

Federal Court Instructs FCC to Review Electromagnetic Radiation Standards

By Barbara Koepfel

FOR 25 YEARS—THROUGH FIVE DEMOCRATIC AND Republican administrations—the Federal Communications Commission has refused to revise the regulations it set in 1996 that address what level of radiation from cell phones should be considered safe. Labeled radio-frequency radiation (RFR), these emissions are discharged from all wireless devices, Wi-Fi networks, and the thousands of towers stretched across the United States that transmit and receive the signals.

The FCC's power is promethean. It is the sole U.S. agency that determines the acceptable RFR exposure from wireless devices for people of all ages, wildlife, and the environment. And it insists its original 1996 limits are fine.

However, scientists who've reviewed hundreds of studies published over the last two decades claim the FCC ignores critical findings that show a "statistically significant" link between heavy cell phone use (10 or more years) and brain and thyroid tumors, especially on the side of the head where people hold their phones. Professional groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the California Medical Association have asked the FCC to update its numbers.

The scientists and physicians worry that the FCC simply repeats the industry's line that all is well—which is particularly troubling since millions more people around the world are exposed each year. In the

United States, for example, only 44 million people had cell phones in 1996; today, the number has soared to about 300 million, and that doesn't include the tablets, watches, and other wireless products that increase RFR exposure exponentially.

Thus, in 2019, the Environmental Health Trust (EHT), Consumers for Safe Cell Phones, Children's Health Defense, and 11 other petitioners sued the FCC. They argued that although the U.S. Government Accountability Office told the FCC in 2013 to review its 1996 limits in light of new research, six years later, the FCC was still repeating its all-is-safe mantra. In a 2019 press release, the FCC said that "after a thorough review of the record, we find it appropriate to maintain the existing radiofrequency limits, which are among the most stringent in the world for cell phones."

At the least, this assurance is doubtful. The lawsuit against the FCC argues precisely the opposite: that the Commission

has *not* reviewed "the record." Also, researchers point out that countries such as Italy, Switzerland, France, Israel, China, India, and Russia have more stringent limits than the United States regarding the use of Wi-Fi in schools and day care centers, and on acceptable levels of radiation emissions from cell towers. In addition, some have banned all cell phone ads pitched to children.

The lawsuit notes that the FCC even ignored the landmark 10-year,

\$30 million National Toxicology Program study carried out under the National Institutes of Health—which produced unequivocal results in 2019. Having exposed rats and mice to cell phone radiation for two years, the NTP researchers reported "clear evidence of cancer in the male rats' heart cells, some evidence of increased brain gliomas (brain cancer), and adrenal gland tumors, DNA damage in the brains of male and female rats and mice, and lower birth weights of female rats' offspring."

Two years after the suit was filed, the U.S. Court of Appeals of the D.C. Circuit ruled in August 2021 that the FCC had to reexamine the research to determine if its regulations should be updated. Further, the court called the commission's behavior "arbitrary and capricious," since it had ignored evidence of the harm to children's brains (which are not fully developed) and to



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male and female reproductive systems. It also ruled that because the FCC never produced regulations about radiofrequency radiation's effects on wildlife, it had "completely failed" to address the evidence of potential environmental harm.

However, the court did not set a date for the FCC to comply—which meant the commission could retain its old regulations indefinitely. Also, the court did not address the issue of whether RFR exposures cause cancer; instead it said the FCC had passed the "minimum legal requirement" to assure it had evaluated the research on cancer and radiation exposure. Thus, scientists are concerned that the FCC will again find ways to defer serious examination of the voluminous literature on the subject.

How could this be, given the NTP findings and other research? To bolster its no-cancer claims, the FCC points to a letter the U.S. Food and Drug Administration wrote the commission, which claimed the NTP results weren't relevant to humans since the study was done on rats and mice (although 10 years earlier, the FDA itself had approved the animal study).

Dr. Joel Moskowitz, director of the Center for Family and Community Health at the University of Cal-

[Dr. Joel Moskowitz:] "The FDA wrote a biased review of the research regarding cancer risk from cell phone radiation."

ifornia, Berkeley and a leading authority on radiofrequency radiation, says, "The FDA wrote a biased review of the research regarding cancer risk from cell phone radiation."

Also, the FCC cited reports from organizations that have undeclared conflicts of interest ([ties to the wireless industry](#)), which contest the cancer links. Dr. Ronald Melnick, the lead designer of the NTP study, has published [two articles](#) stating that the results from these groups' reports were "unfounded."

In fact, the FCC failed on several fronts. Besides ignoring the NTP study, the commission dismissed the American Academy of Pediatrics' request for regulations that reflect the special effects RFR have on children and pregnant women. It never explained why it ignored research that showed children's brains absorb higher levels of the radiation. Instead, it has insisted for 20-plus years that RFR is only harmful if it overheats the human body by at least one degree centigrade. This is a red herring, since wireless devices don't emit the kind of radiation that produces higher temperatures. Also, the FCC didn't consider the effects of long-term exposures.

Many researchers insist these links have been proven. As noted in an earlier article in this journal ("Wireless Hazards," [Washington Spectator](#),

December 2020), studies over the past 20 years have found strong evidence of brain tumors and leaks in the blood-brain barrier, acoustic neuromas (tumors on the nerves leading from the inner ear to the brain), thyroid tumors, and cognitive impairment. They also showed a link to male infertility: when men carried phones in their pants' pockets, their sperm were weakened and reduced. Also, physicians and scientists found that some individuals are particularly sensitive to RFR radiation, which can cause tinnitus, vertigo, headaches, fatigue, and loss of memory. Early this month, some experts studying the U.S. diplomats' and CIA agents' "Havana Syndrome" symptoms suggested they could be related to radiofrequency radiation.

The latest evidence

Theodora Scarato, the executive director of the Environmental Health Trust, says that since the FCC had not yet responded to the court's August ruling by last November, the EHT [asked the commission](#) to consider additional studies that were completed after 2019, when the suit was filed.

For example, in late 2019, the European Parliamentary Research Service said that electromagnetic fields (EMFs) emitted by 2G, 3G, and 4G cell phones (which operate at 450 to 6,000 megahertz) are "probably carcinogenic for humans," particularly in causing gliomas, acoustic neuromas, and meningiomas (slow-growing, mostly nonmalignant brain tumors).

In 2020, Yoon-Jung Choi and Joel Moskowitz (the lead authors) and three other scientists reviewed 46 "case-controlled studies" and published their findings in "Cellular Phone Use and Risk of Tumors: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," in the November *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Moskowitz says, "This study updated our earlier analysis published in 2009." Evidence from the new study, he says, links cell phone use to increased tumor risk. The researchers' numbers are compelling: 1,000 or more hours of cell phone use, or about 17 minutes a day over 10 years, was associated with a statistically significant 60 percent increase in brain tumor risk.

Also in 2020, Devra Davis (an epidemiologist and co-founder of the Environmental Health Trust), Aaron Pilarcik (a biophysicist at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute), and Anthony Miller (an epidemiologist specializing in cancer etiology and

an adviser to the World Health Organization) reviewed data on colon and rectal cancer from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. SEER Program at the National Cancer Institute, and the Iranian National Cancer Registry. They found that the colon cancer risk for adults born in the 1990s had doubled and the rectal cancer risk had increased fourfold by the time they were 24 years old—when compared to those born 60 years ago. They hypothesized that cell phone radiation could play a role in the increased risk and recommended the FCC set limits to reduce the exposure. [Their study](#), “Increased Generational Risk of Colon and Rectal Cancer in Recent Birth Cohorts Under Age 40—the Hypothetical Role of Radiofrequency Radiation from Cell Phones,” was published in the *Annals of Gastroenterology and Digestive Disorders*.

In 2020, Henry Lai (a retired University of Washington scientist) reviewed the research on genetic effects and found that exposure to RFR can break DNA strands and affect the central nervous system. The review, “Genetic Effects of Non-Ionizing Electromagnetic Fields” was published in the December 2020 issue of *Electromagnetic Biology and Medicine*.

In 2021, Henry Lai, with Albert Manville (a biologist formerly at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and Blake Levitt (an environmental journalist), studied the effects of cell phone towers in various countries, comparing data from the 1980s to the present. They found that the toxic effects of EMFs on cells and genes had altered “the wildlife’s orientation and migration patterns, their ability to find food, mate, reproduce, build nests and dens, and maintain and defend their territory.” Yet the FCC has still set no standards for long-term, low-level EMF exposure on wildlife. The scientists’ three-part research was published in *Reviews on Environmental Health*, “Effects of Non-Ionizing Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) on Flora and Fauna.”

Also in 2021, the journal *Andrologia* published a [study](#) by Iranian scientists who found DNA fragmentation in sperm and recommended that men keep cell phones “away from the pelvis as much as possible.”

Further, from 2015 to the present, the French government has tested the radiation from cell phones when people hold them next to their bodies. Their findings are dramatic: They reported exposures to RFR up to 11 times higher than those approved in FCC guidelines. Thus, the government passed a ministerial order in 2019 urging the public to limit children’s cell phone use and “keep the phones away from the belly of pregnant women and the lower abdomen of adolescents.”

Moreover, the National Institutes of Health and the American Cancer Society funded a study in 2019 and 2020 at Yale University that found increased [thyroid cancer](#) among heavy cell phone users.

The accompanying table enumerates many of the ways that doctors and vigilant public jurisdictions have identified to help people reduce the health risks that could be associated with exposure to RFR and cell phone radiation emissions.

The EHT’s Scarato reminds readers concerned about RFR emissions exposure to “contact their senators and representatives to raise the issues with the committees.” In the Senate, the

[Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation](#), along with its [Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband](#) oversees the FCC. In the House, the FCC reports to the [Energy and Commerce Committee](#) and its [Communications and Technology Subcommittee](#). Public pressure on the members of these committees will help to prod the FCC to review the research and respond to the ruling of the Court of Appeals. ■

Barbara Koepfel is a Washington, D.C.-based investigative reporter who covers social, economic, political, and foreign policy issues.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM WIRELESS RADIATION

The California Department of Public Health recommends these precautions:

- Use headsets—not ear buds—but remove them when not talking, since even headsets release small amounts of radiation when not in use.
- Text instead of talk.
- Carry phones away from your body in backpacks, tote bags, handbags, and briefcases.
- Keep phones away from your head when streaming.
- Download movies instead of streaming them.
- Don’t use cell phones when reception is poor and they show just one or two bars—in subways, cars, basements, or rural areas. Under such circumstances cell phones often need vastly more energy to communicate with cell towers and other phones, and radiation levels intensify.
- Men should not carry phones in pants’ pockets. Cleveland Clinic Center for Male Fertility researchers found this weakened and reduced sperm, which can cause infertility.

Go to page 8 for more information

The Debate Over Interest Rate Hikes

THE UNFOLDING WAR ON THE RUSSIAN BORDER. LINGERING Covid disruptions. Runaway inflation. The news service *Axios* reports that when U.S. corporate leaders look ahead at 2022, they see minefields everywhere. “Uncertainty, which CEOs dread, abounds. Supply-chain snarls, labor shortages, inflation, rising pay and soaring demands for new benefits and work flexibility are driving up costs and complexity.”

There are other factors, from the CEO perspective. Many individuals are starting their own small businesses. Large numbers of employees are resigning, forcing companies to increase wages and benefits to attract replacements.

Soaring costs have inflicted pain. Morgan Stanley Wealth Management released a revealing data point recently—the year-over-year change in costs for S&P 500 companies is 13.4 percent, the highest it’s been in a decade.

There’ll be changes in the workplace to manage, too. Childcare centers are struggling to find trained staff, and with vaccine and mask mandates still in flux, firms will have to develop new models for managing employees who work from home.

Help, in the view of many business leaders, is on the way, as the monetarists at the Federal Reserve have indicated they will embark on a series of interest rate hikes meant to tame inflation as early as this coming March.

But while everyone wants to slow inflation, not everyone thinks that raising rates—and running the real risk of forcing the economy into recession—is the best way to combat the forces that are driving up costs and prices.

“A large across-the-board increase in interest rates is a cure worse than the disease,” Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate in economics and Columbia University professor, wrote recently in *Project Syndicate*. “We should not attack a supply-side problem by lowering demand and increasing unemployment. That might dampen inflation if it is taken far enough, but it will also ruin people’s lives.”

Nor is there agreement on the actual source of the problem. The economists at the Groundwork Collaborative see corporations more as the perpetrators than the victims of current economic distress. Corporate greed, they argue, has contributed to systemic supply chain failures and price increases.

“Decades of turning over the supply chains to a handful of mega-corporations created a brittle system that was ill-equipped to handle a crisis like the pandemic—resulting in bottlenecks and shortages and ultimately pushing prices up.”

Groundwork economists see no evidence to suggest wage increases for workers are driving current price spikes. What they do observe in their findings is that the same companies that are hiding behind the pandemic and supply chain disruptions as an excuse to gouge consumers are also preventing their workers from collectively bargaining for better pay, benefits, and treatment.

Robert Reich, the former secretary of labor in the Clinton administration, agrees. He writes:

Fed policymakers are poised to raise interest rates at their March meeting and then continue raising them, in order to slow the economy. They fear that a labor shortage is pushing up wages, which in turn are pushing up prices.

It’s a huge mistake. Higher interest rates will harm millions of workers who will be involuntarily drafted into the inflation fight by losing jobs or long-overdue pay raises. There’s no “labor shortage” pushing up wages. There’s a shortage of good jobs paying adequate wages to support working families. Raising interest rates will worsen this shortage.

Slowing the economy won’t remedy either of the two real causes of today’s inflation—continuing worldwide bottlenecks in the supply of goods, and the ease with which big corporations (with record profits) are passing these costs to customers in higher prices.

Even Wall Street economists share Reich’s concerns. Dick Bove, the chief financial strategist at Odeon Capital Group and a regular contributor to Fox Business News, says the Fed is in a box. According to Bove, if it raises rates too sharply, the corresponding increase in the government’s cost of service on the growing debt could become unmanageable—or would at least place unwelcome pressure on government spending priorities. In Bove’s view, Powell has just been jawboning, hoping that by talking about shock therapy he’ll encourage the rates to rise at a more moderate pace by themselves, while everyone waits to see if the supply chain issues can be addressed and other inflationary pressures ease.

Stiglitz feels there are reasons for optimism that these goals can be achieved. He notes that December’s inflation numbers were half those of October. He sees the huge jump in energy costs as part of the pain inherent in the transition underway away from fossil fuels (as producers of traditional sources of energy are “reaping whatever returns they still can”). And he sees the rise in the price of used and new cars as a transitory factor.

Stiglitz’s prescriptions? Targeted structural and fiscal policies aimed at unblocking supply bottlenecks and helping people confront today’s realities. Indexed food stamps and fuel subsidies for the needy, and a one-time “inflation adjustment” tax cut for lower- and middle-income households, which could be financed by “taxing the monopoly rents of the oil, technology, pharmaceutical, and other corporate giants that made a killing from the crisis.”

Left unsaid are the election-year pressures to bring prices down and the opportunism that inevitably accompanies the partisan debate over pocketbook issues. The Fed meets on March 15 to 16, and we’ll find out whether the economy is on track to steer itself or if the central bank feels the need to take the wheel, and if so with how strong a grip. ■

—The Editors

Republican Tax Cuts are Harmful to the Economy

By Steven Pressman

SINCE THE 1980S, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS HAD ONE objective—slashing taxes on the wealthy and on large corporations. This tax cut mania began with President Reagan. It continued unabated with the presidencies of Bush 43 and Trump.

Despite Republican promises that their tax cuts would promote more rapid economic growth, nothing has been further from the truth. U.S. economic growth has fallen by half since 1980. It averaged 4 percent from the 1950s through the 1970s but only 2 percent since then. Furthermore, after 1980 most income gains stemming from economic growth have gone to the top 1 percent. Accounting for inflation, wages and median household incomes in the United States have been nearly flat, while CEO pay has soared from 30 times average wages in the 1970s to 350 times average wages in 2020. Republican tax cuts have not trickled down to most Americans.

And these tax cuts have had negative repercussions. Federal government debt in the United States increased from 30 percent of U.S. gross domestic product in the late 1970s to more than 100 percent today. Lower tax revenues, not increased spending, are responsible for this; in fact, government spending has remained steady at around 20 percent of U.S. GDP since 1980. Like a household that loses income while keeping its spending constant, the government has had to borrow to make ends meet. The fiscal history of the past four decades is clear. When Republicans control the levers of power, the government gives large tax cuts to the wealthy and then borrows back this money from them to pay for the tax cuts. In no sane economic world does this make sense.

There is another downside to giving the wealthy large tax cuts. Without tax revenue, it is hard for the government to provide basic services to its citizens, invest in the future of the nation through infrastructure and education, or maintain adequate social insurance programs. And with climate change becoming a climate crisis, more government spending is needed to deal with the consequences and prevent more damage in the future.

Politically it's hard to cut spending programs that substantially benefit most Americans, which is one reason federal government spending has remained a constant share of GDP. But this hasn't stopped Republicans from trying to downsize government to deal with large government debt created by their tax cuts. At times they have succeeded. Social safety nets have been cut, leading to

more homelessness and more people going to food pantries. Government infrastructure spending has been cut, leading to roads and bridges that are dangerous to drive across. Reduced government aid to colleges and universities led to increased tuition and fees, and students graduating with greater debt.

Government spending has remained a constant fraction of GDP because of some spending increases. Democrats created a few new programs, such as Obamacare. And while opposed to spending that helps the poor and middle class, Republicans support spending that benefits the well-to-do, such as export promotion programs, government grants and subsidies to corporations, and other forms of corporate welfare. Last, but not least, additional government borrowing leads to rising interest rates on government debt, money which again goes to the rich.

Why haven't Republicans suffered any political consequences from this?



Photo by Eric Crama

low-paying, benefit-free sources of employment. And they attack government spending as the cause of greater government debt, when the real problem is falling tax revenues as a fraction of U.S. GDP due to Republican tax cuts.

Second, a favorite Republican ploy is to call government spending programs “socialist,” knowing that most Americans have a negative view of socialism. People associate it with Soviet communism and the loss of individual freedom.

Republicans attacked FDR in 1934 when he proposed a government program that would provide retirement benefits to working Americans 65 and older in order to help those unable to save enough for retirement. They called the Social Security Act a socialist program, although the government would own no firms and produce little. Social Security mainly uses tax revenues from current workers to pay benefits to retirees. The only part of Social Security that is run and controlled by government is the administrative apparatus.

Despite Republican attempts to dismantle the program (the last by George W. Bush after his 2004 reelection), Social Security

has sharply reduced poverty among the elderly (see my piece [“Under Cover of Covid, Republicans Will Come After Social Security as They Have Done Repeatedly Before”](#) in the July-August 2020 issue of *The Washington Spectator*). Everyone who works and pays Social Security taxes for at least 10 years can collect benefits—nearly 100 percent of Americans reaching age 62. With lower administrative costs than private pension plans, Social Security is able to pay more to retirees than a similar national retirement system that is privately managed. On top of this, the government guarantees monthly Social Security benefits. Private plans cannot do this.

In 1945, Republicans attacked President Truman’s national health insurance proposal as a socialist plot. They attacked LBJ’s Medicare and Medicare programs in 1965 and, more recently, Obamacare, as socialized medicine. This is another Republican lie. Medicine has not been socialized. The government funds health insurance through Medicare and Medicaid because the for-profit carriers in the private sector argue they cannot make enough money on their own insuring the elderly or those with low incomes.

Under Obamacare, the government subsidizes health insurance, making it affordable to people not receiving health insurance at work. Still, even as the program has gained in popularity (as measured by increasing levels of public participation), Republicans in Congress have attempted to repeal, modify, or otherwise curb Obamacare at least 70 times since its inception as law on March 23, 2010, promising to replace it with something better. No Republican has suggested what this replacement would look like.

Elsewhere in the developed world, health insurance is provided primarily by the government. In many countries, governments also provide health care, by owning hospitals and employing care providers. When it comes to life expectancy, infant mortality rates, and other key health indicators, the U.S. system performs poorly compared to nations with more socialized medicine. And other nations do this while spending a great deal less per person than the United States on health care. They also manage to do this without forcing people to take on debt or to declare bankruptcy as a result of their medical bills.

Republican scare tactics today focus on President Biden’s Build Back Better plan. One part of the plan is a refundable child tax credit (see my piece [“Child Allowances: a Simple Way to Help Families With Children”](#) in the May-June 2021 issue of *The Washington Spectator*), which provides cash benefits to households with children. Firms won’t provide extra pay to employees with dependent children because it would raise their costs and make them noncompetitive. This is why every developed nation other than the United States provides cash benefits to households with children. The Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University estimates that monthly payments to households in 2021 reduced child poverty 26 percent, bringing 3.4 million children out of poverty. Build Back Better seeks to extend this one additional year. The child tax credit will pay for itself in the

When Republicans control the levers of power, the government gives large tax cuts to the wealthy and then borrows back this money from them to pay for the tax cuts. In no sane economic world does this make sense.

long run because of the additional future tax revenues and the reduced social spending that accrue from having fewer people grow up in poverty. Although the child tax credit is an investment in our nation’s future, every Senate Republican opposes it. Many call it a pathway to socialism. “Tax cuts for the rich good, tax cuts for everyone else bad” seems to be the Republican motto.

With critical elections later this year and in 2024, Democrats need a strategy to deal with Republican fearmongering and lies. President Truman had a simple one—point out that Republicans call anything “socialist” that helps ordinary people. I would add

the following. Point out that Republican tax cuts for the rich have been an abysmal failure for the U.S. economy and have done almost nothing for average Americans. They have increased public debt, led to greater inequality, and provided an excuse to

try to cut government spending that benefits most Americans. A different approach is needed. If Democrats want to be elected or reelected, if they want to maintain political power, they need to emphasize that their policy agenda—retirement insurance, health insurance, refundable child tax credits, etc.—aids average Americans. Lies can be countered with truth. ■

Steven Pressman is professor emeritus of economics and finance at Monmouth University and author of Fifty Major Economists, 3rd edition (Routledge, 2013).

Candidates MIA in Turkish Elections

By Alexandra de Cramer

WHEN TURKEY’S POLITICAL ELITE SQUARE OFF NEXT YEAR in the country’s general election, one element of the democratic process is almost certain to be absent: political debates. The televised airing of ideas and differences, ubiquitous in many Western democracies, has not been a feature of Turkish politics since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was first elected prime minister in 2002.

In Erdoğan’s “New Turkey,” the lack of political debating has absolved leaders from working for people’s votes and disenfranchised an already sceptical electorate. Put another way, the longer politicians stay away from the lectern, the shallower Turkey’s democracy becomes.

The spectator sport known as political debating first appeared on Turkish television in 1983. At the time, millions were drawn to their screens to watch as politicians defined and defended party platforms. The prime-time tradition of watching public servants duel with words got so popular that it trickled down from national politics to the local level.

As elsewhere, debates have made (or destroyed) Turkish politicians' careers. Erdoğan himself rose to national prominence on the debate stage. In the 2002 campaign for prime minister, a prime-time debate on TV propelled the then-Istanbul mayor and Justice and Development Party (AKP) chairman to the country's highest office, as Erdoğan bested the Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Deniz Baykal.

In 2007 a debate sank the aspirations of AKP vice chairman Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, who resigned from his post two months after his 95-minute debate with CHP parliament member Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Kılıçdaroğlu, who was later made chairman of CHP after trouncing Ankara Mayor Melih Gökçek in another debate, accused Firat of corruption. It was political theater at its most informative and entertaining.

Since then, it has been quiet at the podium. Despite several invitations from challengers, Erdoğan, a skilled orator, has stayed away from the debate stage. Former editor-in-chief of *Hürriyet Daily News*—Murat Yetkin—says Erdoğan even banned other AKP members from appearing in televised debates themselves. The prohibition on debates is yet another erosion of Turkey's democratic freedoms and further evidence of Erdoğan's political consolidation.

The ban on politicians debating on screen is especially domineering in Turkey, where television is the main source of information and news. For instance, KONDA, an Istanbul-based polling company, found that 67 percent of Turks first learned about the 2016 coup attempt from television. Indeed, Turks spend most of their free time watching TV. A 2020 report from the TV Audience Research Company estimated that Turks spend four hours and 33 minutes a day watching television. Of course, not everyone is tuned into news 24/7, but the amount of time spent watching television demonstrates how central the small screen is in most households.

And yet news coverage in Turkey is decidedly partisan. İlhan Tasci, the CHP party representative on Turkey's broadcasting watchdog, the Radio and Television Supreme Council, exposed the fact that opposition parties get almost no airtime. During the 2018 election campaign, which ran from April 17 to May 6, public broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television Company gave no airtime to the Kurdish-linked People's Democratic Party (HDP), three hours and four minutes to the CHP, and 36 hours to AKP.

Compounding these concerns, half of all eligible voters for the upcoming general election will have little or no memory of ever seeing a televised political debate. Members of Generation Z, some five million people born after 1997, 16 percent of the electorate, will cast their first vote in a national election next year,

while Millennials, born after 1981, make up 33 percent.

The last time Turkey's voters saw anything resembling a political debate was in 2019, a staid and stiff on-screen meeting between AKP's Binali Yıldırım and CHP's Ekrem İmamoğlu campaigning to be the mayor of Istanbul. Neither man engaged directly with the other. There was no hard talk, no substance, nothing that would have influenced the outcome of the mayoral election.

Given this two-decade decline in Turkey's debate scene and evidence from other countries that such events have little impact on election outcomes, it is worth asking whether the demise of Turkey's on-screen political sparring even matters. Worth asking, but hardly worth answering.

Put simply, the disappearance of transparent political discourse has excluded entire generations of voters from the political process and prevented young people from fully grasping their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Millions of voters have

come of age never witnessing a politician work for their vote or being publicly called out for their wrongdoings. Subconsciously, Turkey's young voters have been trained not to expect politicians to deliver on their promises, or even to make them.

Turkey's lack of political *liyakat* (competence) and the eradication of public accountability are perhaps the biggest shifts in the country's political landscape since AKP came to power. Voters have grown accustomed to Turkish politicians avoiding public scrutiny

or engaging with the opposition. Today in Turkey, politics are a black box.

Unfortunately, what that has produced is a monolithic narrative empowering a single opinion at the expense of many voices. Erdoğan's position on public debates is a key cause of this trend. As candidates get ready to do battle in next year's general election, voters will need to cast their ballots based on what is said in public but, even more importantly, on what is not. ■



Photo by Thomas Koch

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(Continued from page 3)

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM WIRELESS RADIATION

Countries must adopt tough laws

- Belgium and France banned companies from designing phones to appeal to children.
- Israel and Cyprus banned Wi-Fi in day care centers and kindergartens, requiring connections be wired. Israel limited Wi-Fi use in first and second grades to three hours a week.
- France ordered cities to map the locations of antennae, measure their radiation levels, and tell the public. Also, it banned ads showing people holding phones next to their heads and ordered companies to list phones' exposure levels. If they don't, they can be fined up to 75,000 euros.
- India ordered companies to remove towers located near hospitals and schools.
- Israel ordered companies to list phones' radiation levels.
- Geneva (Switzerland) placed a moratorium on the rollout of 5G.

Scientists also recommend these steps:

- Use corded landlines at home, but put satellite or cordless handsets on speakerphone, since they emit even more radiation than cell phones.
- Push for laws to protect children.
- Get states to create expert commissions to study radiation emissions' effects. New Hampshire's commission recommended that towers and antennae be placed farther from schools and homes.