

CYBER SECURITY & INFO TECHNOLOGIES

The Troll Armies in Turkey - Nervana Mahmoud & Suleyman Ozeren by Ahval podcasts

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Suleyman Ozeren spoke in an interview with Nervana Mahmoud for the Ahval podcast series “Turkish Trends”.

Özeren was interviewed by journalist [Nervana Mahmoud](#) in an Ahval podcast.

The Podcast on [Ahval.io](#)

InfoGraphics: <https://bit.ly/3rKLkXS>

Süleyman Özeren, a Turkish scholar at the George Mason University and a fellow of the Orion Policy Institute, said that Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has utilized its youth organizations to dominate public discourse and intimidate the political opposition through social media.

He said that he and his fellow scholars have recently published a report on pro-government campaigns on social media in Turkey.

The research, entitled “Political Astroturfing in Twitterscape: The Role of Troll Armies in Turkey’s Democratic Backsliding” analyzed 6,252 Turkish state-sponsored accounts suspended by Twitter.

Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has utilized its youth organizations to dominate the public discourse and to intimidate the political opposition through social media in Turkey, [Süleyman Özeren](#), a Turkish scholar from George Mason University and a fellow at the [Orion Policy Institute](#), said.

Özeren defined political astroturfing as “state-sponsored campaigns on social media by using trolls in a centrally orchestrated top-down organization”.

“The youth organization of the AKP has extensively carried out disinformation campaigns on social media. The AKP youth has been utilized to dominate the public discourse and to intimidate the political opposition in Turkey.”

Özeren said that Twitter erased more than 7,000 accounts linked to AKP youth organizations.

He said that there are two distinct periods where AKP trolls become very active on social media – critical national events and the lead-up to elections.

The AKP decided to establish its so-called troll army following the Gezi Park protests that shook the government in 2013, Özeren said. These “AK trolls” attempted to discredit the protests describing demonstrators as an extension of foreign powers.

Özeren pointed out that during its initial years, the troll army was only reactive and apologetic. However, they have become more proactive following the 2014 local elections, he said.

Özeren said that the troll accounts not only cover domestic issues but also foreign affairs. For instance, AKP proxy accounts disseminated false information during the 2014 Kobani protests where Kurdish protestors took to the streets in Turkey’s southeast provinces to criticize the government’s closure of a border gate.

Pro-government trolls also became involved in anti-Egypt smear campaigns, according to Özeren.

The trolls have blamed the U.S and other European countries for being complicit in organizing anti-government protests or events in Turkey because domestic and foreign issues have gradually intertwined thanks to the policies pursued by the Turkish government, Özeren said.