

Alpaslan Özerdem and Matthew Whiting (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*. Routledge 2020. 528 pages. ISBN 9780367730604

Reviewed by **Mohammed Alrmizan**
King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS)
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
malrmizan@kfcris.com

The subject of Turkish politics over the last two decades, and particularly from 2010 onwards, has attracted increased debate by numerous social science scholars in fields including political science, international relations studies, economics, and cultural studies from both historical and contemporary perspectives. This increased academic interest is not a coincidence but is a result of the Republic of Turkey's continued crises, complexities, and uncertainty on the one hand, and the heightened significance of its regional and international roles on the other. While many books have investigated specific aspects and ramifications of Turkey's politics, *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* provides an extensive analysis from historical and contemporary perspectives presented by a list of various experts, academics, and researchers. What makes this work insightful is its breadth: it examines significant areas in Turkish politics from the perspectives of history, political institutions, economy and environment, Kurdish politics and security, state and society, and foreign relations.

The book is edited by Alpaslan Özerdem, who is a Professor of Peacebuilding and Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research at Coventry University, and Matthew Whiting, who is a lecturer in comparative politics at the University of Birmingham, of whom both have relevant research activities and publications related to peacebuilding, politics, and the Middle East. In addition to the two editors, the book includes the work of 41 contributors divided between mostly single authored and co-authored chapters. The book has 38 chapters over 6 parts, including Özerdem and Whiting's introduction and conclusion. Each chapter of the book begins by tracing the historical roots of its subject, and then provides contemporary analysis before concluding future and potential scenarios, which means that its diverse subjects are presented in a consistent manner that benefits readers.

Part 1 'History and the Making of Contemporary Turkey' focuses on the development of the political ideas – such as Turkish nationalism, secularism, political Islam, and democracy – that govern today's Turkish society, and examines how these have either developed or changed. Özerdem and Whiting write that "*Many of the challenges and sources of conflict facing Turkey have their origins in the foundation of the state*" (p. 4). In this part of the book, the identity divisions are crucial in Turkish politics, according to Samim Akgönül and Baskın Oran, who explain that "*In this country [Turkey] political positions are mainly related to nationalism and Islamism with a distorted perspective on history.*" (p. 25). Establishing democracy is not easy, and İlder Turan posits that "*Turkey's never-ending search for democracy continues.*" (p. 35). With respect to political Islam and the

heightened role of the AKP specially with politically competing Islamic institutions, Kristin Fabbe and Efe Murat Balıkcıoğlu write that "... [the] AKP is making a concerted effort to crush all cemaats that challenge its statist authority." (p. 65).

'Politics and Institutions' is the title of Part 2 which engages mainly with fundamental and formal political institutes and processes including elections and the party system, presidential issues, military roles, non-governmental organizations and civil society, and Turkey's media policy. Although it claims to be democratic, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu criticizes how Turkey's party system functions and finds that "*From 2002 through to 2018 the Turkish party system came under the hegemony of the AKP*" (p. 99). Also, this part touches upon the role of NGOs and relations with civil society. Based on neo-Tocquevillian and Gramscian frames, Markus Ketola contends that in Turkey "... *the development of Turkish civil society as being guided by the growth of two sets of NGOs representing what appear as irreconcilable worldviews. As a result, we are looking at the dual trajectories of two civil societies*" (p. 135). The media, one of the significant topics in Turkish politics, has always developed according to political changes in Turkey, especially since the AKP's came to power in 2002. Eylem Yanardağoğlu argues that "*After the AKP came to power, the influence of a politics/economics nexus within the media sector widened and deepened*" (p. 145). However, she believes that "*Since the Gezi Park protests, online media seemed to become established as an alternative platform, despite wide-scale media censorship and political tutelage observed in the mainstream media*" (p. 145).

In Part 3, '*The Economy, Environment, and Development*', the book discusses the Turkish political economy, energy security, environmental politics and climate change, urbanization, diaspora governance, and disaster management. Another unescapable and heated topic in Turkey is the economy. Ali Burak Güven contends that the AKP's "*authoritarian neoliberal populism*" model, might "*pose significant long-term risks to the economy – by scaring away FDI [foreign direct investment] ...*" (p. 160). In terms of energy security, H. Akın Ünver concludes that even Turkey's macro strategy tends to decrease its dependence on Russia by liberalizing its local energy sector and diversifications of energy sources, however, the Turkish state is yet dependent on Russian sources (p. 171). Another interesting issue in Turkish politics is how environmentalism and climate change impact local politics. These two issues do not seem to make a priority within Turkey's current challenges. Ümit Şahin finds that "*Even though studies show that environmental awareness in Turkey is on the rise, environmental policies have never been an important part of the manifestos of big political parties and never an issue that could have an effect on election results*" (p. 185).

The fourth part of the book explores '*The Kurdish Insurgency and Security*' by shedding light on some sensitive issues within Turkish politics including the Kurdish insurgency, the Kurdish peace process, (counter)terrorism and societal relations, and security after the failed coup of 15 July 2016. The Kurdish issue poses yet more unresolved and sensitive challenges within Turkish politics and foreign policy. Zeynep N. Kaya and Matthew Whiting explain that the issue is rooted in both the Ottoman Empirical past and in the Republic of Turkey, and yet continues to be unresolved under the AKP rule due to regional politics including Turkish fears of "*an autonomous Kurdistan ... the Syrian war increased divisions between different Kurdish groups in the region*" (p. 239). The issue of security is crucial in Turkey, especially since the failed coup in 2016. Yaprak Gürsoy explains

that the role of security concerning intelligence, the gendarmerie (military police), and the police, has been a priority since the AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002, and even increased more following the coup attempt in 2016 with negative repercussions.

Next, 'State, Society, and Rights' (Part 5) explores contemporary issues in Turkey's politics such as human rights, gender politics, religious minorities and education, and the healthcare system. The issue of human rights is yet another open and controversial subject in Turkey. Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat argues that human rights development in Turkey is a complicated matter that has at times improved at times, at other times worsened, and has been never absent from the impacts and results of major coups d'états since the establishment of the Republic, including the failed coup of 2016. Another important subject the book deals with is gender politics and the women's movement in Turkey. Sevgi Adak finds that "*The politics of gender has now become a central component of the Turkish political and cultural scene ... [and] an established field in Turkish academia ... trying to counter the pushback fuelled by the AKP's neoliberal conservative political agenda.*" (p. 324). Religious education is another historically important subject in Turkish politics. Bekir S. Gür explains that while Imam-Hatip schools expanded in the late 20th century, their numbers continued to increase under AKP rule in the 2000s (p. 347).

The final section, "External Relations" looks into Turkey's foreign policy from 1923 until 2018 with a focus on the 2000s, Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors Iran, Iraq and Syria, and Turkish relations with the U.S., Russia, Cyprus, and with the EU, NATO, and its peacekeeping missions with the UN. Among the most debated topics related to Turkey is its foreign policy. Mustafa Aydın discusses this subject and points out that even though Turkish foreign policy has gone through different stages, it is now primarily shaped by regional interventionism (and is likely to remain that way). Behlül Özkan contends that while Turkey sought to be a model for its neighbors during the first decade of AKP rule, in the subsequent decade the country seems to be in a difficult position given its regional challenges especially in Syria and Iraq. Turkish relations with the U.S., Russia and the EU remain important. Kemal Kirişçi finds that Turkish-American relations have gone through ups and downs especially in 2003 and since 2015, and politicians of both countries find themselves in different positions. According to Pavel K. Baev, Turkish-Russian relations are not particularly stable due to the kind of personal and authoritarian politics witnessed in each country, and other factors including the Russian actions in Syria and against NATO.

In conclusion, *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* presents a diverse array of chapters covering several important and sensitive topics in Turkish politics and focuses on how such topics developed with respect to the AKP's policies inside and outside of the country. The book is unique in many ways, but most importantly in how it is organized, with each chapter beginning with a historical background before providing its contemporary analysis. However, despite the broad scope of the topics, the book has left some important areas untouched in internal and external Turkish politics, for example (armed) Turkish opposition groups, tourism, the arms industry, diasporas, Turkish-Arab relations (especially with Saudi Arabia), Turkey's policies towards southern Caucasus and central Asian countries, and Turkey's increased military interventions in the Middle East and Africa. Nevertheless, the book remains an insightful collection

that covers many different subjects in Turkish politics while focusing on how the ruling party of the country, the AKP, deal with them. Such a book is a good resource for students and researchers who are interested in understanding major issues in Turkish politics including history, the economy, state and society, Kurdish issues, security, and external affairs.