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A model no more? Debating Turkish influence in the southern neighbourhood

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ABSTRACT

Turkey has often in the past been presented by the West as a model for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to emulate. Drawing on interpretivist theoretical premises which conceptualize an international actor's normative agency through its external recognition in the target states and by employing frame analysis, we examine the alternative ideas of political governance associated with Turkey by the political elites in Egypt between 2011 and 2020. We show that despite the widespread debate on the relevance of the Turkish model during the Arab uprisings, its constituents as articulated by the local political actors have been heavily contested even during the democratic transition phase and in its immediate aftermath. We further contend that domestic contestation was in time replaced by the demonization of Turkey's domestic governance due to the rising antagonism between the two countries instead of a genuine engagement with governance-related norms associated with Turkey. This shows the significance of domestic politics and bilateral relations in shaping the local perceptions of a third actor as a norm diffuser in recipient countries. It also underlines the importance of unpacking the discourses in the local context in understanding whether, and if so, how third-party influence travels in a country.

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Introduction

At different times in its history, Turkey has been presented by the West as a model for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to emulate. The most recent incarnation of the model discourse was during the early phase of the Arab uprisings when the prospects for democracy in the region were once again high on the agenda. This time, it was argued, in drawing their own lessons for political and economic reform, the Arab nations were also looking to the Turkish example as a success case of democratic progress, economic growth and active foreign policy under a political Islamist government.[1] However, despite rising expectations, developments in the last decade such as the rise of authoritarianism and the increasing violation of fundamental rights and freedoms in Turkey alongside an erratic foreign policy behaviour often at odds with the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), have

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largely eroded this "model" rhetoric in the West. Yet, despite the well-documented ebbs and flows in the use of this rhetoric in the West,[2] there is little systematic knowledge of how the Turkish model was actually received in the region in the early days of the Arab uprisings, as well as in its aftermath.

Drawing on interpretivist theoretical premises which conceptualize an international actor's normative agency through its external recognition in the target states and by employing frame analysis as the main method, we seek to examine the alternative ideas of political governance associated with Turkey by the political elites in Egypt. The analysis covers the period from the fall of president Hosni Moubarak in 2011 until June 2020. Our focus on Egypt stems from the fact that Turkey has figured relatively high in the discussions concerning political reform in this country. Egypt also provides a fertile ground to assess the impact of domestic and international political changes on perceptions of political reform associated with external actors. While other countries in the neighbourhood, such as Tunisia, were also on the path to democractic transition around the same period, it has already been observed that Turkey rarely figured in the domestic debates on political reform in that country (Ragnar 2021). Even in the case of Morocco, it was found that references to Turkey in (observable) discussions of political reform were sparse at best (see contribution on Morocco in this special issue).

In this article, we argue that these ideas, at times referred to as the "Turkish model" or the "Turkish experience" by the local actors, have been heavily contested in the case of Egypt where domestic politics has been the key driver behind this contestation. We find that during the early months of the Arab uprisings, Turkey was framed as "a model of secularism," "a model of economic power" and/or "a model of military power," depending on the domestic context and contingent on the political standing of the local actors discussing Turkey's relevance to Egyptian domestic governance. Furthermore, we show that in post-2013 military coup Egypt where Turkish-Egyptian relations turned increasingly hostile, the discourse on the Turkish model has not completely disappeared (as most observers argue), but that it has changed, where Turkey is now framed as "a model of how not to be."

As such, we respond to the three pleas raised by the special issue: the external political norms European neighbourhood countries are exposed to; the main domestic actors contesting these norms; and the level of contestation and what it means for norm diffusion (see Introduction, this volume). In so doing, we provide three contributions to scholarship. First, we move beyond the dominant academic focus on Western actors in studying the agents of political change by turning our focus to an individual non-Western actor. Secondly, while acknowledging that the discourse on the Turkish model in the South was indeed primarily put forward by the West and derived largely from Western views on the relationship between religion and democracy, we bring into the discussion the active agency of local actors in the (re)production of this discourse, and in doing so, counter the Eurocentrism that is dominant in the Western accounts on the Turkish model. The third and related contribution lies in the way in which we show that unlike the Western discussions on the Turkish model, the governance-related political ideas associated with Turkey have never been viewed in a rigid and monolithic manner by the local actors concerned but regarded instead from other angles than the singular democratic/secular lens which the Western discourse often highlights.

We will first provide an overview of the origins and components of the Turkish model as discussed in the context of Turkey's ideas-based influence in the literature, to be followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework and the methodology. This will provide the framework of the subsequent analysis which will concentrate on Egyptian political discourses on Turkey in relation to the country's own domestic governance in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. We will conclude by assessing the main findings and the lessons drawn.

The model rhetoric and its origins

The origins of the debate on the Turkish model date back to the 1950s when Turkey was presented by US scholars and policy makers as a model of elite-led modernization for the countries of the Middle East to emulate. However, this US approach was dropped gradually in the following decades of the Cold War due to rising domestic instability in Turkey and the growing strains in US-Turkish relations.[3] The model rhetoric resurfaced in the early 1990s when, fearing Iranian influence in the region, Turkey was branded by the West as a "Muslim democracy" and a "model of development" for the new Central Asian Republics established after the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, this rhetoric was short-lived, thanks to waning Western support in the absence of the Iranian threat, rising Russian assertiveness and the troubles with Turkey's own democracy, particularly concerning the Kurdish issue.[4]

The debate on the Turkish model reappeared after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the November 2002 Turkish general elections in which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. The AKP was a splinter party of the Islamist Virtue Party (FP) that was shut down by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 2001 for constituting a threat to the secular character of the republic. Upon its election, however, the AKP partly assuaged domestic concerns and gained the support of Western governments by signalling its commitment to democratic reforms with a view to fulfilling EU membership criteria and to the IMF stabilization programme with the goal of economic recovery after the 2001 crisis. In the post-9/11 international context, when democracy promotion in the region was high on the agendas of both the US and EU foreign policies, the AKP was thus soon fully embraced by the West as a test case of whether Islam and democracy were compatible.[5] Indeed, in its first term of government, the AKP focused specifically on Turkey's EU accession process and passed crucial democratic reforms which finally led to the opening of accession negotiations with the EU in 2005.[6] This progress bolstered the framing of Turkey as "a Muslim country acting as a model for democracy" across the US and the EU in supporting Turkey's EU membership bid.[7] This rhetoric was also enthusiastically embraced by the AKP as a way to turn its domestic agenda of strengthening the country's Muslim identity into a strategic asset in foreign relations in line with the expectations of the West whose support was crucial to the AKP's insecure initial years in power.

While the "Turkey as a model" rhetoric lost its popularity in the West in the second half of the 2000s with the Iraq War failing to bring democratization in the wider region, it resurfaced once again during the Arab uprisings with the prospects of democracy looming once again in the MENA.[8] It was argued that the 2000s success of the AKP in strengthening the Turkish economy and promoting itself as a democratic model with an Islamic basis, made the Turkish case appealing to the peoples of the region.[9] The Turkish official discourse through its assertive foreign policy in

the early days of the Arab uprisings also pushed for this narrative, with its repeated emphasis on Turkey's "leadership role" in the democratic transitions in the region.[10] This push was largely related to the AKP's expectation that democracy in the region would usher in Muslim Brotherhood (MB) governments with which it historically enjoyed close ties and perceived key to its expanding geopolitical influence.[11] This was taking place against a background in which Turkish democracy itself was gradually deteriorating after 2008.[12]

This historical trajectory shows that the debate on the Turkish model in all its reincarnations was largely driven by the West to uphold its key interests in the Middle East and for a brief period in Central Asia, with endorsement by Turkey contingent on the domestic and foreign policy interests of its governing elite. A survey of the academic literature and the policy writings demonstrates that there has so far been no agreement on what this model entails and thus how it can actually be defined. Some have underlined its key tenet as the accommodation of secularism, democracy and political Islam whereas others have also focused on Turkey's civil–military relations, its economy, strong bureaucracy and close relations with the West.[13] From a theoretical standpoint, the confusion over the model rhetoric may be expected. Without conceptualizing what constituting a model may entail, the discussions surrounding it remain limited to cherry-picked ad-hoc elements of Turkey's imagined soft power in the EU Southern neighbourhood. By treating the model rhetoric as an empty signifier which only acquires its meaning through discourse, we argue that the discourse on any country constituting a model is a claim of its normative actorness insofar as it refers to the attractiveness and "soft influence" (Introduction, this issue) of the political ideas associated with it in its wider neighbourhood. We further stipulate that whether a country can be considered as a model, hence a normative actor or not, depends on how the political ideas that are associated with it are perceived in the recipient countries. In this respect, there is a dearth of systematic academic inquiry into how Turkey was and is discussed in the domestic governance-related debates in the MENA region. While there have been some quantitative public opinion surveys on Turkey's popularity in the Arab world and perceptions of Turkish democracy in the wider region,[14] these have refrained from inquiring into the ideational components of what makes the Turkish experience attractive for the countries of the region, or have restricted their inquiry to preconceived categories and to the study of public discourse, by virtue of the method employed. Similarly, while especially the policy community have flagged the "fall" of the Turkish model particularly since the Gezi uprisings in 2013, these claims have not been accompanied by an academic inquiry into whether, and if so how, the political ideas associated with Turkey by the local domestic political agents have evolved in the region.

In what follows, we further detail our conceptual take on what makes an external actor a normative one and the methodology undertaken to study it, before proceeding to the analysis of the political and governance-related norms that have been aspired to and associated with Turkey in Egypt.

Theory and method: normative agency as external recognition and frame analysis

An international actor's normative agency, defined as "an actor's capacity to define the 'normal'," depends on the recognition of this agency by the target states, where "to

appear" becomes more important than "to be."[15] This is an extension of the conceptual view that "states are dependent on each other to produce their identities in this way, the state's basic ontological condition is relational."[16] The theoretical framework of this study rests on the Habermasian understanding that legitimacy is a basic prerequisite in affirming the normative agency of external actors in target countries.[17] Following from Beetham's (1991) view that justifiability is a central mechanism of legitimation, it can be argued that legitimacy can be inferred from people's justification of matters in terms of their beliefs, values, standards and normative expectations.[18]

This is where the significance of the discursive context enters into the picture. The ability of any external power to exert a normative influence in a given state depends on the "socially and historically contingent discursive context" within which an external actor's agency strikes a chord and (re)produces discursive justifications concerning the normative agency of the external actor(s).[19] These justifications also provide insight into the extent to which the norms associated with an external actor are contested by the local agents in a given context. In that sense, we remain close to recent critical norm research which underlines the significance of norm localization and argues that the processes of localization are incurred first at the discursive level.[20] Norm localization at the level of discourse refers to the ways in which norms that are (or are not) associated with an external actor "are consciously or unconsciously linked to different frames" in discourse by the local actors [21] who strive to enhance their legitimacy and/or authority through the use of these frames.[22] This conceptual take also allows us to study the normative influence of external actors beyond the dichotomy of acceptance and rejection by accounting for contestation, which "obtains visibility for the researcher through its materiality as a discursive practice."[23] To study such justifications in their local discursive context, we thus turn to political frame analysis as a qualitative discourse analysis method which allows us to observe how certain ideational elements of justification "are linked together into packages of meaning."[24]

We define political frames as discursive maps provided to the citizens by political elites as a compass to situate themselves in an already complex political world. They are also defined as "central organising themes" which hold together forms of argumentation realized through the use of words, metaphors and other linguistic devices.[25] Individuals provide justifications for their views on certain issues and those justifications find expression through the use of frames in discourse.[26] Frames can cross borders but then they are infused with the national discursive contexts with their cultural, historical and political specificities.[27] Similarly, the frames that are employed in argumentation can differ across different political and social groups even within a given national setting.[28]

We focus, in particular, on the frames that are used in justifying certain elements of domestic governance that are associated with Turkey as appropriate for adoption in Egypt. We concentrate on the discourses of political elites rather than those of the general public. The reason behind this choice is two-fold. First is the availability of the discourses of the former, whereas it is not possible in the context of our inquiry to gauge in-depth discursive articulations of the public across time, and particularly in a post-2013 coup Egypt where the public is largely silenced. The second reason behind this choice lies in the way in which political elites have been found to "determine frames to channel public perception of an issue in a specific direction,"[29] hence

with considerable impact on public opinion, as well as due to their role in formulating domestic and foreign policies.

We adopt an inductive approach in identifying the frames that were used by political actors in their official statements from the fall of the Moubarak regime in 2011 until 1 June 2020. While some freedom of speech and association was observed right after the fall of Moubarak, this started to deteriorate during the MB era (June 2012–3 July 2013) and especially after the 2013 military coup. Following the coup and the rise of President al-Sisi to power, there has been increased censorship and bans on many political groups' official channels and websites. Under al-Sisi, political opposition and freedoms of speech, assembly and press are non-existent.[30] Despite the difficulties encountered in access to information, we surveyed the available official statements (in their original language, Arabic) from the Egyptian government (State Information Services; Dar al-Ifta al-Massriyya), the MB website (Ikhwan online) and the main liberal/secular political parties: Congress Party (chaired by president al-Sisi), New Wafd party (al-Wafd), Free Egyptians Party, Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Egyptian Patriotic Movement. These parties, along with the MB's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), were among the parties running in the 2011 parliamentary elections and represent the main political groups (Islamists, secular, liberals, centre-left) in Egypt. Furthermore, we viewed official statements from political elites as mentioned in Egyptian policy papers and newspapers, using LexisNexis, for the same time frame.

In our search, we focused on terms such as "Turkey," "Turkish model," "Turkish experience," "Turkish reforms," "Turkish development," "Turkish political reforms" and "Turkish economic reforms." We coded texts to be able to identify the frames through which justifications for the usefulness or appropriateness of the governance-related norms associated with Turkey were delivered. Each frame we identify is a collection of distinctive metaphors, concepts and values which provides an organization that helps actors to conceptualize different approaches to the relevance of Turkey to the issues relating to the governance of Egypt. Due to the relatively small scale of the data and the interpretivist nature of the study which draws attention to the significance of the discursive context, this was done manually without the assistance of specialized computer software. As such, we do not aim to measure the relative salience of the frames but instead "identify absence and/or presence of discursive elements without quantification and use representative quotes to illustrate the way in which discourses are formulated."[31] The goal here is "to guarantee a minimum representativeness of the participants [of the discourse …] in the qualitative sense of representing the diversity of opinions with regard to the topic of discussion."[32]

The myth of the Turkish model(s) in Egypt: was there even a model?

Our analysis suggests that the debate about the type of policies and models that Egypt should apply to move forward in terms of economic and political reforms gained momentum with the fall of Moubarak and stayed salient until the June 2013 military coup. Zooming in on the local context, one immediately notices that governance-related norms which relate to Turkey are predominantly discussed with reference to the "Turkish model" (*Al-Namouthaj al Turki*) or the "Turkish experience" (*Al-Tajruba al-Turkeihai*) under the AKP rule, used interchangeably. Nonetheless, the data also suggests that the saliency of the "model rhetoric" in both shape and form was not commonly observed at the official level. It was contested by the various

local actors; and lasted very briefly, disappearing completely once the MB took power. We find that with the deterioration of the relations between Egypt and Turkey after the June 2013 military coup and the ensuing disagreements on several regional issues, the discourse on Turkey turned into daily criticisms of its domestic governance where it was framed as a "model of how not to be."

Depending on the local actors involved (military, secular/liberal, Islamic groups), the analysis shows that the Turkish model/experience under AKP is framed differently. There are two main frames that are employed: the "political frame" which is divided into two elements (Turkish military as an exemplary power and the relationship between secularism and Islam) and the socio-economic frame (focusing on economic development and social justice in Turkey) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Framing of the Turkish model.

Frames	Political Frame 1: Military Power	Political Frame 2: Secularism, Islam, Democracy	Economic Frame
Indicators	Military dominance, military draws the guidelines for the country, government in charge of day-to-day politics, the constitution privileges the military, the constitution is protected by the military	Islam, secularism, secular state, separation of state and religion, freedoms, elections, constitution based on secular values, Islamic values	Economic efficiency and growth, developed infrastructure, material wellbeing, social welfare, job creation, low unemployment

In what follows, we elaborate on each of these frames in the Egyptian context.

The political frame

Some argue that the Turkish model which is based on "secularism and democracy – has obvious appeal in a region burdened by corrupt, autocratic, incompetent, and inefficient governments."[33] The analysis shows that reference to a Turkish model/experience on grounds of secularism and democracy was indeed present in the discourses of the local actors and has been contested by all political actors (see Table 2).

Table 2. Actors and frames.

	Frames of the Turkish Model/Experience		
Local Forces	F1: Political (Secularism/Islam)	F2: Political (Military Dominance)	F3: Economic Experience
MB	Contested	Rejected	Accepted
Armed Forces	1980s model/reject current model	Accepted	Accepted until the relations with Turkey deteriorated
Liberal/Secular Forces	Contested	Rejected	Accepted–Contested
Other Islamic Groups (Al-Nour Salafi Party)	Rejected	NA	NA

In what we refer to as a general "political frame," we identify two components through which the Turkish political model/experience was seen as relevant for the Egyptian case. One relates to the role of the military in shaping political life and the other is

based on the Islamic nature of the AKP, which was viewed to some extent and mainly by the MB as a source for inspiration for political reform and change in Egypt.

The role of the military after the fall of Moubarak

With the fall of Mubarak, interest in the Turkish model of governance is mostly justified with reference to a strong military which plays an important role in facilitating a smooth transition while the political parties participate in building the new democratic system. This narrative gains momentum especially in the era between the fall of Moubarak and the 2011–2012 elections and is identified even in the discourses of military officials. According to one Military Council member,

> we want a model like Turkey, but we will not impose it […] Egypt, as a country, needs this to protect our democracy from the Islamists. We know that this group [i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood] is not thinking in a democratic way.[34]

This model that the military was seeking – even before the election of President Mohammad Morsi to power – is not the current so-called democratic system in Turkey where the military is subordinate to the political elites but rather refers to the 1980s/1990s "when civilians ran Turkey's day-to-day affairs under the watchful eyes of the military."[35] During the interim period following the fall of Moubarak, Deputy Prime Minister for Democratic Transformation, Dr. Ali al-Salami, was tasked (by the Military Council) with preparing a document that would lay down the basic principles of the Egyptian constitution. The Military Council pushed for including "supra-constitutional principles" that keep the military budget out of scrutiny, give them immunity and allow the military to play a prominent role in politics and to be the guardian of the constitution of the "Civil State" – similar to the 1980s/1990s Turkish model.

This declaration raised controversy among the major political parties as some considered it to give major powers to the military, allow them to be involved in political life and even intervene whenever they think the constitution of the state is violated. This would result in going back to a similar situation in Moubarak's era and therefore was rejected by the majority of the political parties in Egypt (see Table 2). This view was highlighted by a key player in the transition, Wahid Abdel-Maguid (MP and official spokesperson for the Constituent Assembly of Egypt in 2012), who considered that Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and other senior officers sought to emulate the Turkish model of the 1980s and 1990s where they could obtain "a unique status in the constitution, [to] be independent from and even stronger than the executive authority" in which the military forces "will be the ones steering the country's policy in the future directly or indirectly."[36]

The relationship between secularism and Islam (2011 to June 2013 coup)

The debate on Islam and secularism in the Muslim World in general and Egypt in particular has been a long standing one. Some consider that secularism reflects European modernity which contradicts with Islamic traditions and therefore totally reject it as "kufr" (infidelity). More moderate Islamists are less hostile to the idea but also do not accept it. The main controversy rests on "what constitutes Islamicity" and "on what to retain from the heritage or incorporate of modernity."[37] This debate gained

momentum in Egypt with the fall of Moubarak and the official engagement of the MB in political life.

Following the fall of Moubarak and after a meeting with Erdogan in 2011, both liberal/secular presidential candidates Amr Mousa and Mohamed El-Baradei expressed interest in and admiration of the Turkish experience.[38] Other parties, such as the secular Egyptian Patriotic Movement (established by former presidential candidate Ahmad Chafic), did not really refer to the Turkish experience or model. The analysis suggests that liberal/secular groups generally appreciated Turkey's secular state and political reforms. Nonetheless, they did not frame them as unique to Turkey but associated them with the West, also expressing doubts that the MB was even interested in a replication of the Turkish case. In several statements, one of the main parties, al-Wafd party (liberal/secular) doubted if the MB was interested in replicating the Turkish experience of democracy that is based on secularism, arguing that the MB deputy leader and other MB leaders only "address the West with a Turkish tongue, as they move to impose a ruling with an Iranian stick in Egypt."[39] In a similar vein, when the protests against MB rule erupted, party members and politicians, such as Councillor Kamal al-Islambouli, head of the Egyptian National Council, argued that the political system in Turkey was successful "because the AKP and Erdogan are not like the Brotherhood of Egypt who took power after the revolution and were not seeking or even capable to adopt the Turkish model but more of a radical version."[40]

The rest of the data also suggests that for some liberal/secular political actors who were opposed to the MB, the experience with the MB's rule failed because of the fundamental differences between Erdogan's AKP and the MB on their views on Islamic rule which made it impossible for the MB to model on Turkey's experience. Having said this, liberal/secular groups were also generally critical of steps towards authoritarianism in Turkey as well as the previous dominance of the Turkish military in political life and therefore contested the model rhetoric. For example, the vice president of al-Wafd party, Dr Yasser El-Hodiby, criticized the authoritarian turn in Turkey stating that Erdogan had destroyed the democratic political and party life in Turkey.[41]

Positive references to the Turkish model/experience were indeed observed in the speeches of many MB leaders at various times in this period. For instance, one of the MB senior leaders, Dr. Mohamed Kamal, underlined the importance of the Turkish experience and suggested that Egypt can learn from and build on it by reforming the entire system while also embedding Islamic jurisprudence into it.[42] This view was supported by Mohammed Badie (the eighth Supreme Guide of the MB) who urged the Egyptian people to take guidance from the Turkish experience as the road for reforms is long.[43] While attending the 4th AKP Congress in Istanbul, President Morsi praised the Turkish experience under the leadership of the AKP and the political, economic and social reforms which Turkey experienced during the past decade under AKP rule.[44] Morsi attributed this success mainly to the removal of the army from politics, ending the military coups that were the reason for the country's backwardness.[45]

However, not all Islamists had a positive view of the Turkish experience. Some were highly critical of Erdogan's remarks that the secular state does not contradict Islam, its values and teachings; and his denial of the claim that democracy and Islam are incompatible.[46] In fact, the statements of Erdogan during his visit to Egypt right after the fall of Moubarak's regime regarding the establishment of a civil/secular state in Egypt

aroused the rage of the MB to such an extent that the MB's spokesperson Dr Mahmoud Ghazlan considered the "advice" of the Turkish leader an interference in Egypt's internal affairs. These criticisms were interpreted in the local press as "substantive" intellectual differences between the MB and the AKP, even though they both belong to the same Islamic trend.[47] In a similar vein, some MB leaders expressed that Erdogan's vision about state building and democracy based on the Turkish concept of secularism contradicts their idea since "that partisan culture of Erdogan, AKP and even the Islamist movement, were not founded on Muslim Brotherhood foundations at all."[48]

Other MB leaders expressed concerns regarding President Erdogan's hegemonic ambitions in the region, such as Issam Al-Aryan, who stated that the MB "does not see that he or his country alone can lead the region or shape its future."[49] This shows that even from a geopolitical perspective, the MB has viewed Turkey with considerable suspicion. It also reflects how both the particular elements of the so-called Turkish model(s)/experience as well as its overall influence were contested even by the MB – which is often supposed to be the most receptive actor to Turkish experience.

Salafi groups (such as Al-Nour Party) have also been heavily critical of the discussion of the Turkish model and the role of Turkey in the region, fed mostly by their strong opposition to secularism. For instance, one of the presidential frontrunners in 2012 and a Salafi candidate, Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, wrote on his (currently banned) webpage that

> it was surprising when the Egyptian masses chanted to him [Prime Minister Erdogan] as the Islamic caliphate, and then he praised secularism, asking the Egyptians not to fear it! […] we must not imagine that the Turkish experience is the desired experience for Egyptians. There is no doubt that the authentic people of Egypt with the right understanding can uniquely confront the world with a unique Egyptian experience, which, God willing, will become a bright beacon for the countries of the world. Not by the secularism that separates religion from the state, but by the teachings of our true religion.

This cross-party contestation that is observed in the context of the political frame, particularly in matters that relate to democracy and secularism, shows a number of things: first, that most political parties were doubtful if the MB wanted to take a similar route to the AKP when they gained power and maintain the secular nature of the state; second, suspicion was that the MB wanted to mimic the Iranian model and not really build a democratic state; and third, that even within the MB, the Turkish model was contested. While this contestation regarding the political frame is salient in the main parties' discourse, it is less visible when the relevance of the Turkish model/experience is framed from an economic perspective, to which we now turn.

The economic frame (2011–2014)

One of the main ways through which the relevance of the Turkish model/experience is highlighted is by framing the country as an economic success under AKP rule. This is emphasized many times by the major political parties. The economic frame is the most accepted frame across the various political groups (with a few exceptions discussed in the next sections) (see Table 2).

Following the success of Morsi and the MB in the first parliamentary and presidential elections after the fall of Moubarak, the MB's FJP has taken Turkish economic performance as one reference point in its speeches and discussions. Mohammed Gouda,

member of the Economic Committee and the Secretary of the Education Committee of the FJP in 2012, stated that the party's programme aims at "integrated economic development renaissance and turn this into reality in Egypt, so that its economy within seven or eight years surpasses that of Turkey and even Malaysia."[50] Relying on the Turkish and Malaysian experiences as a reference point, Gouda added that the programme is based on:

> full economic freedom and respect for multi-state property, the establishment of a strong state that ensures the protection of competition and prevent monopolistic practices and the creation of basic infrastructure and taking into account the poorer classes, as well as the adoption of a large national project to achieve a comprehensive sustainable development and attention to social justice.

Former Minister of Information in the MB government, Salah Abdel Maqsoud, highlighted the similarities between Egypt of today and Turkey of the early nineties and suggested that it can learn from the Turkish experience in combating:

> corruption, economic and social difficulties, energy and water problems, underdeveloped infrastructure, high inflation, deterioration of life standards, water, electricity and hygiene problems, erosion of infrastructure, increased rates of inflation and high prices, a decrease in the value of its currency and its reflection on the standard of living.[51]

Similarly, in light of the fraternity agreement signed between the municipalities of Cairo and Istanbul in 1988 and updated in 2011, the mayor of Cairo underlined the importance of learning "from the Turkish experience in […] fighting corruption, making progress in the economy, sanitation and the traffic problem."[52]

The analysis suggests that the economic frame largely rests on the economic success which Turkey witnessed during the early years of AKP rule in which it improved the lives of Turkish citizens, lowered unemployment and boosted the economy. Former Prime Minister (during Morsi's rule) Dr. Hisham Kandeel underlined the remarkable successful economic performance in Turkey under the AKP leadership which chose "what is most appropriate for the Turkish community, which we can learn from" in Egypt and in the region.[53] In an official MB statement congratulating the AKP and Erdogan following the 2014 Turkish presidential elections, the MB referred to the economic success of the AKP as the main reason for their victory.[54]

Furthermore, Dr. Naser Al-Farash, spokesman for the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade during the MB rule, announced that Dr. Bassem Awda, the Minister of Supply, had discussed with the Turkish Ambassador in Cairo the measures that would strengthen cooperation between the two sides where Egypt would benefit from the Turkish experience in improving the supply chains of food commodities, and doing a full study to improve the commodity system in Egypt.[55]

Two points stand out in the discussions of the economic frame. One is that many of the components of the so-called economic success, as shown previously, are mostly those that have to do with neoliberal capitalism which is hardly unique to the Turkish case. The relative success of AKP's economic performance in its first decade in power had to do with the institutional arrangements that were imposed on Turkey by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its close economic relations with the EU (Turkey benefited from the customs union with the EU and it was an integral part of the European economy with FDI presence) as well as the domestic institutional setting in which the military does not control major sections of the economy as is the case in Egypt. Yet, these factors were rarely discussed by the political

actors in Egypt. The second point has to do with the fact that the economic model argument was praised in most political elites' statements including the MB. The only exception is the socialists – with low rates of public support – who considered these policies harmful for the poor in Egypt. For instance Ahmed Bahaa Shaaban, Secretary-General of the Egyptian Socialist Party and General Coordinator of the National Assembly for Change, has argued that "the application of neoliberal policies may work in the developed West, but it is not suitable for our poor societies (such as Egypt, Tunisia and even Turkey) which need state care."[56]

The June 2013 military coup and the way forward: Turkey, a model of how not to be

We observe that following the June 2013 military coup in Egypt, the debate on the Turkish model is overwhelmingly framed as a *model of how not to be*. In the political talk shows and Egyptian newspapers such as *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Watan* or *Akhbar al-Youm*, one notices the level of enmity to the AKP and the Turkish president. The data suggests that since the coup, newspapers that are beacons of the regime have been criticizing democracy, human rights, freedoms and corruption in Turkey as well as Turkey's involvement in regional conflicts, on a daily basis.[57] It needs to be kept in mind that this local discourse which is produced under strict state censorship also frames the Egyptian coup as a way of bringing back legitimacy to the people after the MB abused their power and as such, it is in fact a continuation of the 2011 revolution against oppression.[58]

Turkey reacted very strongly to the Egyptian coup, which diminished its hopes of regional hegemony through its bonds with the MB and awakened fears of a similar coup at home.[59] With increased authoritarianism under al-Sisi, Turkey's criticisms of the Egyptian regime increased. Turkey sought to present itself as a beacon of democratic change by constantly emphasizing the need for Egypt to democratize in accordance with the demands of its citizens, even while moving towards competitive authoritarianism at home.[60] The Egyptian foreign ministry responded to the Turkish claims by arguing that Turkey cannot be a role model to follow as "Erdogan did not hesitate to change the political system […] change the Turkish constitution in order to continue to be in power for ten years to come [and this] cannot be described as the behaviour of democrats."[61]

Even what used to be praised as a good economic model was framed as a catastrophic model after the coup. Rising animosity between the two sides was further aggravated by regional conflicts, most notably in the Mediterranean where the two countries stood in opposite camps. Turkey is now characterized in official Egyptian discourse as a dictatorship in which the rule of law is violated, freedoms are restricted and tens of thousands are in prison due to their political views.[62] Ahmed Hafez, official spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, has stated that Erdogan's opponents in Turkey "end up being arrested for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."[63] In a report issued by the Committee of Arab affairs in the Egyptian parliament, Erdogan was criticized for "practicing the strongest ranks of dictatorship and terrorism with his people with the testimony of the whole world and the European Union itself."[64]

The post–June 2013 regime in Egypt has also been using religious authorities in criticizing Turkey and its governance. Dar al-Ifta (official religious authority) has been

very critical of Erdogan as well as Turkish foreign and domestic policies. In an official statement, it stated that "there is no voice of opposition that can be raised against the Sultan and his dictatorial attitude" and pointed at "the brutal treatment of all opponents without exception."[65] Furthermore, on the Egyptian government's State Information Service, one notices ample amounts of translated international newspaper articles and reports which shed light only on the deteriorating economic and democratic situation in Turkey.[66] This is ironic given that Egypt under al-Sisi "is transforming into a mafia-like intelligence services-state with a haywire justice system that doesn't refrain from sentencing hundreds of people to death in a matter of just a few minutes."[67]

Conclusion

In this article, we have critically engaged with the assertion that Turkey constitutes a potential model for the countries of the Southern neighbourhood by examining the alternative ideas of political governance associated with Turkey in Egypt since the fall of Moubarak, when the relevance of the Turkish model was first publicly discussed. Based on an interpretivist approach where the frames used by the local actors' discourses on justifying the relevance of the Turkish model/experience were identified, we have shown that despite the widespread debate in the West and in Turkey during the Arab uprisings on the relevance of the Turkish model, its constituents as articulated by the local political actors have been heavily contested even during the democratic transition phase and in its immediate aftermath in Egypt.

This contestation has shown us that both illiberal components (i.e. military dominance) or liberal elements (i.e. democracy/secularism) of Turkish governance have been put forward by different political actors in Egypt, depending on their domestic political agenda (see Table 2). It has also revealed that domestic contestation seems to be more acute in political rather than economic frames. Furthermore, we have seen that after the Egyptian military coup, domestic contestation was replaced by the demonization of Turkey's domestic governance due to the rising antagonism between the two countries instead of a genuine concern or engagement with the governance-related norms associated with Turkey.

This shows us the significance of domestic politics as well as bilateral relations in shaping the local perceptions of a third actor as a norm diffuser in recipient countries. It also underlines the importance of unpacking the discourses in the local context in understanding whether, and if so, how third-party influence travels in a given country. Studies on the local political actors' discourses on external democratic influence in Morroco and Tunisia (Ragnar 2021) show that compared to the Egyptian case, the Turkish model is not even recognized by any of the political actors in these two cases as a model to emulate or draw lessons from. Put together with these contributions, we see that in the case of Turkish influence in and beyond Egypt, there has been an extremely limited and highly contested reception of the model rhetoric put forward and assumed by Turkey and the West in the past. Our findings also shed doubt on claims mainly advanced in the West regarding the fall of the Turkish model or Turkey posing a model of illiberalism, given that in the case of Egypt, the deterioration of the already contested model rhetoric seems less to do with the state of Turkish democracy which had already been in decline for long and more to do with the nature of the Egyptian regime and the acrimonious relations between the two countries.

Furthermore, one notices that, especially after the onset of the Syrian civil war, Turkey has been articulating a foreign policy discourse based on humanitarian norms and anti-colonial discourse.[68] This approach is mainly aimed to contest European/Western normativity in their shared neighbourhood.[69] Further research which similarly focuses on local agency could benefit from studying whether, and if so how, this normative language which extends beyond domestic governance is being received in the wider neighbourhood.

Notes

1. Kirişçi, "Turkey's 'Demonstrative Effect'"; Tol, "The Turkish Model."
2. Altunisik, "Turkish Model and Democratization"; Taspinar, "End of the Turkish Model."
3. Adalet, *Hotels and Highways*.
4. Bal, *Turkey's Relations with the West*.
5. Huber, *Democracy Promotion and Foreign Policy*, 173–77.
6. Kubicek, "Political Conditionality and European Union's Cultivation of Democracy in Turkey."
7. Aydın-Düzgit, *Constructions of European Identity*.
8. Alessandri and Altunisik, "Unfinished Transitions," 6.
9. Taspinar, "End of the Turkish Model."
10. Alaranta, "Conclusion: Narrative (Dis) Order."; Aydın-Düzgit, "Can Non-Democracies Support International Democracy?"
11. Aydın-Düzgit, "Can Non-Democracies Support International Democracy?"
12. Lührmann et al., "State of the World 2018," 904–7.
13. See, among others, Uğur, "Intellectual Roots of Turkish Islam"; Gümüşçü, "No 'Turkish Model' for Egypt"; Ülgen et al., *Can the Turkish Model Gain Traction?*
14. Akgün and Gündoğar, *The Perception of Turkey*; Ceyhun, *Turkey in the Middle East*.
15. Kavalski, "The Struggle for Recognition," 250.
16. Murray, *Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 43.
17. Larsen, "Normative Power Europe."
18. Stanley, "Focus Groups in Political Science."
19. Larsen, "Normative Power Europe."
20. Zimmermann, "Same Same or Different?"
21. Zimmermann, "Same Same or Different?" 106.
22. Acharya, "How Ideas Spread," 248, 251.
23. Wiener, *Access to Contestation*, 6.
24. Creed, Langstraat, and Scully, "A Picture of the Frame," 37.
25. Wunderlich, "Positioning as Normative Actors," 4.
26. Medrano, *Framing Europe*, 250; Yukawa, Hidaka, and Kushima, 'Coups and Framing'.
27. Galpin, *The Euro Crisis*.
28. Medrano, *Framing Europe*, 5–6.
29. Wunderlich, "Positioning as Normative Actors," 5.
30. Freedom House, "Egypt: 2020."
31. Crespy, "Analysing European Discourses," 107–8.
32. Duchesne et al., *Citizens' Reactions*, 164.
33. Larrabee, "The Turkish Chimera."
34. "Egypt: Turkish Secularism or Paakistani Radicalism?!"
35. Torchia and Michael, "'Egypt's Generals Eye Turkish Model."
36. Ibid.
37. Najjar, "The Debate on Islam and and Secularism in Egypt," 17.
38. "Erdogan Meets El-Baradei and Mousa."
39. "From Ayatullah to Ayat."
40. "30 June … Day of 'Salvation.'"
41. "Yasser ElHodiby: Erdogan Destroyed."
42. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Party Turkish or Egyptian Way?"

43. "Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood."
44. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "President Morsi's Speech."
45. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Congratulations to the Turkish People."
46. Atwan, "Erdogan Embarrasses Rulers," 1.
47. "Islamic Forces Welcoming of Erdogan."
48. Gul, "Erdogan Turkey Is Different."
49. Ibid.
50. Abdel Salam, "Egypt's Brotherhood Wants Economy."
51. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Salah Abdel Maqsoud Writes."
52. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Mayor of Cairo Meets Mayor of Istanbul."
53. "Qandil from Turkey."
54. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Congratulations to the Turkish People."
55. Muslim Brotherhood Official Statement, "Awda Uses the Turkish Experience."
56. "30 June … Day of 'Salvation'"
57. "Op-Ed Review: Erdogan Criticised"; Howary, "Erdoganish Thuggery."
58. Yukawa, Hidaka, and Kushima, "Coups and Framing."
59. Aydın-Düzgit, Rumelili, and Gülmez, "Turkey as Model for Mediterranean?"
60. Esen and Gumuscu, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism."
61. "Egypt's Hopes of Ending International Criticism."
62. Al-Senawi, "End of Neo-Othomanism"; Howary, "Eroganish Thuggery."
63. Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Erdogan's Talk About Egypt.*
64. Arab Affairs Committee of the Egyptian Parliament, "Turkey's Circumvent Approach."
65. "Erdogan Continues to Use Fatwa Weapon."
66. Egyptian State Information Service, "News."
67. Salloum, "Berlin Sends Wrong Message."
68. Keyman, "A New Turkish Foreign Policy."
69. Langan, "Virtuous Power Turkey."

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