

Article

Islamist Populist Nation-Building: Gradual, Ad Hoc Islamisation of the Secular Education System in Turkey

Ihsan Yilmaz 

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne 3217, Australia; ihsan.yilmaz@deakin.edu.au

Abstract: The founders of the secular Turkish Republic, the Kemalists used secular nationalist education to build a secular Turkish nation and to create their own version of modern pro-Western secular Turkish citizens. This paper argues that Turkey's current ruling party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has been using the same system of education to create its own desired citizens with Islamist Populist ideals. This has been done without changing the secular principles of the constitution and laws on national education since there are several constraints that would prevent AKP to have open and declared pro-Sharia changes to the law. Thus, unlike many other Islamists in the other parts of the world, the paper shows that the AKP has chosen to undermine the secularity of the system, constitution, and law in an ad hoc, gradual and undeclared fashion. The paper concludes by noting that no matter the change in political actors and their ideologies, education is monopolized by the state for political purposes.

Keywords: religion; Islam; Islamism; populism; education; jihad; nation-building; Turkey; AKP; Erdogan



Citation: Yilmaz, Ihsan. 2022.

Islamist Populist Nation-Building: Gradual, Ad Hoc Islamisation of the Secular Education System in Turkey. *Religions* 13: 814. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090814>

Academic Editors: Naser Ghobadzadeh and Ali Akbar

Received: 17 July 2022

Accepted: 29 August 2022

Published: 31 August 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The education system is secular and has long been highly centralized in the Republic of Turkey (Yilmaz 2014). The Kemalists relied heavily on secular nationalist education to create their own version of modern pro-Western secular homogenous Turkish nation (Yilmaz 2005, 2016). This identity was disconnected from Ottoman history and religion, and thus the European-inspired Kemalist education system attempted to fashion young Turkish people into strong supporters of the nationalist and secular regime, and to view the Ottoman past and Islam as retrograde forces or irrelevant.

The AKP has used the same Kemalist system of education to propagate its own ideals, though with an entirely different goal in mind. While the Kemalists used the education system to secularize and westernize the young people of Turkey, the Erdoganists instrumentalized the same system to Islamize them (Yilmaz 2018). All this has been done without changing the secular principles of the constitution and laws on national education since there are several constraints that would prevent the AKP from having open and declared pro-Sharia changes to the law. Thus, unlike many other Islamists in the other parts of the world, it has chosen to undermine the secularity of the system, constitution, and law in an ad hoc, gradual and undeclared fashion (Yilmaz 2022). The educational system, national curriculum and schools are the most manifest grounds of this phenomenon, as education is a crucial component of the AKP project of Islamization of the secular Turkey. By exposing students to conservative religious themes in schools, the AKP have tried to cement Islamist ideas in children, with the ultimate aim of creating a 'pious generation' that will devote themselves to building an Islamic society.

The paper goes beyond AKP policies and funding preferences to explore the theoretical underpinning of the education system, which under AKP rule is undergoing indigenization and nationalization. This change is then explored in the context of decreasing government

support for secular education in general, and increasing government support for Islamism and Islamic studies, which have been brought to the forefront in the schooling systems.

2. Methodology

Even though there were signs of the AKP's authoritarianism in its second term, it is usually agreed that after it managed to change the constitution in 2010 to get rid of Kemalist tutelage and its third general election victory in 2011, the AKP indisputably took an authoritarian populist turn and the opposition has intensified its claims that the party has been trying to transform Turkey's secular system (Yilmaz and Albayrak 2022). Thus, to determine the extent to which the AKP has changed the education system towards an Islamist Populist direction, this study scanned reforms that have been made in the education system of the country since 2011. The legislative activities for these reforms, the AKP leaders' declarations and statements in favor of these changes, the media reports on these changes, academic reports on the issue, statistical figures, increasing funding for religious schools vis-à-vis the comparative neglect of secular schools in the last decade, increasing religious content versus decreasing secular content in the curriculum, religious groups' increasing activity in education, and the evidence provided by civil society groups and the opposition figures on Islamisation were systematically analyzed. Changes towards Islamisation in education are presented in the paper.

3. Education Reform and the Erosion of Secular Education

After its third general election victory in 2011 and its authoritarian populist turn (Yilmaz et al. 2022; Yilmaz and Shipoli 2022), the AKP started to take bold steps in restructuring the education system. Turkey's education system had, since the 28 February 1997, military coup, which removed Islamic parties from power, been shaped according to priorities and sensitivities of the secular ruling elite. Before 28 February, secular education was compulsory for only 5 years at the primary level. Following this period of compulsory state-supervised education, parents were free to choose to send their children to either a secular school which focused on academic education, or a vocational school. However, among the vocational schools available were the Imam Hatip middle schools, which taught religious courses in their curriculum. Parents, therefore, were able to send their children to a religious middle school if they wished. However, following the 28 February coup and the subsequent secularist crackdown on Islamism, an extra three years of compulsory education were introduced, and all vocational middle schools were shut down. While the change was promoted as an extension of compulsory education, the new system crafted by secularists clearly targeted the Imam Hatip middle schools and was designed to close them down (Nor and Ibrahim 2020, p. 118). This system remained untouched until the beginning of the third term of the AKP, beginning in 2011. The party's third election victory, which unequivocally vindicated the party, gave the AKP the confidence to take bolder steps towards ending secular control over Turkey's education system. On 30 March 2012, the AKP led government passed the "Primary Education Law no 6278", which altered the education system, requiring students to attend 4 years of primary, 4 years of secondary, and 4 years of high school. (Gün and Baskan 2014, p. 230). Facing mounting criticism from the secular opposition, the AKP framed the new law as an attempt to encourage vocational training and to provide families with greater choice. Nevertheless, it has become obvious that the major goal of the government in changing the system was to increase religious courses and empower Imam Hatip Schools, which were considered to be the "backyard" of the National Outlook movement.

Having put the law into practice, the government immediately opened 1099 Imam Hatip Middle Schools, whose number was only 601 in 1998 (Gün and Baskan 2014, p. 233). However, no new vocational middle schools were opened. The Ministry of National Education also accepted that opening vocational middle schools other than Imam Hatips was not on its agenda (Gün and Baskan 2014, p. 231). In a 2015 speech, Erdoğan himself

boasted that “since my government came to power in 2002, the number of ‘imam school’ students had risen sharply from mere 60,000 to 1.2 million” (AA 2015).

Many secularist critics believe that the education reforms were created to strengthen Imam Hatip schools in the national education system and make them superior to the secular system. Therefore, the backbone of the reform was to change a continuous 8-years education system to allow the transfer of graduates of primary school more easily into Imam Hatip schools.

4. Increasing Investment on Imam Hatip Schools

The Imam-Hatip Schools have always been controversial in secular Turkey. These schools were first opened in 1924 under the Law of *Tevhid-i Tedrisat* (Law of Unification of Educational Instruction) and were designed to replace madrasas as the chief site of religious training. However, they were closed in 1929 due to a shortage of students, largely because Islamic preaching was at the time not particularly lucrative, but also due to constraints on entry to university education (Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan 2017, p. 281). They remained closed until 1951 when the Justice Party, which came to power with the support of conservative voters, reopened them throughout major cities at the middle school and high school levels. As of 1970, the number of the Imam-Hatip schools reached 72. Under the Fundamental Law of National Education (*Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu*) the Imam Hatip Schools were given a new status as Imam Hatip High Schools, and graduates were granted the opportunity to enroll in the social sciences departments of universities, just like the graduates of secular high schools. The partnership of the Islamist National Salvation Party (Milli Nizam Partisi) in three successive coalition governments in 1970s, and the revival of Islamist movements, increased the interest in these schools, and by 1980 their number reached 374 (Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan 2017, p. 282). Since the reopening of the Imam-Hatip Schools, their mission has also changed fundamentally from institutions that train religious officers, to providing religious courses along with scientific education. Thus, students at these schools often received religious education but didn't attend the faculty of theology and become religious officers. The increasing popularity of Imam Hatip schools in the 1980s and 1990s, and their graduates growing power in Turkish society and politics, changed secularists' attitude towards these schools. (Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan 2017, p. 283). While the secularists came to view these schools as the backyard of the National Outlook Movement, and therefore worried about their role in Islamizing Turkey, conservatives and Islamists continued to argue for their essential role in the education system, stressing the rising public demand for religious education. The postmodern coup on 28 February 1997, aimed at curtailing the influence of Imam-Hatip Schools and returning them to their previous mission of training religious preachers. The new law therefore closed Imam-Hatip Middle Schools, substantially reducing the chances of their graduates entering faculties other than theology at Turkey's universities. These changes immediately decreased the number of enrolments in the Imam-Hatip High Schools. However, when the AKP took power in 2002, perceptions of Imam Hatip schools once again started to turn positive, and between 2003 and 2012 the number of students at these schools increased two-fold, although the overall number of Imam Hatip schools remained the same (Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan 2017, p. 283). Furthermore, the decision of the Council of Higher Education in 2009 to remove disadvantages against graduates of the Imam Hatip schools, which had prevented many from enrolling in universities, made a substantial contribution to the increasing interest in these schools.

The Imam Hatip schools made a resounding comeback after the educational reform of 2012. The AKP's “Primary Education Law” not only opened the way for building new Imam Hatips at the middle school level, but also initiated a period in which these schools systematically promoted and enjoyed positive discrimination in line with the agenda of the ruling party. Thus, the reopening of the Imam Hatip Schools has been interpreted as the realization of Erdoğan's promise to raise pious generation. In response to the leader of an opposition party that accused Erdoğan of exploiting religion for political gain, Erdoğan

replied “We will raise a pious generation. Do you expect a party with a conservative democratic identity to raise an atheist youth?” (Hurriyet 2012). As Coşkun and Şentürk (2012, p. 170) stated:

“[The AKP] It considers the IHSs as an instrument for educating what Antonio Gramsci calls “organic intellectuals”, whereas previous right-wing populist parties perceived the IHSs as a tool for populist policies. Thus, these schools have become an instrument for creating a *cemaat* that is loyal to the AKP’s rule. IHS graduates will be the organic intellectuals of the *cemaat*, who harmonize modern urban life with an Islamist and conservative lifestyle.”

The AKP has indeed given the Imam Hatips a special mission. As Former Minister of Education Ismet Yılmaz once said:

“Now Imam Hatip has a meaning. Probably Mr. President has also made contribution to that . . . Those who are educated in these schools have a different vision. That vision bestows additional responsibility upon us. Those educated at these schools are committed to their national and moral values; love their county, work for their nation, consider a day without any progress a loss and work hard with this understanding to become successful.”. (İleri Haber 2018a)

The immediate result of the new ‘4+4+4’ schooling system was the mushrooming growth of Imam Hatip middle schools and high schools. The middle schools were divided into two groups: schools opened in new premises, and those opened within the premises of existing Imam Hatip High Schools. When the new law entered into force, 1099 Imam Hatip middle schools were immediately opened and the number of Imam Hatip High Schools jumped from 537 to 708, and 94,467 and 380,771 students enrolled in these schools respectively. Since then, the number of these schools increased steadily reaching, 3535 and 1583 respectively, with a total number of 1.3 million students attending these schools as of 2019 (T24 2019).

The AKP made a special effort to increase the number of Imam Hatip schools, either by incentivising the creation of these schools, or by compelling families to register their children in them. The elimination of the points system, which put the graduates of Imam Hatip High Schools in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers from the secular high schools, was the most important factor behind the growth of these schools. However, another important factor was the privileged position given to the schools by the Erdoğan government. With the transition to the new schooling system in 2012, the share of the Ministry of National Education’s budget going to Imam Hatip Schools began to gradually increase year on year. A Reuters review of the government budget and investment plans in 2018 showed that spending on Imam Hatip high schools for boys and girls aged 14 to 18 doubled to 6.57 billion liras (\$1.68 billion) in that year, which was nearly a quarter of the total secondary and high schools budget. Imam Hatip schools received 23 percent of all funding from the Ministry’s budget (double the spend per pupil at secular high schools) despite the 645,000 Imam Hatip students making up only 11 percent of the total high school population. The budget and investment plans also showed that the government planned to complete construction of 128 Imam Hatip high schools in 2018 and to build a further 50 (Butler 2018). According to “The 2019 Investment Plan of the Presidency” the government planned to build 162 Imam Hatip high schools and 151 Anatolian high schools by 2021, but only nine science-based high schools (*Fen Liseleri*), which provide the highest quality education and are highly popular among the college-bound students. For 2019, the government earmarked only 30 million Turkish Lira for these schools, while the Imam Hatip schools were again granted a hefty 640 million Turkish Lira in the budget (Çepni 2019).

The AKP government obviously invests more in Imam Hatip Schools than secular schools. Indeed, David Lepeska reported that the AKP offered many privileges to Imam Hatip Schools:

“The mothers were bothered less by the religious curriculum and taxed classroom space than by a lack of equity: every Imam Hatip student gets a tablet computer

and digital lessons (while the other secular middle school students lug around heavy textbooks); their bus to school is half-price; and their classrooms come decked out with smart boards, projection tools and better laboratory facilities". (Lepeska 2014)

In many places, due to so-called technical scarcity, children and parents have been 'automatically' forced to enroll in Imam Hatip Schools (Letsch 2015; MeForum 2017).

Even before the 4+4+4 law, the Ministry of National Education decided to close an entire category of secular public high schools which they deemed educationally inadequate and introduced an entrance exam for all high schools except the vocational high schools, which include the Imam Hatips (CDN 2015). This meant that students who do not qualify to enroll in a secular high school would have no choice but to enroll in either a vocational high school or an Imam Hatip High School. Therefore, when this new system entered into force in the 2013–2014 academic year, many high schools were converted into vocational or Imam Hatip High Schools, causing a backlash against the new system. In 2013, over 1,112,000 students took the placement test for high schools. With only 363,000 slots available, the remaining students were distributed automatically to vocational high schools, which led to the enrolment of at least 40,000 students in Imam Hatip Schools against their will (Cornell 2018). The government seemingly intended to limit the number of secular schools, building more religious institutions to channel students to these schools one way or another.

Ceylan Yeginsu, who prepared a story for the New York Times, explained how the AKP's policies force students to attend Imam Hatip Schools. She argued that families prefer secular schools; however, the centrally organized exam forces them to make a critical decision over their child's education. If their children are not very successful on the exam, they cannot go to private secular schools or secular public schools. When they want to transfer, secular schools reject them by claiming that there is a lack of vacancy. Some families even offer bribes for transferring their children to secular schools (Yeginsu 2014).

Many secular schools began to be converted into imam Hatip schools, surprising many families who wished their children to have a secular education. Parents are therefore increasingly worried that the secular schools their children attend will be transformed into Imam Hatip schools. Yeginsu reports the story of a family thus:

"In August, the Yesil Bahar Secondary School in Kadikoy, one of Istanbul's more liberal districts, was among hundreds of secular schools converted to religious ones. Parents staged protests, and the conversion was reversed. "They provide free transport and meals for these schools and tell people it's the same education with a few extra religious classes, so people are easily persuaded," said Ozden Aras, a teacher at the school who was active in the protests". (Yeginsu 2014)

The government's intentions can be terrifying for secular families. According to DW: "In Istanbul alone, 67 secular schools have been converted to Imam Hatips, many in staunchly secular parts of the city as of 2012. Ali Boga, member of parliament for the AKP reportedly said: "We will increase the number of these schools in records. We have the chance to turn all schools into Imam Hatip schools" (Jones 2012). Or as Orhan Kemal Cengiz observes, the reforms transformed "religious schools from a selective option to a central institution in the education system" (Cornell 2015).

Government officials argue that the number of the Imam Hatip schools have skyrocketed merely due to strong demand from the public. Nazif Yilmaz, Director General for Religious Teaching at the Ministry of National Education, rejected the notion that the government has opened too many Imam Hatip Schools, stressing that the portion of these schools was 9.18% before the February 28 post-modern coup, and 13.57% in 2019 (Sputnik 2019). The Minister of National Education, Ziya Selçuk, also claimed in 2019 that the Imam Hatip Schools had reached their full capacity (Evrensel 2019). However, the figures show that as the number of the Imam Hatip schools continues to increase, the number of students enrolled in these schools has been decreasing. According to the official figures of the Ministry for National Education, between 2015 and 2019 the number of Imam

Hatip High Schools increased by 43.7% but the number of their students decreased by 10% (Buyukbayrak 2021).

5. Increasing Religious Courses in the School Curriculums

Erdogan's education reforms extended beyond boosting Imam Hatip Schools. The reforms also greatly expanded the religious content of secular middle and high schools by introducing new courses to the curriculum. The history of religious courses at schools parallels that of Imam Hatips. After the foundation of the republic, religious education was regulated by the Law of *Tevhidi Tedrisat* of 1924. However, after the introduction of the principle of secularism to the constitution, religious courses were gradually removed from the curriculums after 1927 (Genç 2018, p. 4). Similar to Imam Hatip's reopening, the Justice Party re-introduced elective religious courses in 1950. Between 1950 and 1982, school practices on religious education varied, but religious courses were taught at schools beginning with an elective course in primary schools. After the military coup of 1980, religious education was made compulsory in the new constitution in a radical break from the past practices, but these reforms merely offered religious education as elective course out of the concern that compulsory religious education would clash with the principle of secularism. At the time, protecting secularism was not a primary concern, rather religious education was considered a way to de-politicize and unify the polarized nation around common values (Genç 2018, p. 5). The content of the Religious Culture and Ethics course was designed to increase harmony among Turkey's various religious sects by encompassing every sect in the country and providing students with information about religion in a more general sense (Genç 2018, p. 6). In reality, however, the Religious Culture and Ethics lessons largely focused on the Sunni version of Islam, which predominates in the Turkish society; thus, the reforms largely strengthened the identification of Sunni Islam with Turkey itself.

Religious education has always been controversial in Turkey, not just in terms of its incompatibility with the secular character of the republic, but also because the content of the religious courses promotes Sunni Islam above other religions and forms of Islamic practice, thereby estranging the Alevis, who form a sizeable portion of the Turkish population. The religious courses' textbooks only superficially and briefly refer to the Alevi sect. Technically, parents have the right to ask that their children be exempted from religion classes. But while requests from non-Muslim students are generally accepted, Alevis have not been granted the same status and flexibility. In 2008, the Turkish Council of State ruled that the current content of these courses constitute a breach of European Convention of Human Rights to which Turkey is a party, as this convention requires respect for freedom of belief (Bia Net 2008). However, in 2012 the Council of State gave a totally different verdict, overruling a lower court's decision against compulsory religious courses on the grounds that the content of the Religious Culture and Ethics doesn't focus on religious education, but on general knowledge about religion. In 2010, the Ministry of National Education revised the content of the religious courses taught at the middle schools, yet this didn't prevent the European Court of Human Rights ruling in 2014 against Turkey in a case in which 14 Turkish citizens objected to compulsory religious courses. The court suggested that the Turkish government should grant citizens the right to demand exemptions from religious courses.

Not only was the controversy on the compulsory religious courses not resolved by this ruling, but the 4+4+4 reform increased students' exposure to mandatory religious classes, as the legislation forced them to attend compulsory or elective religious courses for a straight nine years from grade four to grade 12. Needless to say, more than 95% of the material shown to students in these courses is about Sunni Islam (Lepeska 2014). The law stipulates that "Elective courses on Quran and the Life of Prophet will be offered at middle schools and high schools", but no other elective courses are mentioned (Law No. 6287 2012). All public schools, including Military High Schools, which have long been under strict secular surveillance, were obliged to offer these elective courses (Aljazeera 2012). However, people who think that religious education should be optional became increasingly concerned that even allowing elective religious classes may cause compulsion, as schools can only offer a

limited number of elective courses due to physical limitations and shortages of teachers, thereby leaving the students with no option but to elect to study religion courses (Gün and Baskan 2014, p. 231). This is, indeed, what happened after schools included religious courses in their curriculum. In 2017, a number of middle school principals reportedly made religious courses mandatory without consulting the parents of the children in a district of Izmir, a staunchly secular city in Turkey. The Izmir branch of Eğitim-Sen argued that the Directorate of National Education in Izmir asked all schools in the city to report the number of students who chose religious courses, putting pressure on school administrations to force students to choose these courses (Evrensel 2017). A similar incident occurred in Istanbul. In 2018, a middle school administration made 'elective' courses on the Quran and the Life of the Prophet mandatory for all students, claiming that all parents preferred their children to studies these subjects despite their being more than 20 other elective courses (Uygun 2017). An opposition lawmaker criticised the practice of forcing the students to choose religious courses, claiming that in Balıkesir a district governor ordered school administrations to force students to 'choose' religious courses (DuvaR 2020).

A representative of the Union of Eğitim Sen suggested that school administrations were directing students to pick these Islamic courses by limiting the number of elective courses or by arranging take-it-all religious course packages for students (T24 2016). Thus, "students could receive up to six hours of religious education per week. Meanwhile, the number of total hours of school per week was shortened, and thus, several other classes were either merged or abolished, such as that on "human rights, citizenship and democracy." In theory, these classes are elective; in practice, they may not be. School administrators decide what elective classes are to be offered" (Cornell 2015). Even non-Muslims are forced to take these 'elective' courses. For example, in Diyarbakır, a first grade student in a high school who is Christian and is exempt from Religious Culture and Ethics Course was told that he had to select one of the three Islamic elective courses (Basic Religious Information, Quran and Mohammed's Life) since no other elective course was offered, otherwise he would fail because he did not complete the required number of courses and the student was forced to select one of these courses" (Gün and Baskan 2014, p. 232).

Newsweek published a voice recording alleged to be that of Bilal Erdoğan, who is heard saying: "My concern about Imam-Hatip Schools is that we try to increase their availability". "We are at 10% (of overall pupil numbers); likely soon it will be 15%. Do we want to increase the percentage of available Imam-Hatips to 25%? Or should we, on the other hand, try to establish a strong structure for the other 85%?" Acknowledging that further increasing the number of Imam-Hatips may be "unrealistic", the voice suggests that school administrations could pressure students to take optional religious classes in order to boost Islamic content in normal schools. "If some schools manage to assign 11 h out of 40 to elective religion classes, that would be like having Imam-Hatips" (Cornell 2015).

In 2014 the AKP took another decisive step to enhance its grip on the education bureaucracy by creating legal amendments that strengthened the government's control over the appointment of school principals, who have a decisive influence on what courses schools offer (Cornell 2015). The new law, intended to punish Gulen Movement followers within the Ministry of National Education, made it possible to more easily replace senior managers within the ministry, and led to the dismissal of 8403 school principals and deputy principals nationwide, and the subsequent appointment of pro-AKP figures (CDN 2015). The *Sol* daily newspaper claimed that almost all of the new school principals appointed by the AKP were members of AKP-affiliated Education Union (Haber Sol 2017). Ahval News also published an interview with the General Head of the Eğitim-Sen Union, Feray Aytekin Aydoğan, criticising the AKP's education policies. According to Aydoğan, more than 70% of all school principals are members of Eğitim-Bir-Sen, a union affiliated with the AKP. Through these appointments, we may surmise that the AKP can ensure that the Quran and the Life of the Prophet courses are studied by most students in Turkish schools (Karatas 2018).

Diyanet also used its considerable influence to boost demand for religious courses in schools. The religious body prepared a khutbah, which was delivered in all mosques in Turkey on 2 February 2018, just as the new school semester began, recommending to families that their children should select religious courses. The Khutbah read: “As you know, Quran, the Life of Prophet and Fundamental Religious Knowledge courses are taught in our schools as elective courses. We should pay necessary attention to make sure that our children select these courses” (Ileri Haber 2018b). Diyanet was also instrumental in filling the vacancies of religious teachers at schools. In some cities, imams associated with Diyanet were tasked with teaching religious courses at schools due to shortage of religious teacher with the introduction of elective religious courses (Atalay 2017).

The pro-government daily newspaper *Akit* published a story suggesting that these Quran and the Life of the Prophet courses ought to be compulsory in all public schools. *Akit* claimed that families face difficulties in some schools as the school administrations do not allow students to take these courses. The newspaper also claimed that if these courses were to turn into compulsory courses, the necessary teaching staff could be supplied by theology faculties (Akit 2018).

Ertugrul Kurkcu, an opposition MP from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy, strongly criticized the 4+4+4 system. “The reforms are not only about integrating the Koran into the national education system”, he argued. “Rather they are designed to “integrate the Ministry of Religious Affairs, or Diyanet, into the national education system because the system now comes from a secular tradition and does not have the resources to deliver such an education” (Sabral 2012). Kurkcu estimated that the new system will require the recruitment of large numbers of new staff to teach religion courses. Thus, he rightly assumed that Diyanet will involve itself in the national education system by sending its imams, preachers and Qur’anic School Instructors into the public schools to teach and facilitate the ‘elective’ Quran and the life of the Prophet courses.

The content of the textbooks students were required to read as part of the new elective religious courses also stirred controversy. It appears that the Board of Education, which is responsible for preparing the content of the curriculum and textbooks, instrumentalised elective religious courses to impose an Islamist and conservative worldview on school children. The course books contain contentious statements regarding secularism, the family, and traditional customary societal rules. For example, some of the contentious statements in the textbook about the Life of the Prophet are as follows: “A wife’s obedience to her husband is a prayer”. The book includes further statements in the section on ‘the duties of conjoins’: ‘our religion does not leave the family without a leader. Since the men have more physical power than women, the responsibility of a family has been assigned to men in the first place’. In another section, titled ‘the types of unacceptable marriages’, it was stated that ‘those marriages with an atheist, polytheist, or apostate are forbidden’. The book also comments on the psychological aspects of marriages and articulated that ‘the marriage is a motive in human nature’. Based on this premise, the book further comments that ‘one should consider that people marry in early ages based on custom’. The book also warns the students about the process before marriage. ‘Youngsters should be careful during the acquaintance process, they should not harm the holy institution of family union, because the result of every acquaintance process may not end up with a marriage. In this regard, youngsters should not flirt during acquaintance and decision process.’ The book also articulates that cohabiting without a solemnized marriage is forbidden. ‘A person must protect his or her chastity until marriage, and one can only experience sexual intercourse after having solemnized marriage.’ The book never quotes from the Civil Code; however, it mentions religious institution of ‘mehr’, which is an Islamic element of secular marriage (Diken 2017a). The chair of Board of Education Alpaslan Durmuş said upon being asked about sex separation in education: “Allah says it, not me. Should I correct him, or what?” (Altuntaş 2017).

6. Islamisation of the Curriculum

The Ministry of National Education carried out a comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum between 2015–2017 that further eroded secular education. A study of textbooks written before and after the reforms found that the new textbooks are ‘based on political-Islamist discourse and issues related to women and gender equality have been almost totally removed’ (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2018, p. 3). Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 2019–2020 academic year, Erdoğan boasted that his party “revised the curriculum with a liberal, democratic, transparent and objective approach. We have completely cleared the textbooks of ideological elements that despise the beliefs of our nation and civilisation and cultural values of our people” (Yaman 2019).

The new education policy of the AKP prioritizes the *ummah* over equal citizens of the Republic such as Muslims, Christians, Jews and others. This is a clear indication of the AKP’s desire to return to a certain period of Ottoman rule in which Muslim subjects were regarded first class, and others were classified based on their religious orientation. In other words, the new policy aims to restore the order before the reformist Tanzimat period. As Yanarocak notes:

“The Tanzimât period (1839–1876), a period of reformation and modernization of the Ottoman Empire aimed at granting equal status to Muslims and non-Muslim subjects, was considered, until 2002, as beneficial. In recent years, however, an anti-Tanzimat undertone appeared in the school textbooks. The democratic ideal of “equal rights for all” is described in the following example as abandoning Islamic customs and traditions, leading to the empire’s collapse. Islamic solidarity supersedes ethnic consideration. All Muslims are brothers”. (Yanarocak 2016, p. 17)

The new curriculum thus endeavours to shape a Turkish-Islam consciousness among Turkish citizens in which Islam is portrayed as the only valid monotheistic religion for all humanity, while rivalry between Islam and Christianity is underscored (Yanarocak 2016, p. 12).

As corollary, an Islamic discourse which declares Western civilization antithetical to Islam has been spread throughout Turkey’s schools. For example, Bilal Erdoğan, who has played a role in organizing the AKP’s educational policies, has called upon Turkey to “end the Western civilizational invasion of the Islamic civilization . . . and we understand now that the invaded thing is not our soil but our minds, our heads” (ARTI Gerçek 2017a). In another speech, Bilal Erdoğan speculated that the ultimate goal of the West is “to enslave us. From their music to foods, clothes and lifestyle. The reason why block flute has been in the music course curricula for years is not so simple. Or, the reason of the emphasis on the rhythmic gymnastics in physical education lessons is not simple” (Cumhuriyet 2017a). Bilal Erdogan thinks that these lessons are systematically imposed on Turkish/Muslim students by the Western powers in order to degenerate and corrupt them. When the new curriculum was adopted, Alpaslan Durmuş, the Head of Educations Board (which was responsible for writing the curriculum), said that they incorporated indigenous and national values into the new curriculum and “(dodged) the Eurocentric approach” (Egitimcaddesi 2017).

One of the most striking demonstrations of the Islamisation of Turkey’s school curriculum is entry of the notion of *jihad* into school textbooks. “In elementary school religion classes, teachers will promote the nonviolent meaning of the word *jihad*—“to struggle”—as “love of homeland.” Among the curriculum’s changes, the notion of *jihad* has garnered particular attention” (Bilefsky 2018). “The concepts of *Jihad* and Gaza (two variations of Holy War) are introduced in the medieval sections of International Studies and Social Studies textbooks. Holy War against non-Muslims ‘in order to protect or spread the Islamic religion’ constitutes part of the curriculum, with no qualifications.” (Yanarocak 2016, p. 13).

Yaşar well sums up the manner in which *Jihad* is taught in Turkey’s schools post 2017, describing how “the way of teaching *Jihad* is an example of mixing religious and political contents in the curricula, by defining *Jihad* as a divine service and emphasizing at the same time its importance in the protection of the fatherland. *Jihad* is mentioned together with

democracy, and called a pillar of Turkish civilization. By this definition, the Islamic religion and the Turkish nation, are fused together. Who wishes to be a good Muslim, must be a good Turk and vice versa, saving its fatherland with *Jihad*, if needed." (Yaşar 2020, p. 11; see also Yilmaz and Erturk 2021).

The Minister of National Education, İsmet Yilmaz, in reaction to criticism of the new curriculum's use of *jihad*, remarked "*Jihad* is an element in our religion; it is in our religion ... The duty of the Education Ministry is to teach every concept deservedly, in a correct way. It is also our job to correct things that are wrongly perceived, seen or taught" (Bilefsky 2018). Though Yilmaz asserted that *jihad* means primarily an inner struggle of the self in order to appease the debates, the official Turkish dictionary (TDK) along with many other sources defines the word *Jihad* as a "war fought in the name of religion" (MeForum 2017). Indeed, any suggestion that the AKP primarily viewed *Jihad* as a peaceful internal struggle was somewhat undercut by the party's framing of Turkey's military operations in Syria as *Jihad*. CHP politician Bulent Tezcan criticised the AKP's rhetorical use of *Jihad*, asserting that "by embedding *jihadism* in the education of values, they try to infect the brains of our little children with the same ideas that transforms the Middle East into a bloodbath" (MeForum 2017; Altuntaş 2017).

The inclusion of *Jihad* in the school curriculum may be understood as a reshaping of education in accordance with the Islamist ideology of the AKP and Erdogan. This ideology has increasingly glorified *Jihad*, martyrdom, and sacrifice of life to protect the nation and the *ummah*. An AKP member of the Turkish parliament's national education commission, Ahmet Hamdi Çamlı, summarized his government's stance: "*Jihad* is the primary component of Islam. It even outranks prayer (Namaz-Salaat). As for the Ottoman sultans, in order to not abandon *Jihad*, they chose to not go on Hajj. Our ministry made a very good decision. If prayers are religion's tent pole, then *Jihad* is the tent itself." Camli said: "Our ministry made a very on-point decision. If prayers are the pillars of the religion, *Jihad* is the tent. Without the pillars the tent is useless. "There's no use in teaching mathematics to a child who doesn't know *Jihad*" (Osborne 2017b).

The professional union of Diyanet employees, Diyanet-Sen, has distributed colouring books which promote *Jihad* for children attending kindergartens supervised by the Ministry of National Education. Following sustained criticism, Vice-Director General of Diyanet-Sen defended their actions by claiming that he did "not understand what is wrong with emphasizing *Jihad*. *Jihad* also means peace. *Jihad* does not only means going war with your gun and artillery." Yavuz Oğan, a program speaker of the RS FM, has also defended the colouring books distributed by the Diyanet-Sen, claiming that *Jihad* is brotherhood and even kindergarten-age children can understand this." He further remarked "This is our culture. Of course, the colouring book has been prepared by the pedagogues and experts. Our children should not read 'Pinocchio' and 'Little Red Riding Hood', they should read the biographies of world-renowned men, for example the biography of Necmettin Erbakan. Because there are lessons for us in his life" (T24 2016).

Reports show that when *Jihad* is discussed in Turkey's schools, students are taught to comprehend the term according to its "non-peaceful" meaning. For example, the Enderun School Foundation of Esenler, Istanbul, has urged 4-to-6-years-old children not to recite the 'Andimiz' oath, which has been recited by all students in Ministry of National Education schools, but instead recite a special religious oath: "Alaikum Selam. How nice is this word? Long live Islam. The Quran in our hands. Our faith is in our hearts. We are Muslims who believe in a single God. We never leave this road. We cling to the Book and the Sunnah (of Prophet Muhammad). We abstain all the prohibitions (of Islam)."

An opposition MP once asked a parliamentary question about the Jihadist oath. However, the speaker of the TGNA Kahraman refused to answer, claiming that these issues belong to the private sphere of life and no question ought to be asked on such issues (Ahval 2018). In another example, in an event organized by a Quran course in Sinop students as young as 5-6 years old performed in a drama wearing soldiers uniforms and carrying guns. When opposition lawmaker Barış Yarkadaş objected to the involvement of students

in events associated with violence and militarism, and asked the Ministry of National Education to end the practice in a written motion, the Ministry replied that it doesn't see anything wrong with the drama. Yarkadaş responded that the Ministry encourages Jihad with arms and new massacres (Sozcu 2017). In a similar event, a primary school in Istanbul was criticised for hanging a banner which reads "Whatever you do you cannot prevent ramp of the Turkish nation. Whatever you do Islam will be victorious" (Nazlier 2016).

The Islamisation of the school curriculum not only included the introduction of Islamic courses and notions, but also the removal of non-religious courses including science and history classes. The changes included the shifting of emphasis within the education towards figures representing Islam and Turkishness and away from non-Muslim historical figures, ideas, and discoveries (Yilmaz 2021a, p. 189). The number of hours spent on philosophy and biology courses were reduced, while Religious Cultures and Ethics courses were doubled from one to two hours a day. Moreover, the paper on the Theory of Evolution was removed from high school textbooks, and all references to Darwinian or 'neo-Darwinian' theory removed (Karapehlivan 2019). Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister, Numan Kurtulmus, said that Darwin's Theory was "old and rotten" and therefore did not necessarily have to be taught. Satisfied that they had relegated Darwin's theory to the dustbin of history, the Ministry of National Education replaced it with Creationism. However, the Minister of National Education indicated that that evolution via natural selection may still be taught in universities, where the students had presumably reached a level of education where they could properly interpret the theory. Despite this concession, Istanbul's Marmara University refrained from publishing an academic article on the theory of evolution, stating that the publication would harm the institution, a decision made, perhaps, because of the increasing authoritarianism of the AKP's rule. Mehmet Balik, chairman of the Union of Education and Science Workers (Egitim-Is), was courageous enough to condemn the new curriculum, criticising "the new policies that ban the teaching of evolution and requiring all schools to have a prayer room". (Osborne 2017a) "These actions", he said, "destroy the principle of secularism and the scientific principles of education" (Osborne 2017a).

7. Downgrading Principles of Atatürk in National Education Curriculum

The AKP's new curriculum deeply troubled secularists, who were concerned that students were not being taught enough about the country's first leader, Atatürk. Where once the importance of Atatürk's role in Turkey's War of Independence was emphasised in schools, the new curriculum downplays his legacy and decreases the quantity and quality of references to him. İsmet Yılmaz, Turkish Minister of National Education, stated that the ideology Atatürkism will be removed from the school textbooks, and that Atatürk's life story will no longer be a major focus of classes decreased. These acts were merely a continuation of the AKP's strategy of removing secularism from the education system.

In 2012 the AKP eliminated Atatürkism as the education system's official ideology. Prior to 2012, all textbooks had to comply with the core principles of Turkey's secular constitution, set in place by Atatürk. After the AKP's 2012 reforms, Islamist social and political ideas were permitted to appear in textbooks. Over time, Islamist began to dominate (Yilmaz 2021b). For example, by 2018 Atatürk's name was referred to only once in the social sciences textbooks prepared for primary and middle schools (CNN Turkey 2018). It is very clear, then, that the AKP has long pursued a strategy of Islamizing Turkey through a revised national curriculum (Yilmaz 2018).

The 15 July failed coup attempt provided the AKP with the fertile ground it required to create a new national identity around myth of this event and rewrite the history of the nation to emphasise the victory of Erdoğan over Turkey's internal and external enemies. Just as the War of Independence was once used to exalt national leaders, the failed 2016 coup attempt became instrumental in exalting Erdoğan as the hero of national will (Yilmaz 2021a, p. 191). The '15 July victory of democracy' was introduced in the new curriculum as a new subject at different grades (Karapehlivan 2019). The textbooks that were revised after the 15 July incident draw an analogy between Turkey's War of Independence and the coup,

and use ‘visuals that accompany stories of 15 July and texts of martyrdom, veteran status, heroism, commemorations, and monuments aim to mythicize the day and transmit it to new generations as a landmark historical event’ (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2018, p. 25). The keywords that were chosen to portray 15 July in the textbooks are ‘Jihad’, ‘legend’ and ‘epic victory’ (Çepni 2017a). Thus, the incident represents “a new phase in the imposition of a new form of Turkishness, an Islamized version of national identity, and the creation of a pious generation, which have constituted one of the key strategic projects of the AKP since the party’s third term in power since 2011” (Lüküslü 2016).

After this incident, the AKP government did not miss any opportunity to indoctrinate its cause to millions of students in the national education system. By the time the schools were opened in September 2016, thousands of teachers had already been dismissed, more than half of the textbooks had been scrapped due to containing ‘terrorist’ content, and others now appeared in revised form, having been purified of any content antithetical to Erdoganism. Primary, middle and high school students spent most of the first day of the school year watching videos about the ‘triumph of democracy’ over the ‘coup perpetrator traitors’ and listening to speeches equating the civilian protests that aborted the coup with historic Ottoman victories and war of independence (Kandiyoti and Emanet 2017, p. 873). The new textbooks portray the 17–25 December corruption operations along with 15 July as coup attempts and blame the Gulen movement for both incidents (Çepni 2017a). The Ministry of Education also ordered all school administrations to form a “15 July corner” at schools next to the “Atatürk corner” to depict the incidents that took place on 15 July night. It turned out that some school administrations especially wanted to convey the violent and appalling aspects of the events, hanging in the corner pictures and illustrations of violent clashes between groups, and the arrest of military officials accused of perpetrating the coup attempt (Nazlier 2016). The Ministry of National Education sent a circular to the schools ordering that in the first week of the academic year, all teachers must educate students and organize activities about the failed coup (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Education 2016). The official circular also notes that teachers must educate students in harmony with religious and national values. (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Education 2016).

The Erdoğanist and pro-AKP propaganda in schools has moved far beyond merely indoctrinating schoolchildren but has begun to impact all educational cadres. Reports show that school principals have largely ceased managing teachers based on their classroom performance. They instead blacklist teachers who express—or are suspected of possessing—unIslamic or anti-AKP opinions. Teachers forget their essential duties, such as enriching the students by demonstrating positive behaviours, and instead attempt to destroy ideas contrary to the Islamist Neo-Ottomanism espoused by the government. For example, one teacher ordered a student whose father is a known Gulen Movement member to stand up in front of his class. He then instructed all other students to spit his face. In another example, a teacher posed with his students, who are primary school children, in front of the ‘martyrdom corner’ in the class holding nooses in their hands, implying that they will hang the traitors (Hurriyet 2016).

8. The Islamisation of Schools

The de-secularization of the educational sector does not remain confined to introduction of religious courses in the curriculum. The AKP government has formally inserted into the public education religious practices that were labelled a sign of *irtica* and considered a red line which could not be crossed for the secularist establishment ten years ago. As the AKP strengthened its grip on all public institutions including the military, which was once the self-proclaimed guardian of secularism, it has gained the freedom to promote Islamist practices in the public sphere, including in schools and public offices.

Previously, schools did not have *masjids*, and therefore students were not allowed to pray at schools. Under the AKP, however, praying at school became a common and encouraged practice. In 2017, the regulations for opening new schools or educational institutions were changed, and newly found educational institutions were now permitted—

even encouraged—to build *masjids* for men and women (Hurriyet 2017). As of today, most Turkish schools have *masjids*, and students are encouraged and sometimes forced to join prayers at schools. For example, in Afyonkarahisar the Ministry of National Education and the Provincial Religious Authority (Müftülük) cooperatively organized an activity to motivate students to pray called simply “Let’s go to Pray”. Furthermore, all the students in the city are brought to prayers every day during the 15-days mid-year school holiday. The Provincial Religious Authority called upon teachers of ‘Religion and Ethical Knowledge’ to motivate students to attend prayers. These same teachers have also been assigned to take roll call, and to obtain student signatures as proof of prayer attendance. The Provincial Religious Authority (Müftülük) also assigned imams to collect students’ signatures in order to confirm students’ attendance at Friday prayers (Çepni 2017b). In another example, the Sub-governorship of Fatih in İstanbul ordered the Sub-Provincial Directorate of the National Education Ministry to announce to all public and private schools that it is recommended they attend morning prayers. All students in the Fatih sub-province have thus been invited to the morning prayer at Pertevniyal Valide Sultan Mosque. The initial request for students to attend prayer appears to have originated in the Imam Hatip Schools in Fatih and was then approved by government authorities (ARTI Gercek 2014).

In the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, the impact of pro-AKP private foundations and *jamaats* have become more visible in the educational sector and have been incentivised by the government to fill the void left in the wake of the Gulen movement’s destruction. Not only did these foundations and *jamaats* open many new private schools, but they also penetrated public education through various official cooperation schemes based on protocols signed between the Ministry of National Education and these religious foundations and associations. Reports show that *tariqas* and *jamaats* are involved in many phases of public education, including the preparation of textbooks and curriculum, the teaching of religious courses, and in ensuring the participation of students in extracurricular religious activities held by these religious groups. For example, the Server Life Foundation, which is associated with *Nakşibendi* *tariqa*, has partnered with the Ministry of National Education in the last few years to distribute books published by the foundation and organize knowledge contests at schools. A book titled “Propriety School”, which was distributed at school in 2020, included controversial content suggesting that “music is illicit”, and “movies that features women in leading roles are problematic.” Another book entitled “Communication, Tact and Customs” also suggested that handshaking between men and women is forbidden. Responding to the criticism, Minister Ziya Selçuk said they examined the content of books before distributing them to the students, which is even more scandalous as the Ministry apparently sees no problems in the radical content it publishes (Evrensel 2021). In another case, the General Directorate for Lifelong Learning of Ministry of National Education signed a protocol with *İlim Yayma Cemiyeti*, a pro-AKP religious association, to organize and teach various courses. *Birlik Vakfı*, a religious foundation whose founders included President Erdoğan himself, also joined this protocol (Bildircin 2018).

The schools have been opened to the preachers from the pro-government *tariqas* and foundations to teach religious ideas and practices to children, in line with the Islamist religious and political indoctrination of the government. According to a new project, called “values operations” (*değerler hareketi*), religious values including martyrdom, mercy, austerity, and spiritual cleaning were taught by members of Diyanet and *tariqa* among other Islamist organizations (Ballıktas 2017). It has been also reported that this project and its curricula will be guided and crafted by the commissions outside the National Educational Ministry, including non-government religious groups (Ballıktas 2017).

The Ensar Foundation, which has drawn negative press due to its involvement in the sexual abuse of children in its dormitories, or by its personnel, has conducted several projects with the Ministry of National Education. According to a partnership with the Ministry, the Ensar Foundation gave ‘values education’ for all students enrolled in Imam-Hatip schools in Nigde (Diken 2017b).

There are many examples where school children, from kindergarten to high school, have been taken under the supervision of religious institutions associated with tariqas and jamaats. In Elazığ, 6–10-year-old children have been encouraged to march in the main street of the city carrying posters on which a statement read “Dad, teach me how to pray”. The activity has been organized by the Quran Generation Platform (“Kur’an Nesli Platformu”) together with Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İHH), which became notorious after the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident, and its support for *jihadi* activities. Students were also encouraged to pray in the Cultural Centre of Elazığ Municipality, although female students were excluded from the program to avoid the mixing of genders (ARTI Gercek 2017b).

The Lovers of the Prophet Platform, a civil Islamic organization allied with Turkey’s Hezbollah, organized an exam of ‘The Prophet’s Life’ in public schools. Reportedly, the exam took place in 75 provinces and 300 thousand students attended the exam. The Lovers of Prophet Platform also organizes ‘Holy Birth Week’, mass meeting, which celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad every year in Diyarbakır (Kronos 2018; Demokrat Haber 2015).

The Anadolu Gençlik Derneği (Anatolian Youth Organization, AGD) of the NO movement has been effectively organizing several campaigns, conferences and activities in the schools, including free travel to the Hagia Sofia for morning prayers, and to the Gallipoli battlefield. AGD also organizes events in order to strengthen Islamic “values” such as martyrdom, *jihad*, and piety. For example, the students planted 600 thousand young trees in memory of martyrs, while a large number of AGD volunteers wore a turban called a *sarık* (AA 2018). When AGD and similar organizations were prohibited in schools, such as occurred when their ‘Siyer-i Nebi’ activity in the Private Mersin American College aroused negative attention, they initiated a sort of blacklisting and called upon the government to investigate school leaders and encouraged them to reconsider their bans. In response to Private Mersin American College, attempting to curtail the activities of AGD on campus, AGD’s Mersin branch declared: “We strongly demand Andrew Leathwood, the school coordinator, to be punished due his negligence in ministry instructions, and to be declared as *persona non grata*, who thinks that they are in the soils of the USA. Additionally, we want this school to be shown as an enemy to this nation’s values by not letting us propagate our activity regarding our Prophet, in every platform. Today, it is apparent that the mission of the USA in Tarsus, who speculates the Muslim soils like Iraq, Syria, is to raise soldiers for the imperialism deviated from the Tarsus youth, who benefited from knowing their prophet” (Mersin Time 2017).

The Sub-Provincial Directorate of National Education Ministry of Bayrampaşa in Istanbul sent an order to all schools in the province regarding the organization of a special program to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. In this order, the Directorate also asked all students to attend the program. After public criticism of the program, representatives of the Directorate responded that these activities are organized nationwide under the protocols signed with many foundations such as TÜRGEV. Once members of the public began to object to the protocols and organizations, which did not belong to the regular school curriculum, the Directorate answered that the Ministry of National Education planned and ordered the programs so nobody ought to object to them (Diken 2017c).

The secularist opposition condemned the AKP for “surrendering public schools to the tariqas”. Speaking at a parliamentary session, CHP lawmaker Barış Yarkadaş described how in the Bahçelievler district of Istanbul, the Directorate of National Education forced students to pray under the supervision of a tariqa. He also mentioned another example where the Directorate of National Education in Maltepe district of Istanbul was allegedly handed over to a jamaat, and the directorate notified students that teachers would now visit them at home for religious instruction (Sozcu 2017). Finally, Eğitim-İş, a worker’s union in the education sector, prepared a report for the first term of the 2019–2020 academic year which noted that the protocols signed with foundations and associations operating essentially as the legal faces of tariqas, have increasingly put the education sector under the control of tariqas and jamaats (Çepni 2020).

9. Anti-Secular Practices at Schools

The AKP's policies of Islamising the school curriculums, appointing teachers on the basis of party affiliation, jamaat or tariqa affiliation, and government complacency about the tariqas' and jamaats' penetration into the education sector, led to the emergence of extreme practices at some schools. In the central Anatolian city of Tokata, a female teacher reportedly told female students that they "deserve rape" for not wearing an Islamic headscarf. The teacher threatened the students, admonishing them by saying "You don't cover your head anyway, so raping you or doing evil to you is permissible (in Islam)." One of the parents told a news agency that the teacher "insulted 13-year-old girls for not wearing a headscarf during a Quran class, which is an elective course. This teacher cannot lecture my daughter" (Letsch 2015).

Through the excessive politicization of headscarves, children who do not cover their heads automatically are marginalized within sections of Turkish society on the basis that 'they are more prone to immoral acts'. In some state schools, campaigns are initiated by teachers in order to urge girl students to cover their heads and bodies. For example, according to *Evrensel* daily, a teacher from Şanlıurfa province organized a celebration for newly covered girls. In pictures shared via Facebook, girls are seen holding placards reading "I covered (myself) and then I became happy", "God-willing you will cover too", "I did it because it is a command of my God" (Evrensel 2017). In another example, Şırnak province Silopi district director of national education distributed free headscarves to girl students. In addition to its religious ascription, the headscarf has also a traditional meaning reminding women that they have secondary status within society. In this respect, for example, in one of the kindergartens, girls wearing headscarves washed the feet of the boys in a so-called theatrical performance, which signifies women's traditional submission against the men (Cumhuriyet 2017b).

One of the teachers in İstanbul's Beykent Adem Çelik Elementary School has reportedly banned the name of a female student. The girl's family claimed that the teacher banned the name of their daughter (İrem) upon claims that it means 'fake heaven'. Other families have also reportedly complained about the same teacher. The complaints have been brought to the National Assembly as a ministerial question to be answered by the Minister of National Education. The complainants argued that the teacher had taught several superstitious beliefs to students, such as 'Angels do not enter the house in which dogs live', and 'Only grandmothers give the names for the babies, if others do they become sinners' (ARTI Gerçek 2017b).

Athletic student swimmers' training has been segregated by sex at the Olympic Pool in Van, which is owned by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Families of students have complained about the segregation, claiming that this policy damages team spirit. Representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sports responded to the criticism by claiming that there had been not enough number of trainers to serve the students. After increasing complaints, the policy has reportedly been abandoned (Diken 2017b).

Kartal Sub-Provincial National Education Directorate ordered a public school under its authority to motivate students to become more religious by sending questions to Nihat Hatipoğlu, a theologian and religious TV showman. The order to increase students' religiosity was supported by the Governorship of İstanbul (TR724 2018).

One of the professional unions of education (Eğitim Bir Sen, which is known an ally of the AKP) has demanded the removal of the compulsory course of 'Service of Alcoholic Drinks' from the curriculum of Hotel Management and Tourism Vocational Schools. The Union demanded from the Ministry of National Education to remove this course in theory and practice as a compulsory criterion for graduation. Upon this demand, the Ministry of Education decided to remove the course named 'Preparing Alcoholic Drinks and Cocktail' from the curriculum of the Hotel Management and Tourism Vocational Schools starting from the 2017–2018 academic year (Hurriyet 2017).

10. Conclusions

The first two segments of this paper describe in detail the policy measures the AKP has taken to support an education infrastructure designed to spread Islamist ideology and ultimately create a generation which views the AKP as the embodiment of Islam. The first indication of this change was the increasing number of Imam Hatip Schools all over the country. Erdogan argued that this change was a way to decolonize Turkish children's minds, which had been infected by Western ideas such as secularism. Hostility towards the West and xenophobia are used to justify a new system of education which supposedly frees children from the chains around their ankles. This new education system is thus reoriented to support Turkish and Muslim moral values and love for the Turkish nation, people, and Allah. The Imam Hatip Schools are the flagships of this change. Significant amount of the education ministry's funding is going to these schools, which has made them more popular due to their superior facilities and services. This has encouraged parents to send their children to these religious schools. However, the Islamist syllabus largely fails to prepare students for university studies, particularly in the STEM and humanities areas. Despite this, the AKP persists in supporting Imam Hatip Schools, which they consider the core site of 'resistance' against Western style secular schooling.

Beyond the Imam Hatip Schools, there is also change taking place in secular or non-Islamic schools. Removal of the theory of evolution demonstrates how the AKP has managed to damage education outside the Islamic school system. Evolution by natural selection is seen as a Western idea by the AKP. Other than selectively tailoring science books, the regime has introduced compulsory religious courses. The content of these courses is based on Sunni Muslim teachings, and has even been imposed on military schools, once a stronghold of Kemalism. This has left groups such as Alevites with little flexibility to opt out of these subjects.

Not only are religious classes in schools increasingly forced upon students, even when labelled as 'elective' subjects, but their content is conservative, Islamist and jihadist. Often, the teachings of the Quran and other Islamic literature are misused and distorted. Ultimately, the changes in the syllabus are part of a wider programme of social engineering, aimed at creating a new generations of Islamist AKP voters and members.

The most radical aspect of this change in the curriculum is the inclusion of *jihadist* themes. The anger and fear that is brewed in the syllabus is transformed and rationalized through the need for Jihad. This Jihad is not a struggle between the *nafs* (Freudian Id) and the conscious self; rather it is a violent struggle against the enemies of Islam as understood by the AKP and their Islamist allies. In their conception of this battle between good and evil, Muslims are encouraged to wage *Jihad* by rebelling against the Western ideas and institutions that have enslaved their minds. *Jihad* is presented as more than just a fight for faith, but this notion is mixed with nationalistic jingoism.

Islamist movements and radical brotherhoods are allowed to open schools and Islamize pupils quite openly, and they are also allowed to interfere with public schools. In fact, the government has been collaborating with these groups. One such example is that of Nakşibendi *tariqa*, which has partnered with the Ministry of National Education in the last few years to distribute books published by the foundation and which organizes knowledge contests at schools. These books carry with them extremist notions that forbid music and shaking hands between men and women. The large-scale triumph of these organizations over secular education has only been possible due to the AKP's financial support.

Extracurricular activities at educational institutes have also been changing under AKP rule. Groups such as Love of the Holy Prophet, which has links with Hezbollah, have called for nationwide celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad via rallies and conferences. In some provinces, school authorities have also taken steps and issued directives to schools to celebrate the 'prophet's birthday', while at the same time celebrations such as Christmas and Nowruz are discouraged. The activities organized by these groups show children wearing Arab styled turbans, and some schools have even gone as far as to handout free scarfs to young girls and celebrate when a student chooses to wear a scarf.

Even secular schools are forced to oblige when their students are forcefully taken to prayers under the supervision of *tariqas*.

This article started by reminding the readers that the AKP uses similar methods in creating their desired citizens and using education for social-engineering purpose that Kemalists had used previously. The Kemalists used secular Turkish nationalist education to create their desired typology of Turkish nationalist, secularist and pro-Western citizens. This policy has alienated and discriminated against many of Turkey's religious, ethnic and political groups who have resented the Kemalists and have pursued politics of victimhood. Among them, the Islamists have proven to be the most successful, and they been ruling the country for the last two decades. Especially in the last decade, with their authoritarian turn, they have employed revanchist policies based on their resentfulness and victimhood. All these have been done at the expense of other religious, political and ethnic groups such as the Alevis, leftists, secularists and Kemalists. As a result, Turkey is very polarized, and the dissident groups feel victimized, like the Islamists felt previously. It is obvious that we are witnessing a vicious cycle of revanchism where opposing groups do not see the others as legitimate and try to assimilate or eliminate them. Education is among the most potent of tools in this struggle. There are no promising and strong signs coming from today's opposition groups that when they come to power, they will not transcend this vicious cycle.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- AA. 2015. The Number of Students in Imam Hatip Has Reached 1 Million. Available online: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/imam-hatiplerdeki-ogrenci-sayisi-1-milyona-ulasti/68915> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- AA. 2018. AGD Planted Saplings for Martyrs. Available online: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/agd-sehitler-icin-fidan-dikti/1111922> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Ahval. 2018. When Asked "Sharia Oath at School", the Answer from the Speaker of the Assembly: These Are Private Life. Available online: <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/egitim/okulda-seriat-yemini-sorulan-meclis-baskanindan-cevap-bunlar-ozel-yasam> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Aljazeera. 2012. "4 + 4 + 4 Bid Passed". March 31. Available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/444-teklifi-gecti> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Altuntaş, Öykü. 2017. Turkey's new school year: Jihad in, evolution out. *BBC*. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41296714> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Aratemur-Çimen, C., and Sezen Bayhan. 2018. Secularism and Gender in Turkey's New Textbooks Research, Executive Summary. Project: Ders Kitaplarında Sekülerizm ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet (Secularism and Gender in Turkey's New Textbooks). Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328413717_Secularism_and_Gender_in_Turkey_T1\textquoterights_New_Textbooks_Research_Executive_Summary (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Aşlamacı, İbrahim, and Recep Kaymakcan. 2017. A model for Islamic education from Turkey: The Imam-Hatip schools. *British Journal of Religious Education* 39: 1–14. Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299998777_A_model_for_Islamic_education_from_Turkey_the_Imam-Hatip_schools (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Atalay, Figen. 2017. Teachers are unemployed, imams attend classes. *Cumhuriyet*. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/ogretmenler-issiz-derslere-imamlar-giriyor-841444> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Akit. 2018. Kur'an ve Siyer Zorunlu olsun. Available online: <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/kuran-ve-siyer-zorunlu-olsun-426237.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- ARTI Gerçek. 2014. Kaymakamdan Namaz Talimatı. Available online: <https://artigercek.com/kaymakamdan-namaz-talimati> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- ARTI Gerçek. 2017a. Öğretmen Gunah diye İsmi yasakladı. Available online: <https://artigercek.com/ogretmen-gunah-diye-ismini-yasakladi%20> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- ARTI Gerçek. 2017b. Şehrin Gobeğinde Çocuklara Namaz. Available online: <https://artigercek.com/sehrin-gobeginde-cocuklara-namaz> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Ballıktas, Çağlar. 2017. Tarikatlara Cemaatlere Okullarda vaaz Dönemi! *Bir Gün*. Available online: <https://www.birgun.net/haber/tarikatlara-cemaatlere-okullarda-vaaz-donemi-182000> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Bildircin, M. Mustafa. 2018. They determine the education policy: Not the National Education, but the sect home. *Bir Gün*. Available online: https://www.birgun.net/haber/egitim-politikasini-onlar-belirliyor-milli-egitim-degil-tarikat-yuvasi-223504?__cf_chl_captcha_tk (accessed on 21 July 2022).

- Bilefsky, Dan. 2018. In Turkey's New Curriculum, Atatürk, Darwin and Jihad Get Face-Lifts. *The New York Times*. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/world/europe/turkey-curriculum-darwin-jihad.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Bia Net. 2008. Danıştay: Zorunlu Din Dersi Bu İçerikle Hukuksuz. Available online: <https://bianet.org/bianet/din/105316-danistay-zorunlu-din-dersi-bu-icerikle-hukuksuz> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Buyukbayrak, Brena. 2021. İmam Hatip Liselerindeki Öğrenci Sayısı ve Akademik Liselerdeki Öğrenci Sayısına Dair İddialar. *Dogrulukpayi*. Available online: https://www.dogrulukpayi.com/dogrulama/imam-hatip-liselerindeki-ogrenci-sayisi-ve-akademik-liselerdeki-ogrenci-sayisina-dair-iddialar?gclid=CjwKCAjwr_uCBhAFEiwAX8YJgaeQaRjXd7jv64N0r3k4bckKUB4e9GanAcdbV6Dg-zSgkYhKDG_UBhoC394QAvD_BwE (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Butler, Daren. 2018. With more Islamic schooling, Erdogan aims to reshape Turkey. *Reuters*. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-education/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- CDN. 2015. Re-Educating Turkey. *American Center of Progress*. Available online: <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/09115835/Re-EducatingTurkey.pdf> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Çepni, Ozan. 2017a. There is no Atatürk in the new curriculum, there is plenty of jihad. *Cumhuriyet*. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/yeni-mufredatta-ataturk-yok-bolca-cihat-var-784388> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Çepni, Ozan. 2017b. Signed follow-up in Afyon: 'Let's go to the mosque' instead of homework. *Cumhuriyet*. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/afyonda-imzali-takip-odev-yerine-haydi-camiye-666810> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Çepni, Ozan. 2019. "Bütçe Dindar Nesil İnşaatlarına". *Cumhuriyet*. February 20. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/butce-dindar-nesil-insaatlarina-1258173> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Çepni, Ozan. 2020. "Sects Occupied Education". *Cumhuriyet*. January 17. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/tarikatlar-egitimi-igsal-etti-1714793> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Cornell, Svante E. 2015. The Islamization of Turkey: Erdoğan's Education Reforms. *Turkey Analyst*. Available online: <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/437-the-islamization-of-turkey-erdo%C4%9Fan%E2%80%99s-education-reforms.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Cornell, Svante E. 2018. Erbakan, Kısakürek, and the Mainstreaming of Extremism in Turkey. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*. Available online: www.hudson.org/research/14375-erbakan-k-sak-rek-and-the-mainstreaming-of-extremism-in-turkey (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Coşkun, Mustafa Kemal, and Burcu Şentürk. 2012. The Growth of Islamic Education in Turkey: The AKP's Policies toward Imam-Hatip School. In *Neoliberal Transformation of Education in Turkey*. Palgrave Macmillan's Postcolonial Studies in Education. Edited by Kemal İnal and Güliz Akkaymak. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [CrossRef]
- CNN Turkey. 2018. Atatürk'ün adı yenilenen MEB müfredatında sadece 1 cümlede geçiyor. Available online: <https://www.cnnturk.com/egitim/ataturkun-ismi-yenilenen-meb-mufredatinda-sadece-1-cumlede-geciyor> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Cumhuriyet. 2017a. Bilal Erdoğan büyük oyunu gördü: Müzik derslerinde blok flüt çalınmasının sebebi basit bir şey değil. November 3. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/bilal-erdogan-buyuk-oyunu-gordu-muzik-derslerinde-blok-flut-calinmasinin-sebebi-basit-bir-sey-degil-859077> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Cumhuriyet. 2017b. In Kindergarten, Female Students Were Put on a Headscarf and Male Students' Feet Were Washed. December 14. Available online: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/anaokulunda-kiz-ogrencilere-turban-takip-erkek-ogrencilerin-ayaklari-yikatiildi-885859> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Demokrat Haber. 2015. Kutlu Doğum Haftası' etkinliğinde Hizbullah propagandası. *Demokrat Haber*. Available online: <https://www.demokrathaber.org/kutlu-dogum-haftasi-etkinliginde-hizbullah-propagandasi> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Diken. 2017a. Küçük sporcuların yüzme antrenmanı 'harem selamlık' yapıldı, veliler isyan etti. Available online: [https://www.diken.com.tr/kucuk-sporcularin-yuzme-antrenmani-harem-selamlık-yapildi-veliler-isyan-etti/](https://www.diken.com.tr/kucuk-sporcularin-yuzme-antrenmani-harem-selamlik-yapildi-veliler-isyan-etti/) (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Diken. 2017b. Enderun Mektebi'nde 'çocuk yemini': Yaşasın İslam, Müslümanız Müslüman. Available online: <https://www.diken.com.tr/enderun-mektebinde-cocuk-yemini-yasasin-islam-muslumaniz-musluman/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Diken. 2017c. Okullara zorunlu 'Mevlid Kandili' etkinliği için talimat gitti. Available online: <https://www.diken.com.tr/okullara-zorunlu-mevlid-kandili-etkinligi-icin-talimat-gitti/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- DuvaR. 2020. Reaction to the 'Have a Religion Course Chosen' Instruction. Available online: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2020/01/10/din-dersi-sectirin-talimatina-tepki> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Egitimcadesi. 2017. Approval of the New Curriculum from the President. Available online: <http://www.egitimcadesi.com/yeni-mufredata-onay-cumhurbaskani/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Evrensel. 2017. Jihad Was Praised before in the School That Says "Victory Belongs to Islam". Available online: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/302597/zafer-islamindir-yazan-okulda-daha-once-de-cihat-ovulmus> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Evrensel. 2019. While Minister Ziya Selçuk Says "Imam Hatip High Schools" Are Full, MoNE's Figures Say the Opposite. Available online: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/386304/bakan-ziya-selcuk-imam-hatip-liseleri-dolu-derken-mebin-rakamlari-tersini-soyluyor> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Evrensel. 2021. The Ministry of National Education Continues to Cooperate with Religious Orders This Year. Available online: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/427693/milli-egitim-bakanligi-bu-yil-da-tarikatlarla-isbirligini-surduruyor> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Genç, Kaya. 2018. Turkey's unnatural selection: Darwin is the latest victim of an attack on scientific values in Turkey's education system. *Index on Censorship* 47: 8–10. [CrossRef]

- Gün, Feyza, and Gülsün Atanur Baskan. 2014. New Education System in Turkey (4 +4 +4): A Critical Outlook. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 131: 229–35. [CrossRef]
- Haber Sol. 2017. There Will Be No School Principals without AKP: 26 School Principals Were Recruited, 25 of Them AKP. Available online: <https://haber.sol.org.tr/toplum/akpli-olmayan-okul-muduru-kalmayacak-26-okul-muduru-alindi-25i-akpli-205500> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Hurriyet. 2012. We Will Raise Religious Youth. Available online: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dindar-genclik-yetistirecegiz-19825231> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Hurriyet. 2016. Teacher Made Students Pose with ‘Greasy Rope’. Available online: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ogretmen-ogrencilere-yagli-organ-ile-poz-verdirtti-40305352> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Hurriyet. 2017. Obligation of Ablution and Prayer Rooms for Schools. Available online: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/okullara-abdesthane-ve-mescit-zorunlulugu-40500965> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Ileri Haber. 2018a. The “empty” Imam Hatip Praise from the Minister of National Education. Available online: <https://ilerihaber.org/icerik/milli-egitim-bakanindan-ici-bos-imam-hatip-ovgusu-84982.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Ileri Haber. 2018b. “Elective Religion Course” Fatwa from Diyanet. Available online: <https://ilerihaber.org/icerik/diyanetten-secmeli-din-dersi-fetvasi-81590.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Jones, Dorian. 2012. Schools increasingly religious in Turkey. *DW*. Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/schools-increasingly-religious-in-turkey/a-16269525> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Kandiyoti, Deniz, and Zühre Emanet. 2017. Education as Battleground: The Capture of Minds in Turkey. *Globalizations* 14: 869–76. [CrossRef]
- Karapehlivan, Funda. 2019. Constructing a “New Turkey” through Education. *HBS*. Available online: <https://tr.boell.org/en/2019/10/01/constructing-new-turkey-through-education> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Karatas, Ezgi. 2018. Our schools have been handed over to the communities. *Ahval*. Available online: <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/soylesi/okullarimiz-cemaatlerin-eline-teslim-edilmis-durumda> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Kronos. 2018. Hizbullah Milli Eğitim’de sınav yaptı. *Kronos*. Available online: <https://kronos35.news/tr/hizbullah-milli-egitimde-sinav-yapti/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Law No. 6287. 2012. Changes in Primary and Education Law and Some Laws. Available online: https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/04/20120411-8.htm?utm_campaign=DonanimHaber&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=DonanimHaber (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Letsch, Constanze. 2015. Turkish parents complain of push towards religious schools. *The Guardian*. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/12/turkish-parents-steered-religious-schools-secular-imam-hatip> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Lepeska, David. 2014. Turkey’s long game: How 12 years of AKP rule has eroded the secular state. *The National News*. Available online: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/turkey-s-long-game-how-12-years-of-akp-rule-has-eroded-the-secular-state-1.649265> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Lüküslü, Demet. 2016. Creating a pious generation: Youth and education policies of the AKP in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16: 637–49. [CrossRef]
- MeForum. 2017. Turkish Education Jihad in Evolution Out. Available online: <https://www.meforum.org/articles/2017/turkish-education-jihad-in-evolution-out> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Mersin Time. 2017. Agd den tarsus Amerikan kolejine büyük tepki. Available online: <http://www.mersintime.com/guncel/agd-den-tarsus-amerikan-kolejine-buyuk-tepki-h13160.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Nazlier, E. 2016. School boards in a spiral of violence. *Evrensel*. November 7. Available online: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/295019/okul-panolari-siddet-sarmalinda> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Nor, Mohd Roslan Mohd, and Muhammad Khalis Ibrahim. 2020. Conflicts of Religious Education in a Secular State: A Study on Turkey’s Imam-Hatip School. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies (QIJIS)* 8: 107–30. [CrossRef]
- Osborne, Samuel. 2017a. Turkey’s new school curriculum drops evolution and will teach concept of jihad. *The Independent*. Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-school-curriculum-teach-jihad-concept-drop-evolution-science-muslim-islam-a7848176.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Osborne, Samuel. 2017b. Turkish MP says “no use in teaching maths to a child who doesn’t know jihad”. *The Independent*. Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkish-mp-maths-teaching-jihad-child-muslim-islam-jihad-madrasa-secular-education-a7858451.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Republic of Turkey Ministry of Education. 2016. Schools to Be Opened with the “July 15 Democracy Victory and Remembrance of Martyrs” Event. Available online: <http://www.meb.gov.tr/okullar-15-temmuz-demokrasi-zaferi-ve-sehitleri-anma-etkinligiyle-acilacak/haber/11877/tr> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Sabral, Jody. 2012. New Education Bill Revives Koran Studies In Turkish Schools. *Al-Monitor*. Available online: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2012/al-monitor/turkish-education-reform-passed.html#ixzz6vp1Xdq1l> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Sozcu. 2017. Yarkadas: You Handed over the Schools to New Sects and Congregations. Available online: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2017/egitim/yarkadas-okullari-yeni-tarikat-ve-cemaatlere-teslim-ettiniz-2130433/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).

- Sputnik. 2019. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Din Öğretimi Genel Müdürü Nazif Yılmaz, “28 Şubat öncesinde Türkiye’de imam hatip okullarının oranı yüzde 9.18’di. 28 Şubat’tan 4 yıl sonra bu oran yüzde 2.61’e düştü. Bu oran şu anda yüzde 13.57 Dolayısıyla öğrenci oranında kamuoyunda oluşturulan ‘Çok fazla imam hatip var’ algısının doğru olmadığını görüyoruz” dedi. Available online: <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201907091039609581-milli-egitim-bakanligi-din-ogretimi-genel-muduru-yilmaz-cok-fazla-imam-hatip-var-algisi-dogru-degil/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- T24. 2016. Diyanet-Sen’den boyama kitabı savunması: Cihat aynı zamanda barış demektir! Available online: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/diyanet-senden-boyama-kitabi-savunmasi-cihat-ayni-zamanda-baris-demektir,401250> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- T24. 2019. Bir yılda 798 yeni imam hatip okulu açıldı, dini eğitim alan öğrenci sayısı 1.3 milyona ulaştı. Available online: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/bir-yilda-798-yeni-imam-hatip-okulu-acildi-din-egitim-alan-ogrenci-sayisi-1-3-milyona-ulasti,845477> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- TR724. 2018. MEB Mobilized for ATV’s Program: Students Should Connect on the Phone and Ask Questions! Available online: http://www.tr724.com/meb-atvnin-programi-icin-seferber-oldu-ogrenciler-telefonla-baglanip-soru-sorsun/?utm_content=buffer6080c&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Uygun, Yurdağül. 2017. Elective courses also became compulsory, religion lessons increased to 6 hours. *Sozcu*. Available online: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/334334/bucada-zorunlu-secmeli-din-dersi-baskisi> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Yaman, Zeynel. 2019. Indigenous-national curriculum. *Sabah*. Available online: <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2019/09/10/yerli-milli-mufredat> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Yanaracak, Hay Eytan Hay. 2016. Turkish Staatsvolk vs. Kurdish identity: Denial of the Kurds in Turkish school textbooks. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 7: 405–19. [CrossRef]
- Yaşar, Aysun. 2020. Reform in Islamic Education and the AKP’s Pious Youth in Turkey. *Religion & Education* 47: 106–20. [CrossRef]
- Yeginsu, Ceylan. 2014. Turkey’s religious schools rise as Erdogan exerts sway. *The New York Times*. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/world/europe/turkeys-religious-schools-rise-as-erdogan-exerts-sway.html> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2005. State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey. *Muslim World* 95: 385–411. [CrossRef]
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2014. Religious Freedom, the Muslim Identity and the Secularist Social-Engineering Project in Turkey. *Quaderni di Diritto e Politica Ecclesiastica* 22: 197–204.
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2016. *Muslim laws, Politics and Society in Modern Nation States: Dynamic Legal Pluralisms in England, Turkey and Pakistan*. London: Routledge.
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2018. Islamic Populism and Creating Desirable Citizens in Erdogan’s New Turkey. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29: 52–76. [CrossRef]
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2021a. *Creating the desired citizens: State, Islam and ideology in Turkey*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2021b. The AKP’s Authoritarian, Islamist Populism: Carving out a New Turkey. *European Center for Populism Studies*. Available online: <https://www.populismstudies.org/the-akps-authoritarian-islamist-populism-carvingout-a-new-turkey/> (accessed on 21 July 2022).
- Yılmaz, Ihsan. 2022. *Authoritarianism, Informal Law, and Legal Hybridity: The Islamisation of the State in Turkey*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yılmaz, Ihsan, and Erdoan Shipoli. 2022. Use of Past Collective Traumas, Fear and Conspiracy Theories for Securitisation and Repression of the Opposition: The Turkish Case. *Democratization* 29: 320–36. [CrossRef]
- Yılmaz, Ihsan, and Ismail Albayrak. 2022. *Populist and Pro-Violence State Religion: The Diyanet’s Construction of Erdoğanist Islam in Turkey*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yılmaz, Ihsan, and Omer F. Erturk. 2021. Pro-Violence Sermons of a Secular State: Turkey’s Diyanet on Islamist Militarism, Jihadism and Glorification of Martyrdom. *Religions* 12: 659. [CrossRef]
- Yılmaz, Ihsan, Mustafa Demir, and Erdoan Shipoli. 2022. Securitisation via functional actors and authoritarian resilience: Collapse of the Kurdish peace process in Turkey. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 57: 1–16. [CrossRef]