

# How Gülen Triumphed

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**Abstract:** Over half a million people voted in our poll. But of the many voting campaigns mounted, only one had a decisive impact. The efficiency and discipline of the Fethullah is legendary—so in retrospect, for them, a poll like ours was simple to hijack.

**Key words:** Gülen; Triumphed

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Discuss the intellectuals poll at First Drafts, Prospect 's blog.

When Prospect and Foreign Policy drew up our list of the world's top 100 public intellectuals a few weeks ago, none of us expected a Turkish Sufi cleric, barely known in the west, to sweep to victory. Nor did we expect every name in the top ten would be from a Muslim background. (Noam Chomsky, who won the last poll in 2005, led the west in 11th place this time.)

The early running this year was made by Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian novelist, and Garry Kasparov, the chess grandmaster turned anti-Putin dissident. At one point Al Gore was on course to add the top intellectual gong to his Nobel peace prize and Oscar. But then, about a week into the process, Fethullah Gülen rocketed to the top of the list overnight—and stayed there. Something had clearly happened: votes were pouring in for Gülen at a staggering rate, and continued to do so for the duration of the poll. Initially we were convinced that a tech-savvy member of the Fethullah?i—the collective noun for Gülen's millions of worldwide followers—had hacked into the system and set about auto-voting for his hero. We would identify the culprit, discount his votes, normal business would be resumed and Chomsky would grind his way to another victory.

The truth turned out to be more interesting. On 1st May, Zaman—the highest-selling newspaper in Turkey, with a circulation of over 700,000 and a string of international editions—ran a story on its front page alerting its readership to the appearance of Gülen on the Prospect/FP list, and to the fact that we were inviting people to vote. Zaman is known to be close to the Gülen movement, and over the coming

weeks the paper made regular reference to the cleric's appearance on our list. The poll was also noted in other Turkish newspapers, as well as on every single Gülen website, official and unofficial, we were able to find.

The efficiency and discipline of the Fethullahi is legendary—so in retrospect, for them, a poll like ours was simple to hijack. The temptation for Gülen's followers to elevate their man to the top of a poll organised by two influential western magazines will have been a strong one. In one respect, then, Gülen's crushing win tells us little about what the world thinks about its intellectuals; it merely exhibits the organisational ability of one movement's followers. On the other hand, perhaps we can see through Gülen's victory the emergence of a new kind of intellectual—one whose influence is expressed through a personal network, aided by the internet, rather than publications or institutions. The public intellectual template described by Christopher Hitchens in his article accompanying our list—"self-starting independents or editors of 'minority-of-one'-type magazines"—or, in Edward Skidelsky's formulation (Letters, Prospect June 2008), "someone whose claim to attention rests... on a mastery of words and ideas," may in a generation's time look rather old-fashioned. (Andrew Keen will be exploring this point in the next issue of Prospect.)

But there was probably also a specifically Turkish effect at play. When Time asked its readers to vote online for their person of the century in 1999, the blitz of support for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was so overwhelming that at one point he was leading Bob Dylan in the "artist and entertainer" category. And in our poll, there were other beneficiaries from the Turkey effect: Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish novelist and Nobel literature laureate, and Bernard Lewis, the British historian who made his name researching the Ottoman empire, both performed strongly, finishing fourth and 13th respectively. Neither is likely to have been an appealing figure to the Fethullah?i.

What about the rest of the top ten? We allowed voters to select five names, and the fact that most Gülen supporters would have been Muslims probably pulled up Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Amr Khaled—who had a Facebook group set up to urge his fans to vote for him—Abdolkarim Soroush and Tariq Ramadan, all well-known religious figures, of various stripes, in the Islamic world. Muhammad Yunus, Shirin Ebadi and Aitzaz Ahsan are Muslims who have made their names as campaigners in Muslim countries—the first two are Nobel peace laureates, the third in the vanguard of the anti-Musharraf protests that shook Pakistan last year. Mahmood Mamdani, a US-based political and postcolonialist theorist, is perhaps the odd one out, but he has a Muslim background (he was born in Uganda to an Indian family) and has

spoken out forcefully against US foreign policy.

This “Muslim effect” seems to reflect the power of connectivity in the Muslim world, especially its more liberal parts. You had to have access to the internet to be able to vote in the poll, of course, but, more to the point, email and websites allow news to spread and campaigns to be mounted within hours. Turkey now boasts almost 3m Facebook users, more than any country apart from the US, Britain and Canada. Farsi, the most widely spoken language in Iran, is by some counts the fourth most popular language in the world for blogs.

Not every attempt to influence the poll came off. Press stories featuring specific candidates in Indonesia, Canada, India and Spain had little impact. One of our candidates, Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev, was gracious enough to alert us to the fact that one of his country’s top newspapers was encouraging readers to support him, and to urge us to discount any votes for him from Bulgarian email addresses. But the campaign failed to rouse the Bulgarians.

The dog that didn’t bark this time was China—the five Chinese names on our list ended up mid-tablers at best. Yet this performance was much stronger than in 2005. At first the Chinese were on course to do even worse this time, but in the last week of voting, all five names started to move rapidly up the table—perhaps word of the poll had belatedly reached a department of the ministry of information. Next time, don’t be surprised to see the Chinese walk the poll—a campaign to rouse a few million Sufis will pale against the might of the Chinese information machine.

## 葛兰是如何夺冠的？

汤姆·纳特尔

吴万伟 译

**摘要：**在许多投票活动中，只有一个具有决定性的影响。葛兰信徒的效率和纪律是神奇的，现在看来，对他们来说，我们这样的排行榜很容易被劫持。

**关键词：**葛兰；夺冠

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