teyit during this electoral cycle, which we call "statement-checking" (SC). Here, we conducted systematic analyses of statements made by politicians during rallies, television appearances, and social media in the lead-up to the 2023 elections. 50 of our analyses are specifically focused on scrutinizing these public statements by politicians.



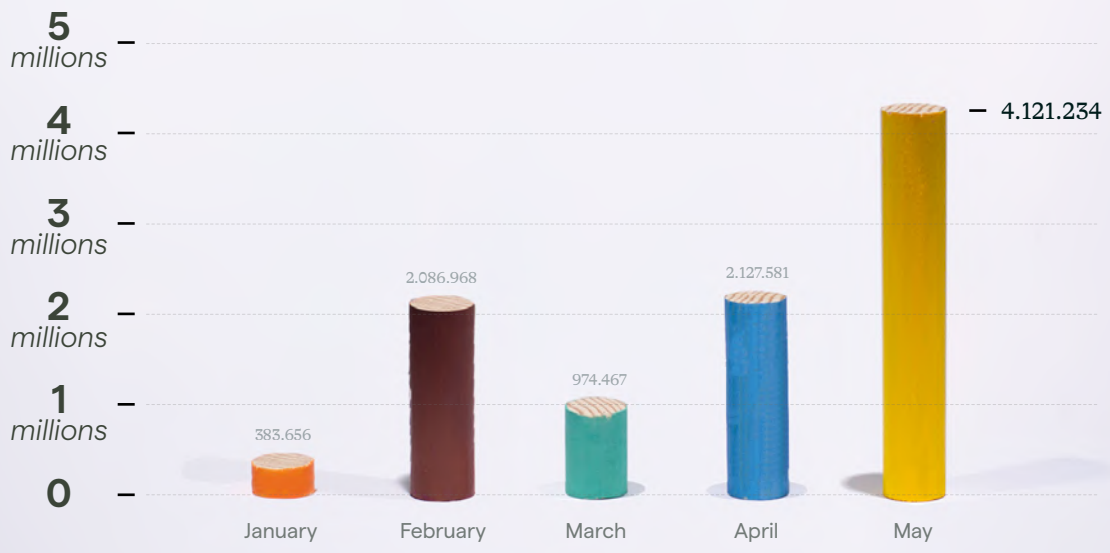
We believe that every citizen has the right to hear only true information from politicians and to make decisions without being subjected to misleading or false narratives. We surely were fully aware of the complexities of this endeavor. Recognizing that politicians might adopt an elusive rhetoric that challenges the fact-checking process, we have developed a unique methodology for our statement-checking initiative that diverges respectively from Teyit's standard fact-checking methodology. Instead of simply labeling the politicians' statements as "true" or "false," we concentrated on exposing their misleading elements and tried to contextualize them for our audience.

The patterns we've uncovered in misleading content and public statements point to worrying trends in political discourse and methods of propaganda in Türkiye. However, the increasing interest in factual information does provide a sliver of hope.

Total reach (👤) of Teyit's social media accounts over time



Total engagement (♥) of Teyit’s social media accounts over time



During this period, we noted that Teyit’s election-focused contents received 631 media mentions. Our media activities have been cited across various platforms, from national newspapers and magazines to blogs and news websites. Additionally, our team made appearances on TV broadcasts by invitations, which made our efforts to be garnered international media attention.

Teyit’s visibility in media as part of election activities



The time is long overdue to break free from echo chambers and dismantle the filter bubbles. Meanwhile, our team at Teyit continues to explore avenues for steering political dialogue toward truth and initiating a detoxification process in the information ecosystem.



Teyit's fact-checking methodology and the statement-checking project

From January 1 to May 31, 2023, our team conducted an in-depth analysis of 201 articles concerning the elections. 151 of the articles were centered on scrutinizing suspicious claims found in both social and traditional media channels as part of the standard fact-checking (FC) analysis, while the other 50 evaluated the misleading aspects of various political statements under the statement-checking (SC) analysis.

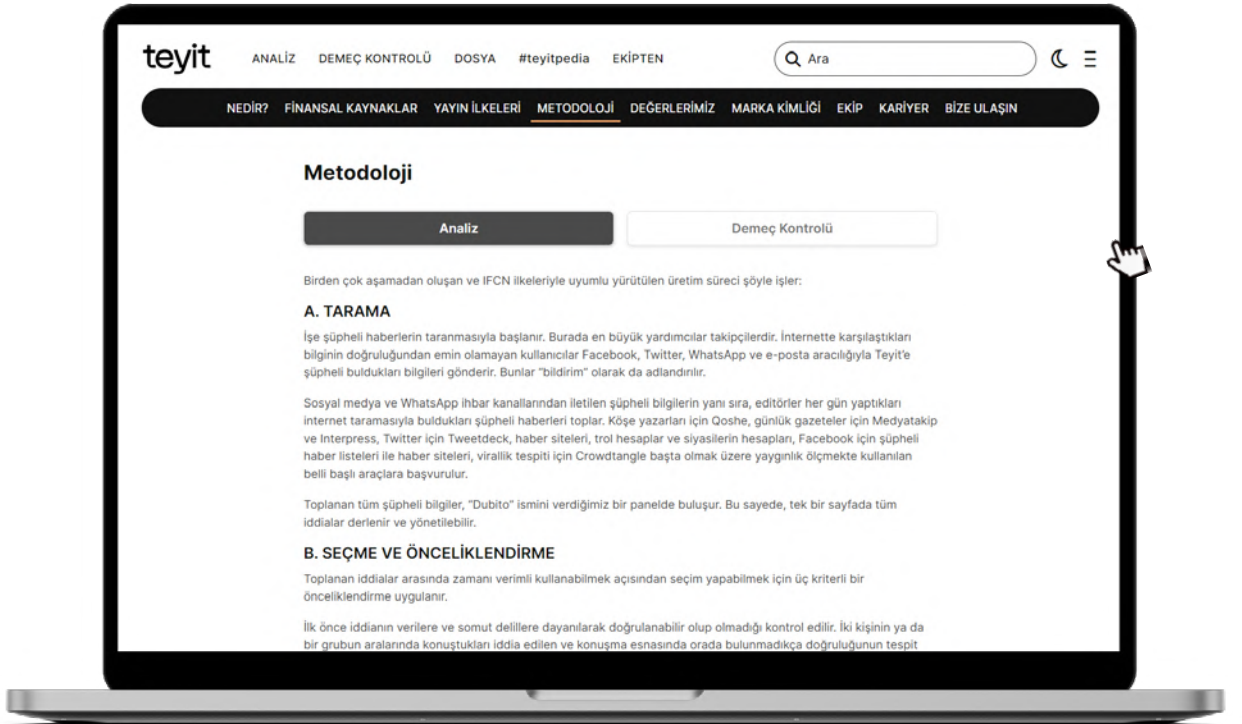
Within the framework of our SC initiative, we developed a specialized approach that deviates in certain aspects from Teyit's standard fact-checking methodology. Instead of simply labeling political statements as 'true' or 'false,' we concentrated on highlighting their misleading aspects and presenting the context in which they were made. To fully comprehend the data and insights presented in this report, one needs to understand the nuances between the methodologies applied to the two distinct types of content analyzed by our team concerning the elections.

Table 1. **Methodological approaches employed in analysis of election content**

	Fact-Checking (FC)	Statement-Checking (SC)
Scope	Evaluates information flagged as suspicious on social and traditional media platforms.	Considers statements made directly by politicians, which are questionable and can be verified.
Selection and prioritization	Suspicious information reported to, or identified by, the Teyit team is evaluated based on its viral reach, significance, and immediacy.	<p>The Teyit team focuses on suspicious statements made by political party leaders, party spokespeople, or politicians who are either highly impactful in the current political climate or have more than 2 million Twitter followers.</p> <p>Claims related to Türkiye’s major issues, which are also highlighted in public opinion polls, are given priority. The topics in question are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy and employment • Education • Refugees and migration • National security • Justice
Categorization of claims	<p>Claims can be tagged as either ‘true,’ ‘false,’ ‘mixed,’ or ‘unsubstantiated.’ When the information in question is marked as ‘false,’ it is further assessed in seven distinct categories, depending on its quality and intent. The categories are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • False context • Misleading • False connection • Manipulation • Parody • Imposter • Fabricated 	<p>Suspicious statements are investigated within varied categories, based on the quality of the information and the context in which it is presented. The categories are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misleading • False context • True, but... • Unfounded • Controversial • Fabricated • Exaggeration • Cherry-Picking

For any assessment by the Teyit team, the main determining factor is that a claim must be verifiable and analyzable. For a suspicious information to be reviewed by Teyit, it needs to be either refutable or verifiable based on open sources and information accessible to the public. Hence, there are some limitations. For instance, insider political information or discussions that occur behind closed doors cannot be verified by open, credible sources and, therefore, are not subject to our analysis. Thus, Teyit does not evaluate claims rooted in personal accusations between politicians.

To learn more about Teyit's fact-checking methods and approach employed in the Politicians' Statement-Checking Project, please see the [related page](#) on our website.



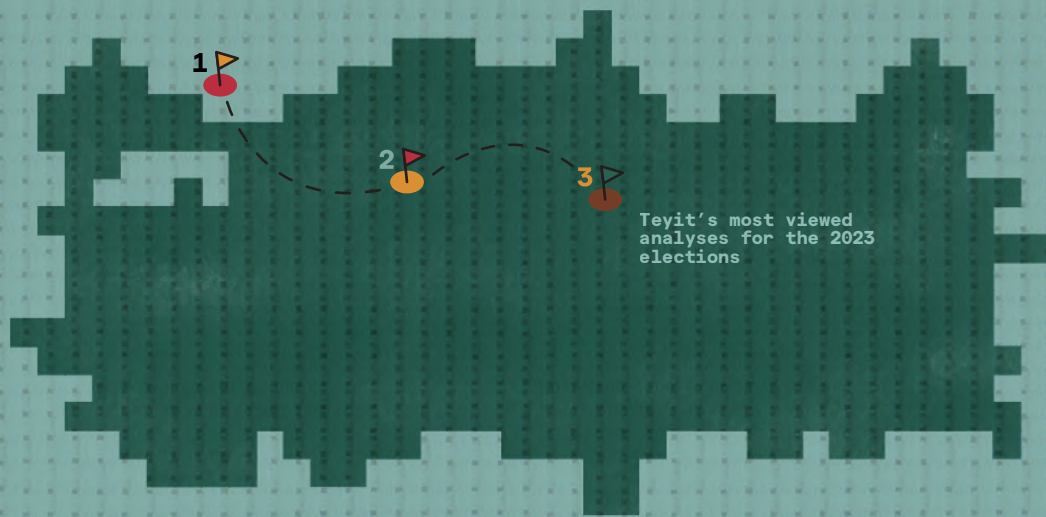
Defining boundaries: what this report is and is not about

Our methodological approach makes it clear that we're not in the business of pinpointing which politician or political group is the worst offender when it comes to spreading misleading information. In fact, we've intentionally stayed away from that kind of polarizing questioning. In simple terms: Our methodology is not designed to draw such conclusions.

What this report does delve into are the claims that have crossed Teyit's radar, survived a rigorous vetting process, and received comprehensive analysis. Our ultimate aim is simple yet ambitious: to arm voters with the insights they need to see through the false narratives that often surface during election season. We're raising our voices to demand a political landscape that values truth and we're inviting politicians to join this impartial discourse.

While this report does outline trends among specific political entities, it's crucial to note that some politicians make statements that are not only beyond the realm of true or false but also resist clear-cut analysis. The absence of certain politicians from our study may well be due to their use of such elusive rhetoric.

Our methodology fundamentally relies on the principles of verifiability and analyzability. During our research, it became abundantly clear that these criteria precluded the scrutiny of statements from some political quarters. For more details on this matter, you'll find a section later in this report titled "Why are some politicians not mentioned in our SC analyses?"



Teyit's most viewed analyses for the 2023 elections






To identify which of our election-related analyses have captured the most attention, we can take a glance at the view counts on Teyit's website. According to our FC methodology, the selection and prioritization of a suspicious claim are influenced by the claim's reach and its engagement level. Likewise, in our SC tasks, our focus is on statements from politicians with a significant impact on shaping or setting public discourse.

It's important to clarify that this report is not all-encompassing. Although many claims and statements come under Teyit's radar, only those subjected to our rigorous methodology, identified as verifiable, and consequently researched and analyzed are included in this report. Therefore, this report should not be seen as a mirror reflecting the entire landscape of information disorder; it portrays a specific slice of information disorder surrounding Türkiye's elections.

In this context, the subsequent statistics provide the view counts for analyses of suspicious claims that have achieved a certain level of circulation. These view counts serve as indicators, not only of the level of interest among Teyit's followers but also of the extent to which these claims are being searched for online.

Table 2. 10 FC analyses related to the 2023 elections that were viewed the most on Teyit between January 1 - May 31

1-5

1		<p>The claim that the election poll in the image is new*</p>	<p>102,675 views</p>
2		<p>The claim that the image shows Erdoğan and Melih Gökçek embracing</p>	<p>41,086 views</p>
3		<p>The claim that the image is from the Nation Alliance's rally on May 6</p>	<p>39,820 views</p>
4		<p>The claim that the photos taken at AKP İzmir rally are fabricated</p>	<p>35,997 views</p>
5		<p>The claim that Hezbollah convict Mehmet Emin Alpsoy is released by presidential pardon</p>	<p>35,000 views</p>

 False | Misleading & False connection

 False | Manipulation & Parody

 False | False connection

 False | Misleading

 True

*The reason this FC article garnered the most views on Teyit.org may not be solely attributed to interest in the claim it investigates. Indeed, the prevalence of multiple misleading election polls during the campaign season could have amplified the article's visibility using popular keywords. Consequently, internet users searching for various polls may have inadvertently stumbled upon this analysis, leading to its access count exceeding 100,000 views.

Table 2. FC analyses related to the 2023 elections that were viewed the most on Teyit between January 1 - May 31

6-10

6



The receipt allegedly showing that Maksut Serim sent 10 million Turkish liras to Muharrem Ince

34,838 views

False | Fabrication & Manipulation

7

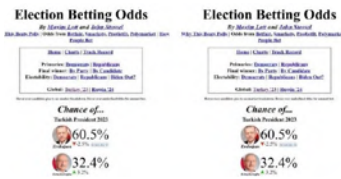


The claim that the graph shows the election survey conducted abroad

32,950 views

Unsubstantiated

8



The claim that the table is from a survey estimating that Erdoğan will receive 60% of the votes

27,792 views

False | False Connection & Misleading

9



The claim that the image shows the advertisement placed on a porn site by the Nation Alliance

27,260 views

False | Fabrication & Manipulation

10



The claim that the video shows Erdoğan receiving the Jewish Medal of Distinguished Service

26,982 views

False | False Connection & Fabrication

Upon first look, it's evident that both manipulative content scrutinized in our FC operations and suspicious election polls targeting voters on social media have caught the attention of Teyit's audience.

Table 3. 10 SC analyses related to the 2023 elections that were viewed the most on Teyit between January 1 - May 31

1-5





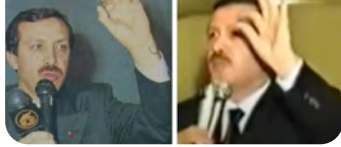











1	 <p>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p> 	<p>The claim that 1.7 million citizens attended Erdoğan's rally in Istanbul on May 7</p>	 Exaggeration	<p>44,158 views</p>
2	 <p>Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu</p> 	<p>The claim that Erdoğan declared his only asset to be his ring</p>	 Misleading & False Context	<p>17,110 views</p>
3	 <p>Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu</p> 	<p>The claim that the premarital screening for prevention of the FIS is not conducted by the Ministry of Health</p>	 Misleading	<p>11,961 views</p>
4	 <p>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p> 	<p>The claim that the opposition declared, "We will stop them when we come to power," in reference to UAVs</p>	 Misleading & False Context	<p>8,924 views</p>
5	 <p>Temel Karamollaoğlu</p> 	<p>The claim that TAI has not launched an aircraft since 1974</p>	 Misleading	<p>8,760 views</p>

Table 3. 10 SC analyses related to the 2023 elections that were viewed the most on Teyit between January 1 - May 31

6-10

6		<p>The claim that Adnan Menderes Airport was built during the AKP rule</p>	<p>7,937 views</p>
7		<p>The claim that AKP's Ordu rally was half as crowded as the Nation Alliance rally</p>	<p>7,622 views</p>
8		<p>The claim that HÜDA PAR contested the elections with its own logo</p>	<p>7,526 views</p>
9		<p>The alleged dialogue between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Fevzi Çakmak</p>	<p>7,100 views</p>
10		<p>The claim that Esenboğa Airport was built during the AKP rule</p>	<p>6,587 views</p>

When investigating the most-viewed SC analyses, we encounter a range of political figures. It becomes evident that suspicious statements from presidential candidates Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu have garnered particular attention.

Specifically, within the realm of SC analyses, we’ve pinpointed the content that has captivated the most interest across Teyit’s social media platforms. This has enabled us to identify our most engaging posts on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter -what’s now known as X. The following data was gathered on 27 July 2023.

Table 4. Three posts with the highest rate of reach/engagement among the SC analyses shared on Teyit’s Facebook page



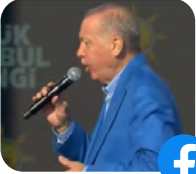


		 Reach	 Engagement	Reach/ Engagement Rate
	The claim that Murat Karayılan appeared in the Nation Alliance’s election campaign clip is false. The content shown at President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s rally in Istanbul on May 7 is a manipulated video.	7,566	269	3.56
	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that the current CHP was in power during the Marmara earthquake of 1999. At that time, however, the coalition of DSP, MHP and ANAP was in power.	12,905	364	2.82
	The claim that a Syrian person stole a cell phone during Fuat Oktay’s speech is false.	9,106	234	2.57

Table 5. Three posts with the highest rate of reach/engagement among the SC analyses shared on Teyit’s Instagram account













		 Reach	 Engagement	Reach/ Engagement Rate
	President Erdoğan’s claim that “it was not possible to be prepared for such a major disaster” is misleading.	519,975	86,778	16.69
	President @rterdogan claimed that 1.7 million citizens attended the rally at İstanbul Atatürk Airport on May 7, 2023.	295,021	20,441	6.93
	Mustafa Varank, Minister of Industry and Technology, claimed that inflation was between 180 and 200 percent when the AKP came to power, a statement that is both exaggerated and misleading.	168,469	11,230	6.67

Table 6. Three posts with the highest rate of reach/engagement among the SC analyses shared on Teyit’s Twitter account

		 Reach	 Engagement	Reach/ Engagement Rate
	We conducted an analysis on President @RTErdogan’s claim stating that the earthquake on February 6 was the world’s most powerful terrestrial quake.	83,786	4,262	5.09

		 Reach	 Engagement	Reach/ Engagement Rate
	President @rterdogan claimed that 1.7 million citizens attended the rally at Istanbul Atatürk Airport on May 7, 2023.	597,921	29,464	4.93
	The video purportedly featuring Murat Karayılan is not part of the Nation Alliance's official campaign video. An old footage of Murat Karayılan had been edited into the video.	337,783	165,619	4.90

Teyit’s analytics indicate that one of the most attention-grabbing articles among online users—accessible via our social media platforms—was a ‘cheapfake’ video disseminated by Erdoğan. This video, representing one of the most salient instances of fabricated content during the electoral cycle, will be subjected to a more detailed analysis later in this report.




Trends in highly engaging yet suspicious social media posts: video contents

A key criterion within Teyit’s FC methodology is the virality of claims circulating on social media. Yet, our SC methodology specifically considered not just the prevalence of a politician’s statement on social media, but also its distribution across various online and offline channels, along with the politician’s ability to influence the national agenda. At this point, we can momentarily set aside the politician statements we have investigated and make some observations regarding how viral the claims falling under our FC activities have been on social media.

While Teyit does keep data on the virality of the claims it investigates, it’s important to clarify that obtaining this data by scanning all social media




platforms is technically not feasible. As such, providing a precise metric to quantify the degree of a claim’s virality exceeds our technical capabilities. However, we can share some statistics that we have identified. When interpreting these statistics, it’s crucial to note that the figures are not absolute. They are estimates based on the misleading posts that the Teyit team has been able to detect.

Table 7. **Three election-related posts identified by Teyit for high engagement on TikTok and subjected to FC analysis**

Platform	Content type	The suspicious claim spread by the post	Post engagement
	Video	The claim that the video depicts chants of “Erdoğan resign” at a recent Şanlıurfa rally	Minimum 132,000
	Video	The claim that the video features a young man calling for Erdoğan’s resignation	Minimum 84,000
	Video	The claim that the video shows a crowd supporting Erdoğan	Minimum 76,000

Our findings indicate that suspicious content in video format tends to receive higher engagement. This pattern aligns with the shifting behavioral tendencies of internet users on social media platforms. For instance, Instagram introduced Reels in recent years to leverage the growing popularity of short video formats, a move that has substantially aided TikTok’s significant growth compared to its competitors.




Table 8. **Three election-related posts identified by Teyit for high engagement on Instagram and subjected to FC analysis**

Platform	Content type	The suspicious claim spread by the post	Post engagement
 Instagram	Video	The claim that the video shows a crowd supporting Erdoğan	Minimum 117,000
 Instagram	Image	The claim that the image shows the advertisement placed on a porn site by the Nation Alliance	Minimum 47,000
 Instagram	Video	The claim that the video features a young man calling for Erdoğan’s resignation	Minimum 22,000

Among the posts that Teyit’s team has flagged within Meta’s third-party verification system, we’ve observed Instagram posts with even higher engagement levels than those outlined in the table above. However, this specific data hasn’t undergone detailed analysis for this report. It’s worth noting that the content identified as suspicious often gets removed from the platform in a relatively short time frame, thereby challenging systematic post-election assessments.

It’s crucial to underline that the high engagement observed with short video content doesn’t imply a corresponding decline in the impact of text-based content. Identifying which type of content—whether video or text—is more memorable and plays a more significant role in the spread of disinformation on social media is a research avenue that still needs further exploration.

Table 9. **Three election-related posts identified by Teyit for high engagement on Twitter and subjected to FC analysis**

Platform	Content type	The suspicious claim spread by the post	Post engagement
 Twitter	Video	The claim that the video shows people celebrating Erdoğan’s victory at Al-Aqsa Mosque	Minimum 98,000
 Twitter	Text	The claim that HÜDA PAR lost some MPs due to objections	Minimum 90,000
 Twitter	Text	The claim that Kılıçdaroğlu’s “Alevi” video is the most viewed video on Twitter	Minimum 81,000



Besides platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, we've also identified suspicious posts on Facebook. Notably, some of these posts, flagged by our team through Meta's third-party verification system, have received a high level of engagement. For example, a Facebook post containing a video that claims to show Erdoğan receiving the Jewish Medal of Distinguished Service amassed over 10,000 interactions.

The persuasive power of short video content in grabbing internet users' attention is beyond question. This underscores the need for platforms that host short videos to ramp up their fight against the spread of false information. Video content, regardless of its nature, can quickly reach a large audience on these platforms, which becomes a significant concern when it involves the widespread dissemination of mis- and disinformation.

One last point warrants emphasis. While our data indicates that short video content often receives high engagement when it comes to suspicious posts on social media, it's important to acknowledge that our technology limits us to monitoring just a fraction of the disinformation landscape.

As such, the onus is on the platforms themselves. We believe that platforms circulating suspicious content have a duty to openly inform their users. This includes detailing how widespread such content is, what measures they're taking to address it, and the algorithmic strategies they've implemented to combat its spread.



Highlights and focus areas: Teyit's journey through the first five months of the year

Expanding our focus beyond election campaigns, let's consider Teyit's activities during the first five months of 2023. Between January 1 and May 31, Teyit published a total of 611 articles on its website. These included 478 analyses crafted using Teyit's standard fact-checking methodology, 50 analyses from the statement-checking project, 23 on special topics, 54 for Teyitpedia, and 6 in the "from the team" category. Notably, 86% of all content produced by Teyit in this period centered on analyses of suspicious claims that the team had flagged. Over a third of these analyses pertained to election campaigns.

Suspicious content can inherently span multiple categories. As declared at the onset of the election period, content in the realms of "Economy and Employment," "Education," "Refugees and Migration," "National Security," and "Justice" received priority attention in SC activities.

However, we didn't encounter such limitations when it came to our FC analyses. One key and tragic event that notably influenced the direction of Teyit's activities was the earthquakes on February 6.

Table 10. **Categories of analyses released by Teyit from January 1 to May 31**

	FC analysis (A total of 478 articles)	SC analysis (A total of 50 articles)
Politics	236	45
2023 Elections	151	50
February 6 earthquakes	135	8
Economy and employment	19	16
Education	7	1
Refugees and migration	12	3
National security	3	3
Justice	0	0
Other	120	0

**An analysis can fall under more than one category.*

The table above highlights that Teyit’s scope within the FC analysis was not solely election-centric, instead, the team consistently scrutinized claims across various domains. Even amidst election campaigns, Teyit continued to tackle suspicious content in diverse areas such as health, climate, culture, science, and technology, all of which fall under the ‘other’ category in the table above.

The SC analysis, centered on evaluating politicians’ claims, ran concurrently with election-related discussions. As is seen, 23 out of the 50 SC analyses align with the categories identified as primary concerns in Türkiye prior to initiating these activities. Six of the remaining 27 articles are directly related to the February 6 earthquakes, while 21 articles are statements by politicians that attracted a lot of attention even though they did not fall under the prioritized categories. Unsurprisingly, Türkiye’s most recent devastating earthquake had a profound impact on the election discourse. As such, statements by Erdoğan that captivated public attention during the earthquake-affected period were also subject to Teyit’s SC investigations.




The claim that “it was not possible to be prepared for such a major disaster”

 Misleading



The claim that the February 6 earthquake was the strongest land earthquake in the world.

 Exaggeration



The claim that officials from CHP municipalities didn't go the areas affected by the earthquake

 Misleading




The claim that the current CHP was in power during the Marmara earthquake of 1999

 Misleading

Setting aside our primary focus areas and topics unrelated to the earthquakes, some of Erdoğan's false claims reveal a pattern:




The claim that Esenboğa Airport was built during the AKP rule

 Exaggeration




The claim that Antalya Airport was built during the AKP rule

 Exaggeration



The claim that Adnan Menderes Airport was built during the AKP rule

 Exaggeration



The claim that University of Harran was built during the AKP rule

 Misleading

Claiming that certain buildings or facilities were constructed under their administration is a strategy occasionally employed by politicians. However, any renovations, reinforcements, or expansions of these structures during the said time frame do not justify the misleading terms like “opened” or “built.”

Besides the key issues we've prioritized, another notable point is the overstated crowd sizes at rallies—another favorite tactic politicians frequently employ.



Erdoğan falsely claimed that 1.7 million people attended the May 7 rally in Istanbul, while Democratic Party Chairman Gültekin Uysal also stretched the truth, saying the attendance at the AKP's rally in Ordu was only half that of the Nation Alliance's rally. As is seen, each leader is using these inflated figures for their own advantage—one to assert dominance and the other to downplay his rival. Such exaggerated claims offer a window into the tactics politicians employ to influence voters. Undoubtedly, they see large rally turnouts as indicators of popular support and will inflate these numbers both to reassure their existing followers and to intimidate those who are still on the fence.

Such political tendencies are also evident on social media. For instance, a viral photo depicting a crowded rally was falsely attributed to the Nation Alliance's May 6 rally in Istanbul. Likewise, a widely-shared photo claimed to be from Erdoğan's Şanlıurfa rally originated from a different rally previously held at the same venue.

Another trend is illustrated by Kılıçdaroğlu's claim that premarital screenings for the prevention of Familial Mediterranean Fever (FIS) are not conducted by the Ministry of Health. He also suggests that families of martyrs are levied with a Special Consumption Tax (SCT) upon purchasing a vehicle. In a similar vein, Erdoğan contends that HÜDA PAR entered the elections under its own logo. Although it's uncertain what the primary motivation behind these false claims is, a lack of accurate information on the topics could be a contributing factor. Of course, other motivations could also be driving these claims. Despite their inaccuracies, these false claims had a notable impact; they could be easily refuted through open sources, but they still possessed the ability to influence the attitudes of voters who supported these politicians.

There were some more statements that fell outside the scope of the prioritized topics set by the SC investigations. The following are the analyses of such claims:



Derya Yanık:

The claim that 70-75% of violence against women is caused by alcohol

Misleading



Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu:

The claim that mining accidents causing mass deaths occur only in Türkiye

Exaggeration



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan:

The claim that Kılıçdaroğlu said he would close TOKİ [Housing Development Administration]

Misleading



Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu:

The claim that President Erdoğan declared his only asset to be his ring

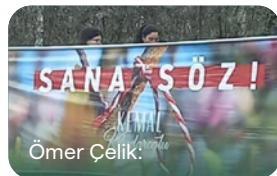
Misleading & False Context



Fatih Erbakan:

The claim that an MP candidate from CHP recently made a statement about the prayer and religious schools

Misleading & False Context



Ömer Çelik:

The claim that a gallows image is featured on the CHP's banner

Misleading & False Context



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan:

The claim that AKP has increased the number of women in parliament

True, but...



Muharrem İnce:

The claim that Meral Akşener did not hold rallies 10 days before the 2018 elections

Fabricated



Temel Karamollaoğlu:

The claim that TAI has not launched an aircraft since 1974

Misleading



Ali İhsan Yavuz:

The claim that 50 out of 100 news reports in Türkiye are "fake news"

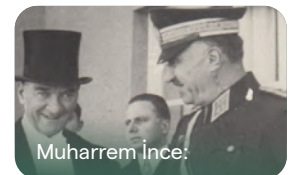
Misleading



Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu:

The claim that Kurdish was noted as an "unknown language" in parliamentary minutes

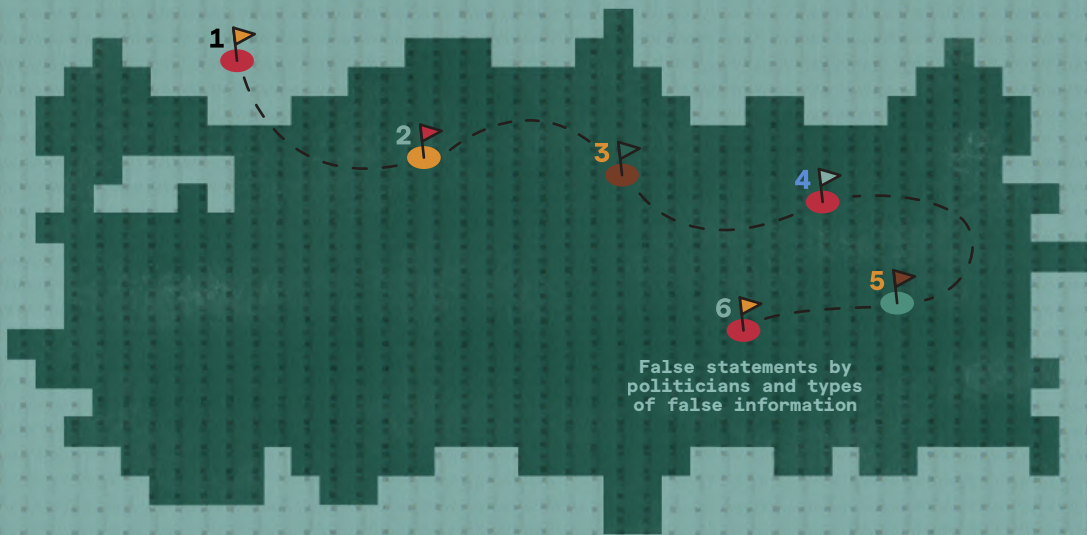
True, but...



Muharrem İnce:

The alleged dialogue between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Fevzi Çakmak

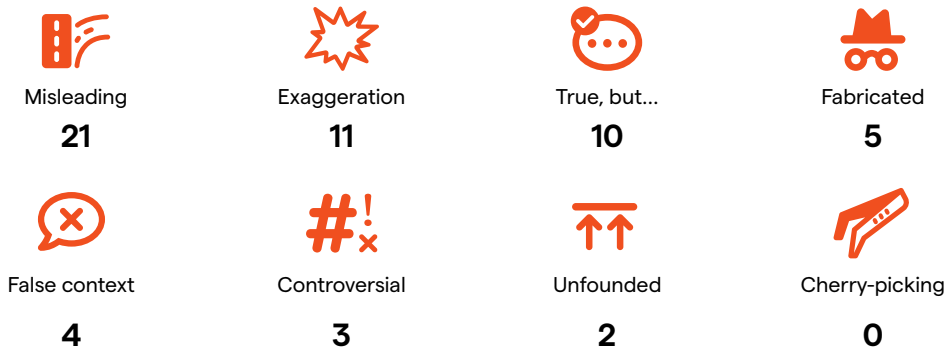
Unfounded



False statements by politicians and types of false information

The nature of the 50 false statements we analyzed within the framework of our SC investigations offers valuable insights into the narratives employed during election campaigns.

Table 11. **The labels of the SC analyses published between January 1 and May 31** (A total of 50 articles)

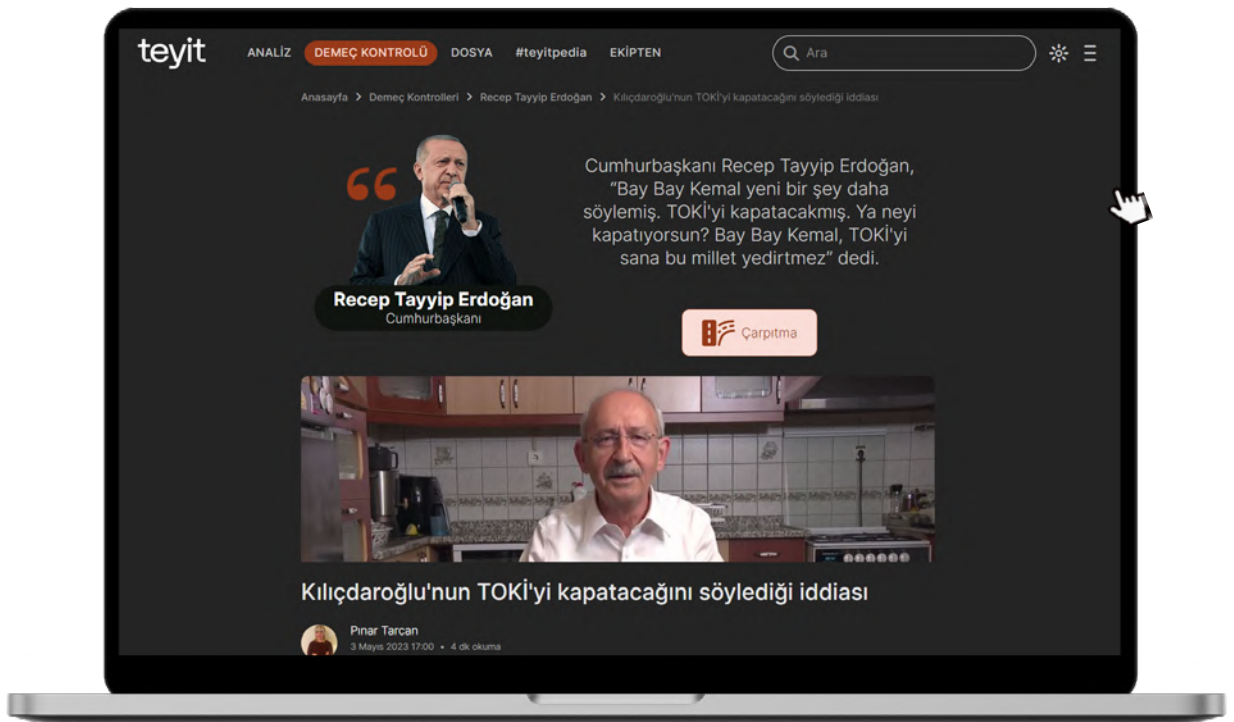


** An analysis can fall under more than one type of false information*

The category of “misleading,” defined as false information designed to mislead or misdirect the audience by distorting the truth, aptly characterizes nearly half of the suspicious statements we investigated. In some ways, this finding is unsurprising. Indeed, it’s not uncommon for politicians to remove the objective reality from a given issue and “reinterpret” it in a manner aligned with their own interests.

Misleading is followed by the category of “exaggeration”, which refers to the exaggeration of an event, information, or data when making a claim. This tactic, employed by politicians to strengthen their base and sway those outside of it, is far from new.

Last in the top three is the “true, but...” category. This is a common political propaganda tactic that presents part of the truth while hiding the rest. Within our SC method, this type of false information is defined as the deceptive situation that occurs when some aspects of an issue are omitted even though the claim contains some truths.

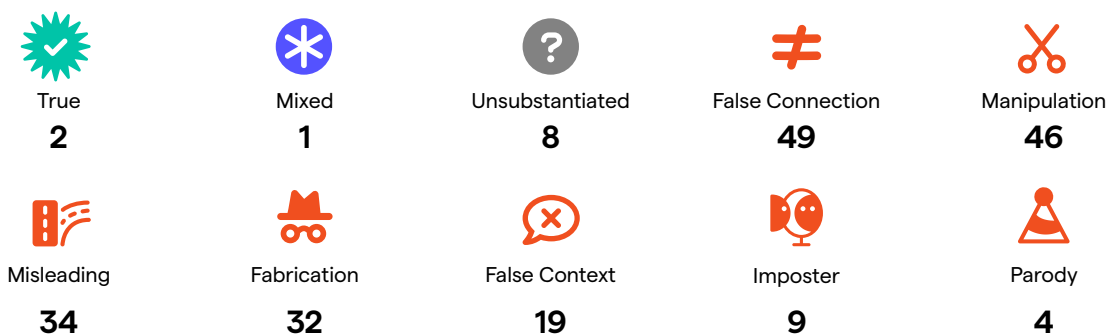




Claims circulating on social media and types of false information

What about the false content about the 2023 elections circulating on social media, or, to put it another way, the analyses we’ve conducted as part of our FC efforts? Are there parallels between the types of false information that social media users believe, and the statements made by politicians? Let’s delve into the answers to these questions.

Table 12. **The labels of the FC analyses published between January 1 and May 31** (A total of 151 articles)



** An analysis can fall under more than one type of false information.*

In the realm of social media, the most prevalent form of false content falls under the category of “false connection.” This entails the deceptive linkage of photos, videos, quotes, or headlines to unrelated events. Coming in close behind is “manipulation,” the act of the manipulation of true information or images for the purpose of deceiving or distorting facts through selection, addition, or subtraction.

Herein lies a critical avenue for further research. The frequent occurrence of “false connection” and “manipulation” begs deeper exploration. Is it possible that claims featuring visual elements, or those prone to false connections or manipulation, circulate more swiftly? What drives their conspicuous presence in our findings? The rapid advancements in artificial intelligence’s capability to generate convincing visuals highlight the immediacy of such an inquiry.

Favored by politicians, “misleading” claims also rank among the top three suspicious content types on social media.

Politicians under Teyit’s scrutiny for false statements

Within the scope of our SC practices, we’ve scrutinized statements from politicians that sparked widespread public debate and were frequently disseminated both online and offline. It appears that Türkiye’s “most popular” politicians are more often on our radar. Still, it’s important to emphasize that we investigated the utterances of 23 different politicians across various parties in a total of 50 articles.

Using our “Warn Politician” button placed next to each identified false statement, internet users have called on politicians to correct their misinformation on Twitter from January 1 to May 31. This feature was used more than 3,300 times by over 2,800 different users.

HÜDA PAR'ın seçime kendi logosuyla girdiği iddiası



Zeynep Şahin
12 Mayıs 2023 17:45 • 4 dk okuma

Bulguları Gör ▾

Paylaş >



SİYASETÇİYİ
UYAR



WARN
POLITICIAN

×

Herkes ▾

Sn. @RTErdoğan, Teyit bir beyanınızda yanıltıcı yönler tespit etti. Sizi hatanızı düzeltmeye davet ediyorum.
<http://teyit.org/demokratik-kontrol/huda-parin-secime-kendi-logosuyla-sorulari-ve-yanitlari>
 Teyit.org aracılığıyla

teyit.org

HÜDA PAR'ın seçime kendi logosuyla girdiği iddias...
 Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, HÜDA PAR'ın seçime kendi logosuyla girdiğini iddia etti.

Herkes yanıtlayabilir

Gönder

“Mr. @RTErdoğan, Teyit detected misleading aspects in one of your statements. I invite you to correct your mistakes.”

The findings from our SC efforts reveal that politicians from various factions sometimes resort to false statements when communicating with the public. It's evident that influential political figures, capable of shaping Türkiye's public discussions, have either directly or indirectly distanced themselves from the truth in an effort to influence voting behavior.

Table 13. Three SC analyses on Erdoğan’s statements with the highest view count on Teyit between January 1 and May 31











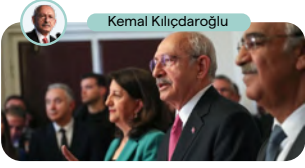

1	 <p>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p>	<p>The claim that 1.7 million citizens attended President Erdoğan’s rally in Istanbul on May 7</p>	 Exaggeration	<p>44,158 views</p>
2	 <p>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p>	<p>The claim that the opposition declared, “We will stop them when we come to power,” in reference to UAVs</p>	 Misleading & False Context	<p>8,924 views</p>
3	 <p>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p>	<p>The claim that Adnan Menderes Airport was built during the AKP rule</p>	 Exaggeration	<p>7,937 views</p>

Table 14. Three SC analyses on Kılıçdaroğlu’s statements with the highest view count on Teyit between January 1 and May 31

1	 <p>Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu</p>	<p>The claim that Erdoğan declared his only asset to be his ring</p>	 Misleading & False Context	<p>17,110 views</p>
2	 <p>Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu</p>	<p>The claim that the premarital screening for prevention of the FIS is not conducted by the Ministry of Health</p>	 Misleading	<p>11,961 views</p>
3	 <p>Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu</p>	<p>The claim that Kurdish was noted as an “unknown language” in parliamentary minutes</p>	 True, but...	<p>5,068 views</p>

Comparatively speaking, we've focused more on the statements made by presidential candidates Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu than on the other 21 politicians. Their ability to shape the national conversation and the impact of their false statements on the public are important factors we considered.

We've explained our approach for selecting politicians and topics in our methodology summary. You can also check out the section titled "Defining boundaries: what this report is and is not about" for more information.

Why are some politicians not mentioned in our SC analyses?

If you browse the [SC analyses section on Teyit's website](#), you'll find it interesting that some of the popular politicians are conspicuously absent from the analyses. Based on our methodological approach, there are several possible explanations for this:

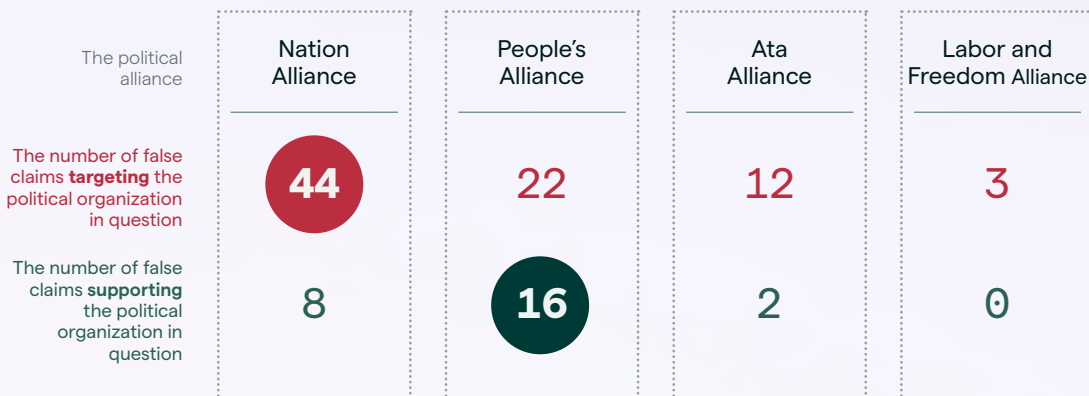
- 1 The politicians in question have not made any statements that have sparked widespread public debate or suspicion.
- 2 The politicians have disseminated suspicious information that could be investigated through standard journalistic methods but doesn't align with Teyit's specific methodology. For example, claims that cannot be verified through open sources, statements about private conversations, or personal accusations.
- 3 The politicians have circulated suspicious information that is so vague or subjective that it defies objective verification.

We can confidently say that the first reason is exceedingly rare. The political discourse in Türkiye, regardless of ideology or party affiliation, is rife with suspicious information. During our analysis, we particularly noticed instances that align with the third reason listed above. We came across particular instances that pushed the boundaries of our SC methodology. Some politicians resorted to allegorical and ambiguous language in their campaigns. These vague articulations, often glorifying a specific ideological stance, presented challenges for objective verification. As a matter of fact, we did not attempt to “read into intentions” or deduce what a specific politician “meant”; our aim was to verify the statements precisely as they were uttered.

Who was targeted by election-related information disorder on social media?

Of the 151 FC analyses published between January 1 and May 31 related to the 2023 elections, 140 are categorized as “false.” Of these 140 suspicious claims, 108 are categorized and analyzed based on whether they targeted or supported specific political organizations.






Table 15. The political alliances included in the FC analyses published on Teyit between January 1 and May 31, and the target/support distribution of the claims (108 articles)



* Analyses on the presidential candidate of the alliance are also included.

A significant number of claims reported or discovered online by the Teyit team and selected for analysis based on criteria of virality, importance, and urgency were primarily targeting the Nation Alliance.





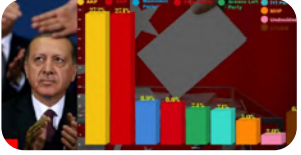
Table 16. Five FC analyses on claims targeting the Nation Alliance with the highest view count on Teyit between January 1 and May 31

1		<p>The claim that the image shows the advertisement placed on a porn site by the Nation Alliance</p>	27,260 views
2		<p>The claim that the image shows Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with Fethullah Gülen</p>	25,621 views
3		<p>The claim that the video includes Netanyahu's statements on 2023 elections</p>	23,677 views
4		<p>The claim that Kılıçdaroğlu said drug lords' money is clean</p>	22,083 views
5		<p>The claim that the image shows Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with Abdullah Öcalan</p>	21,358 views

Among the most-viewed analyses on Teyit's website that target the Nation Alliance, content featuring manipulations is notably prevalent.

As for false claims that seem to support a political group, those appearing to back the People’s Alliance stand out.

Table 17. Five FC analyses on claims appearing to support the People’s Alliance with the highest view count on Teyit between January 1 and May 31

1		<p>The claim that the election poll in the image is new</p> <p>False False connection & Misleading</p>	<p>102,675 views</p>
2		<p>The claim that the table is from a survey estimating that Erdoğan will receive 60% of the votes</p> <p>False False connection & Misleading</p>	<p>27,792 views</p>
3		<p>The claim that Sedat Peker stated that he will support People’s Alliance in 2023 elections</p> <p>False False connection & Misleading</p>	<p>25,700 views</p>
4		<p>The video allegedly shows Muharrem İnce saying, “I will support Erdoğan.”</p> <p>False Misleading & Manipulation</p>	<p>23,034 views</p>
5		<p>The claims about the Economist’s research on 2023 elections</p> <p>False Misleading</p>	<p>16,516 views</p>

Among the false information that appears to support the People’s Alliance, suspicious election polls often stand out.

Once again, let us note that these are the claims that have crossed Teyit's radar and can be analyzed using a particular methodology. Here we see only a part of the universe of information disorder. Nevertheless, when viewed within the context of various other information operations during the election campaigns, the data we've gathered on the target/support dynamics could offer some insight into the prevailing situation.

Asymmetric propaganda targets the Nation Alliance

Asymmetric propaganda refers to the practice where a political group disseminates its messages by mimicking the group it opposes. This tactic has been employed to sway voter behavior in [previous elections](#). In the 2023 elections, asymmetric propaganda emerged as one of the harmful strategies actively utilized for political communication.



The claim that the shared brochure belongs to the DEVA Party



The claim that the image featuring the Nation Alliance's election poster is original



The claim that the Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu posters in the image are real



The claim that the Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu posters in the image are real



The claim that the posters in the image are part of Kılıçdaroğlu's "Make a Decision" campaign

The Nation Alliance has increasingly become the focal point for asymmetric propaganda efforts.



The limited impact of artificial intelligence: not quite *deep*, but *cheap*

While the advancements in AI technologies in 2023 offer numerous benefits, they also raise concerns for fact-checkers. Kılıçdaroğlu's warning about deepfake videos on May 11, just three days before the election, brought this issue to the forefront of Türkiye's agenda.

Nevertheless, during the election campaigns, the Teyit team encountered cheapfake content created with less sophisticated tools, rather than deepfake videos.



The claim that the image shows Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with Fethullah Gülen

 Manipulation



The claim that the photo shows Stalin making a heart with his hand

 Manipulation



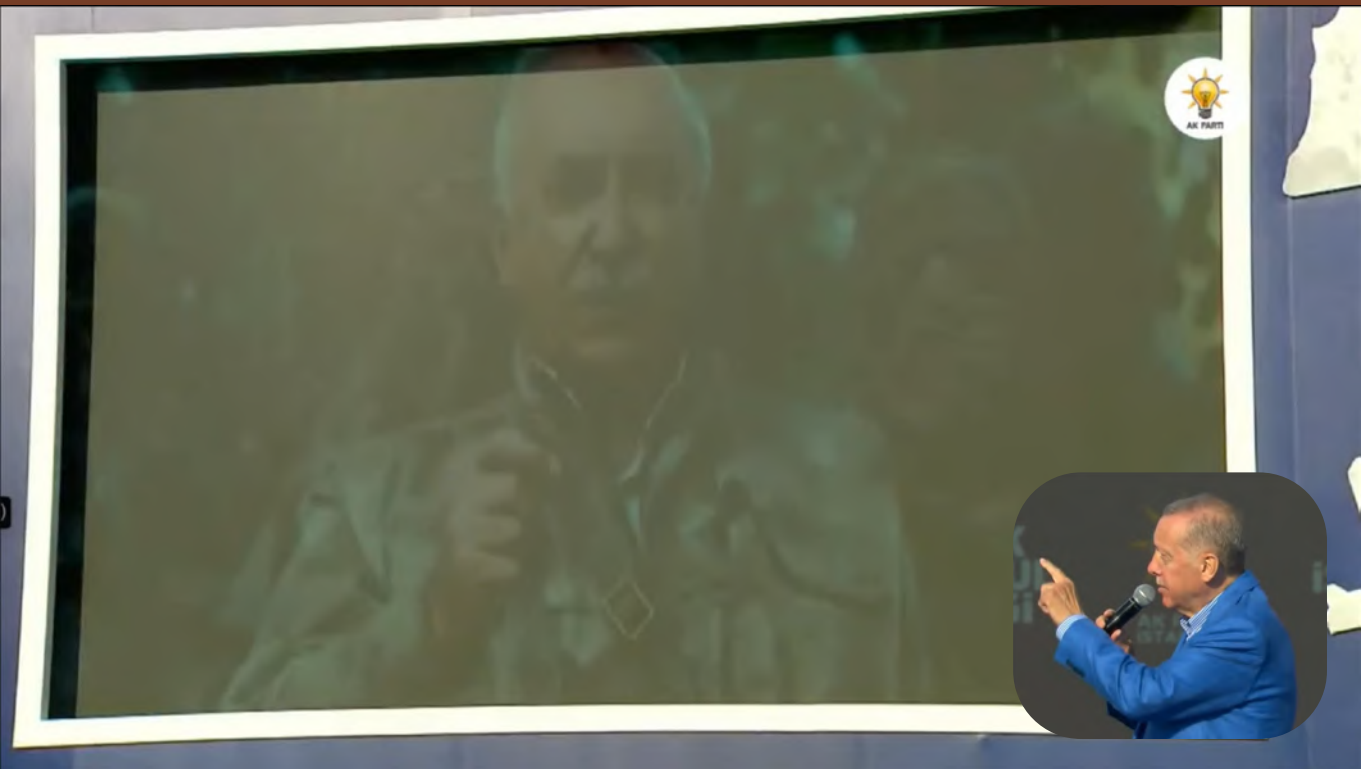
The claim that the image shows Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu with Abdullah Öcalan

 Manipulation



During this election period, one piece of cheapfake content has unmistakably overshadowed all other similar false material. At his Istanbul rally on May 7, Erdoğan displayed a video featuring Murat Karayılan, a senior PKK member, that had been edited into a clip prepared for Kılıçdaroğlu’s campaign. The video was widely seen by citizens on social media and news channels. In reality, the clip shared by Erdoğan first circulated on social media in early May and was later featured by some news websites under the headline “CHP-Qandil Collaboration.” We published an analysis of this claim just hours after it was showcased at the rally. Despite the highly sensitive nature of the issue, the misleading aspects of this video did not gain widespread attention. When the footage was replayed at a subsequent rally, the issue became well-known.

This claim, scrutinized as part of our SC efforts, is the only one from Erdoğan that we have categorized as a “fabrication.”



Just before the second round of the election on May 22, Erdoğan stated in a joint TRT broadcast, saying, “Kılıçdaroğlu has video footage with those in Qandil. They all appear cheerful. Whether the video is edited or not... PKK members have supported them with videos.” This comment by Erdoğan was interpreted as an acknowledgement that the video in question was fabricated.

Needless to say, this type of behavior poses significant challenges for fact-checkers. In a political landscape where such fabrications are considered legitimate, the prospects become even more unsettling when contemplating the potential consequences as AI technologies continue to advance.

Information disorder concerning national security

The cheapfake video shared by Erdoğan was far from the only content that spread false information concerning national security. Throughout the election campaigns, we frequently encountered false content that portrayed the Nation Alliance’s actions as a threat to national security. A substantial share of these misleading claims, which had a considerable impact on shaping public opinion, were made by politicians we investigated during our SC analyses.




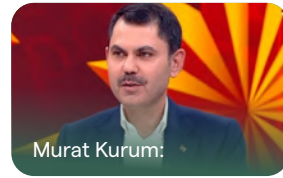
The claim that Murat Karayılan appeared in the Nation Alliance's election campaign

 Fabrication



The claim that the opposition declared, "We will stop them when we come to power," in reference to UAVs

 False context



The claim that the opposition hadn't expressed any anti-terrorism sentiments before May 14

 Fabrication

The cheapfake content on social media that juxtaposed Kılıçdaroğlu with Abdullah Öcalan and Fethullah Gülen appeared to be born out of this charged electoral atmosphere. Concurrently, national security emerged as a dominant theme in the landscape of asymmetric propaganda. While it's uncertain to what extent this content swayed voter behavior, it's safe to say that issues related to national security are among the most significant criteria for Turkish voters.

Election scapegoats: refugees and asylum seekers

In various corners of the globe, migrant communities serve as expedient targets for scapegoating. Indeed, factors like language barriers, cultural differences, and the prevailing political climate can significantly hinder the swift integration of these communities into civil society. For asylum seekers and refugees, the situation grows exponentially more complex, particularly when systemic economic issues surface. Individuals forced to flee their homelands due to the social and psychological toll of conflicts and wars find themselves increasingly marginalized in civil society. With little media support and a growing disengagement from the public sphere, they become convenient scapegoats for a host of societal issues. As such, the more they withdraw and limit their contact with the host society, the easier it becomes for them to be made the scapegoat for all problems. This tendency to blame individuals or specific groups for systemic and institutional failures obscures the true roots of the problems at hand.

As of 2023, Türkiye is the country hosting the most refugees in the world. According to official data from the General Directorate of Migration Management, the number of registered foreigners in Türkiye is almost 5 million. Additionally, numerous studies suggest that there could be an additional 300,000 to 2 million unregistered foreign nationals living the country. The issue's acute politicization by public figures, coupled with the tendency to scapegoat refugees and asylum seekers, undeniably exacerbates social divisions. This subject matter is naturally reflected into our SC analyses.



Muharrem İnce:

The claim “Our borders are open, Syrians keep coming”

#!x Controversial



Sinan Oğan:

The claim that Kılıçdaroğlu and the Nation Alliance did not talk about refugees before May 14

oo Fabrication

The false claim that asylum seekers with foreign ID numbers starting with 99 and 98 had voting rights gained significant traction on social media. Another fabricated claim involve Pope Francis responded to Ümit Özdağ, a nationalist politician, on the issue of asylum seekers.

It is important to point out that disinformation targeting asylum seekers and refugees fuels negative attitudes towards them. These attitudes can manifest in tangible actions, ranging from discriminatory practices to acts of violence against refugees. In this regard, the need for rapid and effective verification of disinformation about vulnerable communities should not be ignored.



The ever-present ‘other’ in the landscape of disinformation: LGBTI+

Disinformation targeting LGBTI+ community has always been on Teyit’s radar, but it has escalated even further during this election season. At one of his rallies, Erdoğan said “these people are LGBTI,” referring to the Nation Alliance, while on another occasion emphasizing, “We are not part of the LGBTI community.” Süleyman Soylu, playing a different tune, said, “If we leave office, these LGBTI individuals will take over. Those advocating for same-sex marriage will come to power. God forbids!” and prior to the first electoral round on May 14, he said, “It will be up to us to decide whether a man can marry another man, and a woman another woman.”

Referring to the Nation Alliance, one of the asymmetric propaganda materials circulated on social media read, “I promise you! If we come to power, your son will be able to marry his boyfriend.”

Aside from how this rhetoric affects voters, these claims were not even close to the reality. We covered this in detail in our article [“The contradictory debate of the 2023 elections: The Nation Alliance and LGBTI+”](#). Upon reviewing the party manifestos and the joint statement issued by the Nation Alliance, it becomes evident that there were no promises specifically addressing LGBTI+ individuals. In contrast to circulating claims, the Nation Alliance did not engage with LGBTI+ issues.

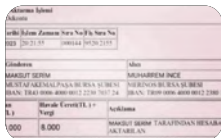
Moreover, many LGBTI+ rights advocates and associations believe that opposition parties in general are not doing enough to advocate for LGBTI+ rights—they’re essentially silent on the issue.

Muharrem İnce’s exit from the presidential race

Initially, the first round of the presidential election was set to have four candidates: incumbent President Erdoğan, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Sinan Oğan, and Muharrem İnce. İnce, who had garnered significant support in the previous presidential race and departed from the CHP due to internal disagreements, embarked on a new political chapter with his founded party, Homeland Party (*Memleket Partisi* in Turkish). While vocal in his criticisms of the existing government, İnce also did not mince his words regarding his previous affiliation.

In the run-up to the election, many people advised İnce to withdraw from the race. This advice, voiced on TV and on social media, was accompanied by a lot of disinformation. By the time İnce exited the race on May 11, we had already observed a plethora of suspicious information concerning him and his party. One of the most prevalent allegations during this election period was a false claim that an AKP member sent 10 million Turkish liras to İnce, adding to already-existing propaganda that he was an AKP ally.

Meanwhile, posts claiming resignations from fake accounts impersonating politicians in İnce’s party were making the rounds on social media. On a single day, we saw four of these bogus accounts pop up, and we tackled them all in one analysis. The main theme of the fake resignations was that “the party has deviated from its goal”.



The receipt allegedly showing that Maksut Serim sent 10 million Turkish liras to Muharrem İnce

Fabrication & Manipulation



The claim that the account @gulderenmp belongs to Gülderen Zeğerek Özafacan from the Homeland Party

Imposter



The claim that the account announcing the resignation of Ali Dursun from the Homeland Party is real

Imposter



The claim that accounts announcing the resignation of Homeland Party members are real

Imposter



The claim that the account announcing Ümrân Köksüz’s resignation from the Homeland Party is real

Imposter



The claim that Muharrem İnce said CHP 189 times and AKP 17 times in Sözcü broadcast

Misleading



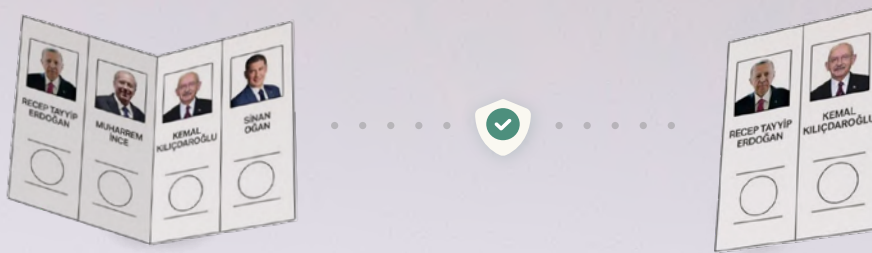
The claim that Muharrem İnce said “I will support Erdoğan”

Misleading & Manipulation



The claim that İnce’s statement “I don’t think I am as hardworking as Kılıçdaroğlu” is new

Misleading

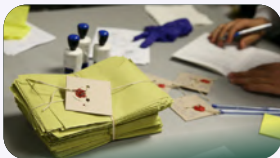


Concerns in the interlude between election rounds: election security

On the morning of May 15, following the first round of elections, Türkiye woke up to a comparatively serene day. With everyone already on edge due to recent earthquakes and electoral proceedings, perhaps we were all just trying to absorb the unfolding events—this was, after all, the first time a second round was taking place.

Just two days later, however, suspicious information about the election and ballot security suddenly surfaced on social media. Claims stating that extra votes were cast, that the voter turnouts are discrepant, and that more people voted at overseas polling stations than were registered, quickly went viral and dominated public conversations.

This type of discourse is fueled by a general lack of trust in public institutions in Türkiye. It's worth noting that claims like “the election's outcome is predetermined,” “votes are being stolen,” and “the results are suspect” only heightened the existing social polarization. That said, it's also fair to state that some of these claims could be debunked with very basic investigations or simple calculations.




The claim that more votes cast in Bremen than registered voters

 Misleading



The claim that there is a discrepancy in voter turnout between presidential and parliamentary vote counts

 Misleading



The claim that people can vote in a different place than their registered address

 Fabricated



The claim that 6,770,786 additional votes were cast in the May 14 election

 Misleading



Al-Aqsa Mosque: the claimed epicenter of celebrations

On the night of May 28, following the announcement of the election results, social media exhibited a somewhat unexpected trend. We had initially anticipated the re-circulation of old celebration videos from various cities, falsely connected to present as current events. However, what actually surfaced diverged from this expectation.

Rather than seeing videos from different cities across Türkiye, we came across multiple posts claiming that celebrations for Erdoğan's electoral victory were centered at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. These claims, which also found their way into mainstream media coverage, placed the Al-Aqsa Mosque at the heart of these purported celebrations. Upon further investigation, we found that these claims were inaccurate; the videos were from unrelated events that had taken place in the past.



The claim that video shows people celebrating Erdoğan's victory at Al-Aqsa Mosque

≠ False connection



Video shared with claim that Erdoğan's election victory is celebrated at Al-Aqsa Mosque

≠ False connection & Manipulation



The claim that video shows Erdoğan's election victory being celebrated at Al-Aqsa Mosque

≠ False connection



Disinformation, polarization and voting behavior

The role that the spread of false information plays in shaping voting behavior is a significant area of study, especially during election seasons. Disinformation exacerbates political polarization as politicians vie for a greater share of the electorate by disseminating misleading statements on sensitive topics. When we analyze election campaigns aimed at shaping voter behavior, several key factors emerge:

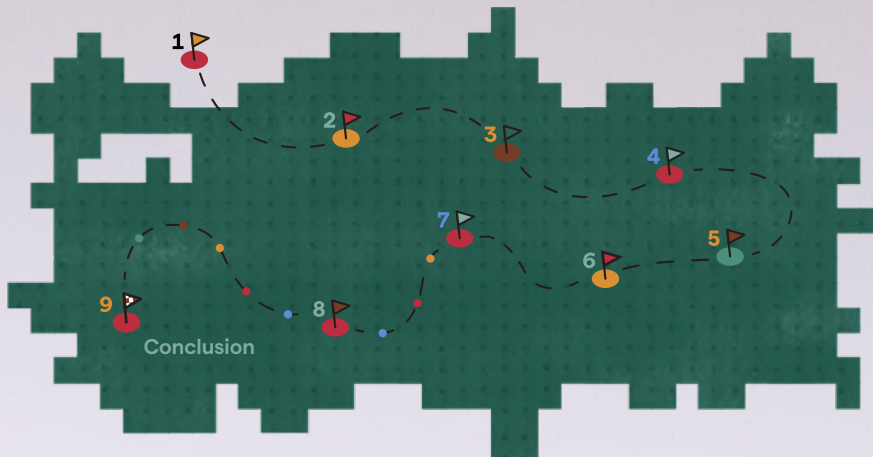
- **The illusion of truth through repetition:** The continuous repetition of false information creates a persuasive illusion of reality. The familiarization process, induced by repetition, reconfigures our perception of what's true and what's not.
- **The nature of mass communication:** In the case of Türkiye, the influence of television and similar mass media on the adoption of false claims by the masses is undeniable.
- **Rhetoric over truth:** In the realm of persuasion, truth often takes a back seat. Perceptions, repetitions, singular false claims supporting grand narratives become part of the rhetoric used to persuade voters. This blurs the objective ground upon which political discourse should ideally stand.
- **Lack of media literacy:** Enhancing critical thinking and analytical skills is essential to combat disinformation. A lack of media literacy leaves voters vulnerable, unable to sift through the mosaic of falsehoods. Hence, there is an urgent need to equip voters with the right analytical tools and way of thinking.
- **Social media as a propaganda platform:** Social media channels serve as effective and convenient platforms for propagating political agendas. Despite ongoing efforts by some platforms to mitigate the spread of false information, they remain fertile ground for disseminating disinformation.

A note on social media advertising during elections

As with every election cycle, political parties have utilized a variety of online and offline platforms this year to showcase their past achievements and future promises. While Teyit does not maintain a record of these advertisements or the financial investments behind them, the content disseminated through digital channels remains a focal point for fact-checking organizations. Although the scandal of Cambridge Analytica feels like a distant memory, the potency of these platforms' algorithms in shaping consumer choices—whether it's for products or for casting votes—cannot be overlooked.

In 2023, advances in artificial intelligence have also highlighted some potential threats to democracies. During a U.S. Senate hearing on AI in May 2023, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman was asked, "Could organizations use artificial intelligence language models such as ChatGPT to induce voters to behave in specific ways?" His response was cautionary; he expressed concern over the use of such language models to manipulate, persuade, and influence voters.

As platforms look for ways to prevent misleading election advertising campaigns on social media that are supported by insights from language models and created with effective targeting, fact-checkers need to improve their skills around these new technologies and find ways to verify such content with effective tools, language, and methods.



Conclusion

As we've seen in previous elections, the 2023 elections were no exception to the pervasive issue of information disorder. At Teyit, we have tirelessly combated this issue, which erodes public trust and hampers the effective functioning of democracy. This election season, we expanded our toolkit for scrutinizing spread of suspicious information through both social media and traditional media channels, focusing keenly on the analysis of politicians' statements.

Our goal was to empower voters against information disorder by uncovering patterns in suspicious statements and posts on social media. We believe that urging politicians to tell the truth and providing a more objective basis for politics are essential to strengthening democracy.

The patterns we've identified should serve as indicators for the future that awaits us, as similar trends could emerge in the run-up to local elections in 2024. On a related note, artificial intelligence could shape political debates with suspicious content that is difficult to detect, and asymmetric propaganda could become much more prominent. Likewise, vulnerable groups in society can be targeted and scapegoated to distract people from the systemic problems. In election campaigns, disinformation can be effective in causing some candidates to exit from the race. As such, election security will remain a hotly debated topic until trust in institutions is restored in a healthy way.

We stand ready for these challenges. Our confidence that the quest for truth will persist remains unshaken. We are committed to empowering voters, to free people from their echo chambers, and we are taking further steps toward a world where critical thinking will be a shared value of the information ecosystem.



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STATE

of

INFORMATION
DISORDER

2023 Turkish Presidential and General Elections

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