

## Article

# The Nexus of Digital Authoritarianism and Religious Populism

Ihsan Yilmaz 

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC 3125, Australia; ihsan.yilmaz@deakin.edu.au

**Abstract:** This paper delves into the intricate relationship between religious populism and the legitimization of digital authoritarianism in Turkey. Specifically, it investigates how the ruling party, AKP, has strategically linked Islamist values to state policies as a means of justifying its repressive control over digital technology. Through an examination of internet governance at multiple levels—full network-level governance, sub-network or website-level governance, proxy or corporation-level governance, and network-node or individual-level governance—the study reveals the instrumentalization of religious populism to consolidate support and validate the government’s autocratic agenda. Furthermore, it sheds light on the role of state-controlled religious institutions, traditional media, social media outlets, as well as religious leaders and organizations in shaping public opinion, enabling the government to exert greater control over the dissemination of information. By dissecting the religious populist justification of digital authoritarianism in Turkey, this research provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play in the realm of online governance.

**Keywords:** digital authoritarianism; authoritarianism; religion; religious populism; cyberspace; social media; Turkey

## 1. Introduction

Freedom House labels Turkey as “not free” in terms of democratic freedoms ([Freedom House 2021](#)). When the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey ranked 100th among 139 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, dropping to 151st in 2016, 155th in 2017, 157th in 2018 and 2019, 154th in 2020, and 153rd in 2021. In 2023, Turkey ranked 165th among 180 countries ([RSF 2023](#)).

Since 2010–2011, Turkey has witnessed a significant shift towards authoritarianism under the leadership of the AKP. This trend became particularly pronounced following the Gezi protests in 2013, which marked a turning point in the AKP’s approach to governance, with a specific emphasis on digital authoritarian practices. The AKP’s consolidation of power in 2010–2011, coupled with a constitutional amendment referendum that weakened checks and balances, played a crucial role in enabling the party to exert greater control over various aspects of society ([Timuçin 2021](#)).

The post-2013 period, characterized by the aftermath of the failed mysterious coup attempt in 2016, saw a heightened crackdown on media outlets critical of the government. Many media companies were targeted, leading to closures, seizures, and transfers of ownership. The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) was utilized as a tool to take over media entities, and influential media outlets, such as ATV, were transferred to pro-AKP groups like the Calık Group. These actions resulted in a media landscape dominated by voices aligned with the ruling party ([Timuçin 2021](#)).

In addition to exerting control over traditional media, the AKP has sought to extend its influence over the digital space, recognizing the growing significance of social media platforms as channels for dissent and alternative narratives. Despite President Erdoğan’s own active presence on social media, he has expressed frustration and discontent with its impact, particularly when used by government critics and dissidents. This tension arises from the fact that social media provides a platform for individuals to voice dissenting



**Citation:** Yilmaz, Ihsan. 2023. The Nexus of Digital Authoritarianism and Religious Populism. *Religions* 14: 747. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060747>

Academic Editor: Enzo Pace

Received: 15 March 2023

Revised: 23 May 2023

Accepted: 1 June 2023

Published: 5 June 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 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/>).

opinions, circumventing the government's direct control over traditional media outlets ([Euro News 2020](#)).

This paper examines the decade following the Gezi protests, focusing on how religious populism has been instrumentalized to justify the AKP's digital authoritarianism. The AKP has strategically utilized religious populist discourse and imagery to legitimize its control over the digital sphere. By framing its actions as rooted in religious values and morality, the AKP seeks to garner support and suppress opposition, presenting itself as the sole genuine protector of Islamic values and the defender of the nation's pious youth. This manipulation of religion allows the AKP to bolster its populist authoritarianism, consolidate power, and maintain a dominant presence in the digital landscape.

The core part of Turkey's authoritarian ruling party under the AKP is its ability to integrate Islamist populism as part of its narrative and political interests ([Yilmaz 2018, 2021](#)). The AKP political regime (Erdoğanism) features four key components: "electoral authoritarianism, neopatrimonialism, populism, and Islamism" ([Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018](#)).

In the AKP Islamist populist narrative, the AKP is the only genuine representative of the morally superior and pure Muslim people of Turkey and the opposition comprises the evil elite supported by not only the dangerous others in the country (Kurdish political movement, Alevis, Gülenists, etc.) but also Crusader imperialists, Western nations, and Zionists who aim to destroy Turkey and the Muslim world.

The AKP has used religious institutions, such as mosques, to promote its policies and messages to the wider public, through sermons, religious lessons, and other activities. A content analysis of the sermons between 2010 and 2021 indicated that Diyanet pulpits that regulate the Friday khutbah (sermons) echo the AKP's political outlook ([Yilmaz and Albayrak 2022](#); [Rogenhofer and Panievsky 2020](#)).

Internet penetration in Turkey is very high at 83 percent. A study showed that almost 80 percent of these people use the internet daily. Additionally, 64 percent of Turkey's population are estimated to be active social media users. On average, Turkish citizens spend 7 h and 29 min per day on the internet and social media platforms. The most used social media platform, YouTube, is accessed by 90 percent of internet users. This is followed by Instagram (83 percent), Facebook (76 percent), and Twitter (61 percent) ([Bianet 2020](#); [Daily Sabah 2021a, 2021b, 2021c](#); [World Bank 2021](#)). With a large online user base and declining audience numbers for television and newspapers, the internet has become a powerful tool for opposition voices in Turkey. This has caused the AKP to increase its digital authoritarian efforts.

Under the AKP, Turkey still has close military and security ties to the West. However, its digital information control policies are similar to the Russia–China axis ([Eldem 2020](#), p. 454). Since the Gezi protests in mid-2013 especially, the AKP's domestic internet policy has converged towards prioritizing information security promoted by Russia and China ([Eldem 2020](#), p. 455). As a result, the AKP government has implemented various measures to regulate and surveil the digital realm in an effort to stifle dissent ([Bellut 2021](#)).

With a large online user base and the use of the internet by the opposition, the AKP has implemented various digital authoritarianism measures to stifle dissent ([Bellut 2021](#)). It detained Twitter users, banned Twitter and YouTube, passed a new internet law and depicted social media platforms, companies, and users as evil forces that aim to attack Turkey's national unity, state sovereignty, social cohesion, and religious values. On the other hand, social media has been used for religious populist purposes and has been transformed into "a medium of government-led populist polarization, misinformation, and lynching" ([Bulut and Yörük 2017](#)). Internet bots (software applications running automated tasks over the internet) are also deployed by the AKP to assist paid pro-AKP individuals (AK Trolls) ([Yesil et al. 2017](#)). With his religious populist narrative, Erdoğan also tried to energise his party's Muslim nationalist base against dissident social media users ([Yesil 2016](#); [Kocer 2015](#)). In short, the digital space in Turkey has been subject to increased security measures and offline repression since the Gezi protests in mid-2013.

The literature on the AKP's digital authoritarianism and cyber security usually focus on critical infrastructures (Karabacak et al. 2016), data protection (Gürkaynak et al. 2014), internet policy (Yesil et al. 2017), online surveillance (Yesil and Sozeri 2017), hacktivism (Polat et al. 2013), and social media and trolling (Bulut and Yörük 2017; Saka 2018). However, the use of religion by this Islamist authoritarian ruling party for digital authoritarianism has been understudied. This paper addressed this gap and aims to show how the AKP has used religious discourse to justify censorship and crackdowns on opposition voices online, presenting control over digital technology as a means of protecting Turkish religious values and morality. It argues that state-controlled religious institutions, traditional media, and social media outlets, promote Islamic values and are aimed at influencing public opinion in favour of the AKP's digital authoritarianism.

To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, this paper introduces an analytical framework comprising a four-layered approach. This approach enables us to examine digital authoritarianism in Turkey across various levels of internet governance: full network-level governance, sub-network or website-level governance, proxy or corporation-level governance, and network-node or individual-level governance. By considering each of these layers, we can unravel the multifaceted ways in which religion has been monopolized to legitimize digital authoritarianism.

Starting with full network-level governance, it scrutinizes the mechanisms by which the government exerts control over the entire network infrastructure, enabling them to monitor and restrict access to online content. Subsequently, the study explores sub-network or website-level governance, focusing on how the government regulates and censors specific websites and online platforms to suppress dissenting voices. The analysis then extends to proxy or corporation-level governance, investigating the role of government-influenced proxies or corporations in controlling digital spaces and manipulating online narratives. Finally, the paper explores network-node or individual-level governance, elucidating how the government leverages religious influence to shape public opinion, control information flows, and curtail individual online freedoms.

At each of these four levels, this paper examines how religion has been employed to legitimize digital authoritarianism. It analyses how state-controlled religious institutions and influential religious leaders are utilized to propagate the government's message and shape public opinion in favour of the authoritarian agenda. Moreover, the study explores the government's control over traditional media outlets and social media platforms, which are used to disseminate religious narratives that align with the government's policies. By monopolizing religion and manipulating public perception, the government establishes an environment conducive to digital authoritarianism, thereby enhancing its ability to control the flow of information and suppress dissent.

## 2. Internet Governance and Digital Authoritarianism

The term 'internet governance' encompasses the creation and management of rules, policies, and practices in the digital realm on how the internet operates, how it is used, and how it is governed at local, national, regional, and global levels. (Kurbalija 2016). Various state institutions, telecommunication companies, international organizations, digital businesses, social media giants, civil society organizations, technical communities, and individual users play a role in internet governance.

While internet governance includes the policies, rules, and practices that an authoritarian regime employs, which shape the public's online experiences and behaviour, digital authoritarianism encompasses a wide range of control measures (Howells and Henry 2021).

Authoritarian regimes and rulers have gradually adapted to internet governance and resorted to systematic abuse of the extensive reach of new media (Lynch 2011). They have implemented classic (removing and banning content or targeting the content providers or consumers themselves) and subtle censorship (Bennett and Naim 2015; King et al. 2013). Many of these authoritarian countries use the term 'information security.' However, this is usually "a Trojan horse for increased content control and internet censorship" (Ebert

and Maurer 2013, p. 1055). They have also employed disinformation (Diamond 2021; Tucker et al. 2017). In these regimes, information is clouded by obscurity, facilitated deception, and manipulation of its original context (Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga 2020). Digital authoritarianism is not a uniform strategy. While some regimes take a direct approach and pull the plug, others use heavy censorship and disinformation (Michaelsen and Glasius 2018, p. 3788; Timuçin 2021, p. 8; Polyakova and Meserole 2019). These digital authoritarian strategies “can be broken into six main techniques: surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and harassment, cyber-attacks, internet shutdowns, and targeted persecution against online users” (Timuçin 2021, p. 8).

Developing countries often shift to advanced technologies directly (technological leapfrogging), skipping the middle, more expensive, and less efficient stages since modern technologies have, by the time of their implementation within those countries, been rendered more economical and effective than the initial technology. They also derive a similar benefit from technological leapfrogging with a capacity to selectively implement new surveillance and control mechanisms (Anderson and Lee 2020).

According to Freedom of the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism by the Freedom House, 26 of the 65 countries that were assessed experienced a deterioration in internet freedom, where reductions in half of these countries were related to a rise in disinformation, censorship, online attacks, surveillance and harassment of protestors, and arrests of government critics in the lead-up to elections. Governments in 18 countries increased state surveillance since June 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic only legitimised and normalised governmental access to citizens’ biodata while intensifying control (Yang et al. 2021).

These digital authoritarian strategies are not limited to authoritarian regimes (Bauman et al. 2014; Greenwald 2014; Lyon 2014). They also pose challenges to democratic politics (Tufekci 2014; Bennett and Livingston 2018; Howard et al. 2018). Many of the digital authoritarian technologies and strategies have been used by liberal, democratic regimes to target people of colour, political activists, migrants, and refugees (Yilmaz et al. 2022). The authoritarian regimes’ use of emerging technology to monitor and stifle opposition is unique in its intensity, density, and scalability (Feldstein 2019).

### 3. Four-Layered Approach to Analyse Digital Authoritarianism

To carry out the analysis of digital authoritarianism, a four-layered approach to digital authoritarianism was utilised (Howard et al. 2011) in the article *The Dictators’ Digital Dilemma*. The authors outlined a multi-layered approach employed by authoritarian regimes to control digital communication, which included four levels of control: full networks, sub-networks, network–nodes, and by proxy.

a. Full network control: This level of digital governance involves the government asserting control over the entire internet infrastructure within a particular jurisdiction. This can be achieved through measures such as shutting down the internet entirely, often during times of political unrest or protests. By cutting off access to the internet, authorities gain comprehensive control over online activities, communication channels, and the dissemination of information. This form of governance allows the government to restrict the flow of information, silence dissenting voices, and maintain a tight grip on the narrative.

b. Sub-network control: Sub-network governance focuses on specific segments of the internet infrastructure, such as websites or social media platforms, that are subjected to censorship or blocking by the ruling government. These restrictions may target platforms that are critical of the government, disseminate dissenting opinions, or share information that challenges the regime’s narratives. By censoring or blocking access to these platforms, authorities seek to control the flow of information, limit exposure to alternative viewpoints, and shape public opinion in their favour. Sub-network control is often employed as a means to maintain political stability and suppress opposition voices.

c. Proxy control: At the proxy level, governance is carried out through the use of intermediaries or proxies to restrict access to specific content or expressions. This approach

involves leveraging third-party entities, such as internet service providers or content delivery networks, to filter or block certain online content. Proxies act as intermediaries between users and the internet, allowing authorities to implement control measures indirectly. By utilizing proxies, governments can regulate internet traffic and selectively block access to websites, social media accounts, or online services that are deemed politically sensitive or threatening to their interests. Proxy control provides a level of deniability for governments, as they can distance themselves from direct responsibility for censorship.

d. Network-node or individual-level governance: This form of governance focuses on targeting individual users, activists, or content creators based on their views or online activities. Authorities monitor and track the online communications, social media accounts, and digital footprints of specific individuals or groups who are perceived as dissenters or threats to the regime. Targeted individuals may face various forms of harassment, surveillance, or even legal repercussions, such as arrest or prosecution. By targeting individuals, governments aim to instill fear, deter opposition, and create a chilling effect that discourages others from expressing dissenting opinions or engaging in activities that challenge the regime's authority.

These different levels of digital governance collectively contribute to the overarching framework of digital authoritarianism. They enable authorities to manipulate and control the digital space, suppress dissent, and maintain their political power. By understanding these levels, we can gain insights into the strategies employed by governments to control the flow of information, restrict online freedoms, and shape the digital landscape according to their interests.

#### **4. Digital Authoritarianism's Internet Governance Framework**

The four-layered approach presented in this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how hybrid regimes exert control over digital communication. This approach allows researchers to delve deeper into the tactics and strategies employed by these regimes, enabling a nuanced analysis of internet governance. By breaking down the control mechanisms into four distinct layers, researchers gain insights into the specific methods used and the role of religion in justifying and legitimizing interference in digital spaces.

The first layer, Full Network Control, refers to the complete control exerted by the regime over the entire internet infrastructure. In extreme cases, regimes may choose to shut down the internet entirely, denying access to online communication and information. This level of control allows regimes to establish a monopoly over digital spaces and severely restrict the flow of information. It represents a significant infringement on freedom of expression and can be a powerful tool for suppressing dissent.

The second layer, Sub-Network Control, focuses on specific segments of the internet infrastructure that are subject to censorship or blocking. This layer involves targeting particular websites, social media platforms, or online content that the regime deems threatening or contrary to its interests. By selectively censoring or blocking access to these platforms, regimes seek to control the information landscape and limit exposure to dissenting views. This layer highlights the regime's desire to shape public opinion by controlling the narratives available to citizens.

The third layer, Proxy Control, involves the use of intermediaries or proxies to regulate internet traffic and restrict access to specific content or expressions. Regimes may employ third-party entities such as internet service providers, content delivery networks, or filtering systems to act as intermediaries between users and the internet. By leveraging proxies, regimes can indirectly manipulate and filter internet content, allowing them to maintain a level of deniability or avoid direct responsibility for censorship. This layer demonstrates the regime's utilization of intermediaries to control digital communication and limit access to information that challenges its authority.

The fourth layer, Network-Node or Individual-Level Governance, revolves around targeting individuals, activists, or content creators based on their online activities or views. Regimes closely monitor and surveil specific individuals, tracking their online communica-



tions, social media accounts, and digital footprints. Through tactics such as harassment, surveillance, or legal actions, regimes aim to silence dissent, instill fear, and deter others from challenging their authority. This layer illustrates the regime's efforts to exert control at the individual level, effectively stifling opposition and discouraging free expression.

By employing this four-layered framework, researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the severity and mechanisms of control used by hybrid regimes. It provides a valuable tool for analyzing the different levels of internet governance and their implications. Furthermore, the framework allows researchers to explore the role of religion in justifying and legitimizing these control measures. By examining the interplay between religious justifications and digital authoritarianism, researchers can unravel the complex dynamics and motivations behind these regimes' actions.

In summary, the four-layered approach (see Table 1 below) enables a detailed analysis of how hybrid regimes exert control over digital communication. It sheds light on the specific tactics employed at each layer and allows researchers to explore the role of religion in justifying and legitimizing these control measures. Understanding these layers is crucial for comprehending the multifaceted nature of digital authoritarianism and its impact on freedom of expression and information flow within societies.

**Table 1.** Four layers of digital authoritarianism.

Targets of Internet Governance	Control Mechanisms
Internet infrastructure	Infrastructural isolation (e.g., firewall) Internet service blackouts
Internet services providers (ISPs)	Licence restrictions Market control Content moderation mandates Prosecution
Online platforms and websites	Prosecution Blocking/denial of service Content filtration Blacklisting
Internet user	Prosecution Blocking Blacklisting Denial of anonymity

## 5. Overview of Digital Authoritarianism in Turkey

The early use of digital governance was targeted towards the Kurdish community in Turkey. Traditionally, the ethnic community has been a victim of silent assimilation in Turkey and the AKP-led government has continued this legacy of oppression. Under the internet laws, state-growing digital authoritarianism was put on display when internet shutdowns and surveillance were used to justify the state's efforts to curb the alleged "terrorism" instigated by Kurds, especially in the eastern provinces of the country (Topak 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the year 2013 marked a significant turning point for Turkey's digital authoritarianism, as it expanded its scope beyond targeting the Kurdish population. During the Gezi Park protests in 2013, civil society groups and activists increasingly relied on social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to organize and share information. In response, the Turkish government labeled Twitter as the "worst menace to society," signaling its recognition of the role social media played in mobilizing dissent. This event marked the beginning of the government's heightened control over the internet in Turkey.

Since 2013, there has been clear evidence of a substantial increase in the expansion of digital authoritarianism in Turkey. The vague and broadly defined nature of existing laws has allowed the state to interpret and expand the definition of who qualifies as a "terrorist" or a threat. This flexibility in interpretation has resulted in the instrumentalization of these legal measures to target and suppress various individuals or groups deemed challenging

to the regime's authority. This broad discretion poses a significant risk to freedom of expression and democratic values.

Another concerning development in exerting control over cyberspace occurred in 2014 when an amendment to the Law on State Intelligence Services granted extensive digital surveillance powers to the National Intelligence Agency (MIT). This amendment allowed the MIT to conduct surveillance on both public and private data, enabling the collection of vast amounts of information that could be used as evidence in courts to prosecute individuals accused of various crimes. This expansion of surveillance capabilities further erodes privacy rights and poses a threat to personal freedoms (Topak 2019).

In recent years, Turkey has intensified its efforts to exert control over social media platforms and internet service providers. In 2020, the government introduced a "disinformation law" comprising numerous clauses, which aimed to combat the spread of "disinformation" on online platforms. The law required the prompt removal of content deemed as disinformation within 48 h, with substantial fines imposed for non-compliance. This law applied to both national and international platforms with more than one million users in Turkey. Shortly after the implementation of this law, prominent platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok faced fines for not adhering to the government's requests to remove content it deemed questionable or false.

These examples highlight the Turkish government's increasing efforts to tighten its grip on the digital sphere, exert control over social media platforms, and regulate internet service providers. Such measures pose significant challenges to freedom of expression, privacy rights, and the open exchange of information online. They demonstrate the government's determination to suppress dissent, control narratives, and consolidate its authority in the digital realm.

In summary, the expansion of Turkey's digital authoritarianism since 2013 has been accompanied by a broadening of the regime's control over the internet. Vague laws and flexible interpretations allow for the instrumentalization of legal measures to target dissenting voices. Additionally, the granting of extensive surveillance powers to intelligence agencies and the implementation of laws to combat disinformation further solidify the government's control over cyberspace. These developments have significant implications for freedom of expression, privacy, and the open flow of information online in Turkey.

In 2022, before the 2023 elections, the government tabled a set of new changes to Article 19. These changes also suggested higher control of cyberspace and the desire to expand powers of the BTK to regulate the internet to further compel social media platforms to hand over user data as well as remove content (HRW 2022). It also introduced the idea of "internet throttling", i.e., reducing the intended bandwidth of social media companies that do not comply with the government's requests (HRW 2022). This law also posed the additional idea of a "disinformation offence" which it defined as, "publicly disseminating, purely with the intent to cause anxiety, fear, or panic, false information about the country's internal and external security, public order, and general health in a way likely to damage the public peace" (HRW 2022). The proposed changes also intended to impose a three-year prison sentence for this offence (HRW 2022).

In essence, the increasing implementation of digital governance has taken on various forms, leading to multiple consequences. Firstly, one significant aspect of the government's efforts to regulate the internet is content regulation. These laws grant certain bodies the authority to block access to online content that the government perceives as a threat. However, what is considered morally or nationally threatening to society has evolved over the years to align with the political agenda of the AKP-led coalition. Consequently, bodies such as the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) possess significant powers conferred by legislative frameworks to remove and filter content.

Secondly, these laws have placed greater pressure on internet service providers to comply with the state's requests regarding information removal and access to users' personal data. Failure to adhere to these obligations can result in penalties or even the revoca-

tion of internet providers' licenses. Speculation exists that in the future, this may lead to bandwidth reduction and limitations on advertisements for these service providers.

Thirdly, while cybercrime provisions are intended to safeguard against hacking and online harassment, the state has instrumentalized these laws to gather user information for the purposes of investigation, prosecution, and collaboration with "international entities" through the dissemination of false or misleading information. Consequently, cyber authoritarianism aligns itself with and derives support from the constitution. For instance, individuals found guilty online under Article 299 (insulting the president), Article 301 (denigration of Turkishness, the Republic, or state institutions), Article 216 (provoking the public to hatred and hostility), or Article 314 (membership of a terrorist organization) can be brought to trial and subjected to corresponding punishments.

In summary, the increasing prominence of digital governance in Turkey has had significant repercussions in several areas, including content regulation, pressures on internet service providers, and the misuse of cybercrime provisions. These developments have far-reaching implications for fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and privacy, as well as the overall state of online discourse within the country's political landscape.

Furthermore, the Turkish government has effectively utilized state-controlled religious media outlets, such as Diyanet TV and the Anadolu Agency, as powerful tools to propagate its message and target opposition voices and critics of digital authoritarianism. These outlets, which are under direct government control, have been harnessed to launch attacks on dissenting opinions and amplify the government's narrative. This strategic use of religious media allows the government to manipulate public perception and discredit opposing viewpoints, further consolidating its power and suppressing dissent.

Moreover, Turkey's entertainment industry has experienced a notable surge in content that promotes neo-Ottoman ideologies. This content encompasses themes such as jihadism, ummatism (the concept of Muslim unity), fostering hostility between Judeo-Christian and Muslim communities, and the glorification of Islamist heroes. These shows, characterized by their propagandistic nature, have gained popularity within the country and have also been exported to other regions through digital platforms and streaming services. Muslim-majority countries, particularly those where pro-AKP narratives dominate the prevailing political dynamics, have become receptive to these productions (Yilmaz and Shakil 2021).

The deliberate promotion of neo-Ottoman ideologies in the entertainment industry serves multiple purposes for the Turkish government. Firstly, it aligns with the government's own political agenda, which seeks to consolidate power and project a specific narrative that resonates with its conservative, nationalist base. By glorifying Islamist heroes and fostering a sense of Muslim unity, the government aims to strengthen its influence and control over the population, particularly those who identify with religious values.

Secondly, exporting these shows to other regions, particularly Muslim-majority countries, serves as a means to expand Turkey's soft power and influence. By disseminating content that aligns with the government's ideology, Turkey seeks to position itself as a leading advocate for Islamic values and a model for other nations to follow. This strategic projection of cultural influence allows Turkey to shape narratives, exert influence, and foster political alliances that further its geopolitical interests.

In summary, the Turkish government has effectively employed state-controlled religious media outlets to propagate its message and target opposition voices. Additionally, the entertainment industry has seen a surge in content promoting neo-Ottoman ideologies, serving both domestic and international purposes for the government. These developments illustrate the government's strategic utilization of media and entertainment to shape public opinion, suppress dissent, and project its political agenda. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the broader implications of digital authoritarianism in Turkey and its impact on freedom of expression, cultural narratives, and political alliances.

The subsequent four sections of the text delve into the various levels at which digital authoritarianism manifests itself: full networks, sub-networks, proxies, and network-nodes. At each of these levels, control mechanisms are designed and implemented to monopolize



the digital space, reflecting an authoritarian outlook. These mechanisms encompass a wide range of tactics, ranging from complete internet blackouts to the use of spyware and the banning of specific content and websites.

## 6. Full Network-Level Governance

The Gezi Park protests in 2013 marked the start of the Turkish government's full control over the internet. In response to this, civil society groups and activists turned to social media to organise their efforts, leading to the government labelling Twitter as the "worst menace to society" (Akgul and Kirlidog 2015). This resulted in increased internet governance, including internet blackouts, which were administered by the newly formed Telecommunication Technologies Authority (BTK) by the government's command. The government justified these internet curbs as a means to combat "terrorism", but there was also a political motivation behind these actions.

The peak of the Turkish government internet shutdowns took place between 2015 and 2017. This was due to the introduction of Law No. 5651 in 2007, known as the Internet Law, which allowed websites to be blocked on eight grounds, including sites that spread terrorism. The definition of "terrorism" was manipulated to serve the interests of the dominant power and silence dissenting voices. Over time, the definition of a "terrorist" in Turkey has expanded to include peaceful protestors, such as the Gezi Park protestors in 2013, anti-government activists known as "FETOists", and the university students' activism during Istanbul's Bogazici University events of 2021 (Wilks 2021; Yesil et al. 2017). As a result, the 2007 law has been instrumentalised to marginalize digital spaces for non-AKP or critical groups. This has also led to the expansion of the TIB's power and placed additional burdens on hosting services and intermediaries. The 2014 amendment to the law on state intelligence services granted the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) the right to collect, record, and analyse public and private data. Intermediaries were required to comply with MIT's requests or face incarceration.

The eastern regions of Turkey faced the largest impact of internet and cellular shutdowns during this period, particularly in areas with strong Kurdish resistance. For example, during high-risk security incidents, such as the 2015 Suruç suicide bombing and the 2016 Atatürk Airport bombing, localised internet and cell phone blocks were put in place. The government's growing authoritarian approach led to the use of digital anti-terrorism laws to target marginalised groups, such as the Kurds. Most of the shutdowns took place in the southeast, where political activities tended to be more active. The 2016 internet and landline closure in 11 cities in the region, following the arrests of the mayor and co-mayor of Diyarbakir, led to protests and cost millions of dollars to the Turkish economy. While internet shutdowns decreased from six in 2016 to one in 2020, the cost remains high, with a value of USD 51 million in 2020 (Buchholz 2021).

While the role of religion and religious organisations in legitimizing full network governance is unclear, their role remains indispensable to the government and is a crucial factor in legitimizing other forms of digital governance.

## 7. Sub-Network or Website-Level Governance

The Internet Law (No.5651) enacted in 2007 made it easier to monitor and block web-pages and websites in Turkey. Despite being amended, the law still poses a problem with its arbitrary and ambiguous provisions. The internet governance institutions have a wide discretion for determining what is considered acceptable or unacceptable content. According to Freedom House's latest report on internet freedoms in Turkey, the control of the internet has been tightened in recent years (Freedom House 2021). Prior to the introduction of the Internet Law in 2007, only four websites were blocked in 2006. However, this number rose to 1014 in 2008 and to a staggering 27,812 in 2015. There is little transparency in the government's actions and no accountability, as blocking orders are often issued by the BTK without clear justifications, leaving website owners with limited avenues to appeal the decision. Suspicion and precaution could be reason enough to block a website.

After the coup in Turkey, many websites related to the Gülen movement, the Gezi protests, and charges of corruption and terrorism were blocked or taken down (Ergun 2018, p. 17). Websites promoting the opposition, Kurdish rights, pornography, and LGBTQ+ rights have also been targeted and blocked by the government (Ergun 2018). Numerous news outlets, including Zaman and Today's Zaman, were shut down in 2016. Websites promoting atheism were also blocked, such as the Atheism Association, which was ordered to be blocked by the Gölbaşı 2nd Civil Court of Peace in Ankara (Hurriyet Daily News 2015). The court order cited Article 216 of the Turkish Penal Law, which forbids "provoking the people for hate and enmity or degrading them".

Directly handpicked by Erdoğan himself, under the presidential system, the President of Diyanet wields significant influence as the centralised religious authority within Turkey and its global network of mosques around the world (Danforth 2020). The former President of Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez, directly targeted social media in his opening speech, blamed social media for harbouring all kinds of harms, and criticised its impact on families, privacy, and marriage. In 2016, a forum entitled "Social Media and the Family in the Context of Privacy" was organised by Diyanet in response to the government's calls for control on social media. The forum's objective was to guide Turks towards the traditional family value that is associated with the institution with the intention of circumventing any possible damage stemming from social media. The forum was also dedicated to discussing how social media has destroyed privacy, drastically impacting the institution of marriage, and therefore, causing a breakup of the family structure. Görmez considered that social media could be damaging for the entirety of humanity. He concluded on the need for his directorate to write a social media catechism for establishing the main principles on the usage of social media, and therefore, reiterating the ideological accord shared by Diyanet and Erdoğan's regime, leading the government towards the consolidation of authoritarianism both online and offline (Yilmaz and Albayrak 2022; Yilmaz et al. 2021; Danforth 2020).

Diyanet also published a booklet titled "Social Media Ethics" to lay the groundwork for stronger control of social media the use of Islam as a yardstick standard (Duvar 2021). Ali Erbaş, who personally penned the preface, warned readers of the omnipotent power of God that would extend his governance to social media activities under Islamic law. Additionally, believers were also warned of the dangers of "fake news" and the need to create a "world of truth" (Duvar 2021; Turkish Minute 2021). In addition, Diyanet's Friday sermons increasingly dealt with themes of social media, technology, and morality. On 17 January 2020, a sermon titled 'Technology Addiction and Social Media Ethics' was circulated by Diyanet to warn people of the dangers of the internet in violating the five fundamental values of Islam. It added that the "... inconsiderate use of technology harms human life by exposing threat to human health and inflict[ing] costly damage to property by causing financial loss. It erodes human dignity through unethical orientations and human faith through radical and perverse ideologies. It impairs the ability to think and comprehend and challenges the mental faculties." (Diyanet 2020).

## 8. Proxy or Corporation-Level Governance

After the July 2016 event was politicised by Erdoğan and his party as an attack on Turkish sovereignty, the most severe forms of digital restrictions emerged. The TİB was disbanded due to suspicions of being pro-Gülenists, and its powers were transferred to the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK). This led to a complete shutdown of 150 online and legacy media, and the loss of occupational capacity for 2700 Turkish journalists. (Kocer and Bozdogan 2020). The legal framework regulating digital spaces was used against the opposition and civil society voices, while supporting the AKP and pro-AKP groups. Social media intermediaries in Turkey have been under various types of restrictions. Under the Internet Law, they are required to accede to the requests of the Turkish government or face bans. At the height of growing discontent with the AKP in 2014, the TİB was mobilised to urge Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook to remove critical

information from their platforms that was damaging to the AKP. While Facebook was quick to comply with the AKP's request, Twitter and YouTube were nationally blocked for several hours before they eventually responded to the request (Yesil et al. 2017). In 2016, the search engine Google also followed thousands of requests regarding content removal from the Turkish state (Yesil et al. 2017).

Twitter's 2019 transparency report revealed that in the first half of the year, the Turkish government made 350 information requests on 596 accounts as well as 6073 removal requests on 8993 accounts with a five percent compliance rate. Turkey had the highest number of legal demands for removals. Facebook's 2019 transparency report also revealed that the government made 2060 legal requests and 2537 user information requests. Facebook was compliant with 73 percent of requests (Freedom House 2021). In a similar fashion, 450,000 domains, 140,000 URLs, and 42,000 Tweets were banned in Turkey (Timuçin 2021). In 2017, the information platform Wikipedia faced a ban in Turkey when the Ankara 1st Criminal Court found that certain articles linked Turkey to terrorist organization, and thus it required the articles to be edited before the website could be allowed to refraction the country. The ban was lifted in 2020 (Hurriyet Daily News 2020; The Guardian 2017). The list of incidents depicted the pressure on intermediaries before October 2020. Since then, a new—Law No. 7253—with harsher requirements for social media companies has been enforced.

The media's role in shaping public opinion is well documented, and the Turkish government has used its monopoly over public and private media outlets to manipulate the distribution of news and entertainment content online. In addition to the interference of transnational social media and the tightened restrictions of local websites, such as encyclopaedias, there is also additional control inserted over TV, streaming services such as Netflix, and various over-the-top media (OTTs). In 2019, the government granted plenary powers to the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) to issue licenses to regulate OTTs and force them to obtain licenses before they can stream content in Turkey (Pearce 2019; Yerlikaya 2019).

Even prior to the state of emergency imposed after the failed coup in July 2016, the government had already exerted formal and informal influence over media outlets such as the Bugün and Millet newspapers, KanalTürk TV, and the Ipek Group (Rogenhofer and Panievsky 2020). Pro-government media outlets spread conspiracy theories, such as the notion that the coup was a US-led attempt to assassinate President Erdoğan (Yilmaz et al. 2020). Turkish media refused to cover the Gezi protests and one even aired a penguin documentary instead of covering the protests, leading them to bear the name "penguin media". In the hotly contested early elections following the 2013–2014 events, it was also noted that the AKP was given more airtime on media platforms compared to the CHP etc. It was noted that "the AKP was allocated 30 h of screen time, Erdoğan was given 29 h; comparatively, the main opposition party CHP had five hours, the far-right MHP was allotted one hour, and the pro-Kurdish HDP only enjoyed 18 min" (Hoyng and Es 2015).

On the other hand, critical voices faced financial penalties, including fines and heavy taxes, that hindered their ability to operate independently. The government's tactics have driven many critical media outlets out of business, and pro-government entities have taken over their assets. For example, the pro-government Demirören Group acquired the Doğan Media Group after the government imposed high taxes on it. The Anadolu Ajansı (AA), which has enjoyed government support, increased its support for the AKP government by 545% since 2002, and 91.1% of its Twitter coverage favours the government. The informal means of supporting pro-government content also included the closure of anti-government entities and their transfer or sale to pro-government supporters, creating a clientelist relationship between the state and the media (Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018). The Gülen-linked Samanyolu Group, Koza Ipek Group, and Feza Publications were confiscated during the state of emergency in 2016 and redistributed to loyalists of President Erdoğan (Timuçin 2021; BBC 2016; Yackley 2016).

In the academic sphere, several pro-AKP Islamic scholars aligned themselves with the Turkish government's narrative. These academics formed a close-knit group of individuals, such as Nihat Hatipoğlu and Hayrettin Karaman, who are associated with the AKP (Sarfati 2019; Kenes 2018). They believe that social media is rife with misinformation targeting Turkish national interests and that it has the potential to mislead the youth. For instance, Hayrettin Karaman has publicly defended the AKP's actions by legitimizing a version of their stance, arguing that "corruption is not a theft" (Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018). In his view, a society should be operated by Islamic law rather than liberal democracy. In 2013, Karaman even provided counsel to Turkish President Erdoğan, advocating for a democratic order based on Islam in a predominantly Muslim society and tougher measures on social media and the individuals who use it to resist these principles.

In 2013, Karaman wrote the following. "In my opinion, the solution number one is to establish a democratic order based on Islam in a society which consists of people who are 'Muslim' almost 100 percent. The political power should not attempt to apply politics against this regime, even if people insisted on the liberal democracies; the individuals should, for the sake of the majority they always need, willingly restrain from some of their freedoms. If they still do not restrain, the measures such as at least a neighbourhood pressure becomes the right of the majority" (Karaman 2013).

Since 2016, Karaman has frequently accused social media of being used by "anti-Turkey" groups to spread lies. He has also expressed the dangers of social media, claiming that false information spread through these platforms can lead to public lynching and that there is no opportunity for refutation (Karaman 2021). He also wrote a poem that was in line with the AKP's views on social media, advocating for more control over social media to raise a "pious youth" and curb the critical remarks directed towards the AKP (Karaman 2020).

Similarly, Nihat Hatipoğlu, a Turkish academic and theologian, used his popular show on ATV to issue fatwas, warning viewers to be cautious when using social media as it can lead to sin. In addition to claiming that social media messages are potential hubs of adultery, he claimed that following or liking "questionable" persons on social media can lead to false rumours and sin, which will have accountability in the afterlife (Akyol 2016).

"Celebrities, politicians, and clergy who are victims of lying rumours will demand accountability in the afterlife. Think ten times before you like something. Sins are not limited to alcohol, adultery, and gambling. Envy, a sin that man commits with her tongue, is far worse. Our Prophet said: 'A person may have drunk and committed adultery but cannot bear false witness.' False testimonies are a public matter".

Despite being critical of "Western" media and social media, both Hatipoğlu and Karaman endorse Islamic content. For example, they both supported the Iranian movie "Muhammad: The Messenger of God", with Hatipoğlu hoping for a more Sunni-oriented outlook in future movies (Akyol 2016).

## 9. Network–Node or Individual-Level Governance

The Turkish government has been cracking down on social media and prosecuting individuals for their internet activities, particularly following the 2016 coup attempt. According to the Ministry of Interior, over ten thousand people were investigated for their online activities, with over 3700 facing legal action and over 1600 arrested. During a two-month period from mid-January to mid-March 2018, over 6000 social media accounts were investigated and over 2000 individuals were subjected to legal action. Freedom House's 2021 evaluation of Turkey's internet freedom showed that between 2013 and 2018, the government filed over 20,000 legal cases against citizens due to their social media actions (Ergun 2018). In 2016, academics and other civil society voices were targeted by pro-AKP media outlets, who accused them of being involved in "terrorism." (GIT North America 2016). As the public sphere has become increasingly restricted, journalists have faced limited space to express their critical opinions and many have faced trials and accusations of being connected to terrorism under Article 314/2, association with an armed organization, and Article 147 or Article 5 that concern crimes associated with terrorist organizations and



aims (Sahinkaya 2021). The restriction of anti-AKP voices has negatively impacted the public sphere, which is dominated by pro-AKP voices both online and offline.

The Turkish government is actively suppressing dissent on social media by threatening and arresting individuals. In 2014, a court order from Turkey's Diyarbakir ordered Facebook to block the pages and individuals engaging with content from the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, which published a cartoon insulting Prophet Muhammad (Johnston 2015). In May 2020, Turkey's Director of Communications of the Presidency warned Turkish citizens that even liking or sharing a post that is not accepted by the government could put them into trouble. Journalists, scholars, opposition leaders, and civil society leaders who tend to hold critical stances towards the government are more likely to face prosecution. A large number of arrests demonstrated a chilling effect and has given rise to self-censorship among Turkish citizens, who are increasingly vulnerable to legal repercussions for their online activities (Freedom House 2021). The proposed Law No. 7253 requires social media companies to appoint permanent representatives in Turkey and store data within the country, making individuals and companies responsible for complying with Turkish laws and regulations. The proposed law regulates the stack of internet infrastructure from the network, the content provider and the hosting provider to the access provider. This has further expanded the government's digital governance and monitoring capabilities, leading to a significant increase in legal cases against individuals for their online activities (Ergun 2018).

The AKP's interference in the digital public sphere is marked by government-orchestrated or self-organised internet trolling and online harassment aimed at shifting the narrative towards supporting the AKP. Critics of the AKP, including journalists, academics, and artists, have been subjected to a culture of "digital lynching and censorship" by the party's army of trolls (Bulut and Yörük 2017). The post-2016 scenario has exacerbated the situation, exposing these critical voices to open cyber bullying by trolls and making their persecution even more burdensome (Shearlaw 2016). A significant number of trolls are pro-AKP Imam Hatip graduates (Bulut and Yörük 2017). It is worth noting that these individuals receive a payment of a minimum of 1000 Turkish Lira and there are also traces that pro-AKP networks further provide benefits to successful trolls, which include entities such as TRT and Turkcell (Bulut and Yörük 2017).

In addition to utilizing trolls, the AKP also employs bots to boost their presence in the digital space, leading to an overrepresentation of their narrative across the platforms. For example, when the Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu resigned and uploaded his resignation letter on Twitter instead of making a formal announcement, he was able to garner widespread online support through the efforts of trolls and bot accounts. The hashtag #seninleyizsoylu (#wearewithyouSoylu) became a trending topic in Turkey within hours of his resignation, and President Erdoğan ultimately refused to accept the minister's resignation. Dissident mafia boss Sedat Peker claimed in a series of online exposés that he was hired by the minister to orchestrate this move, using bot accounts to generate the appearance of popular support (Duvar 2021). While Peker's criminal history raises questions about the credibility of his claims, they are supported by the findings of the Stanford Internet Observatory (2020), which verified that AKP organizations have links to trolls and bot accounts.

In 2020, Twitter deleted 32,424 accounts from China, Russia, and Turkey as part of its propaganda account purge, with 7340 of these being Turkish accounts. It was revealed that these accounts circulated 37 million tweets, primarily to support President Erdoğan and attack opposition parties, as well as calling for reforms (Safety 2020). In 2019, an average of 26.7% of the daily top ten Twitter trends were generated by fake accounts or bot trolls, with the highest impact being 47.5% of the top five Twitter trends (Elmas et al. 2019). It was evident that the state-organised hate speech, trolls, and online harassments were often left unchecked. Garo Paylan, an HDP MP who is of a Turkish–Armenian background, was harassed online due to his political stance during the 2020 Azerbaijan–Armenian skirmish (Briar 2020). At the same time, the suggestion of Ibrahim Karagul, a pan Islamist and neo-Ottomanist writer, 'accidentally' bombing Armenians was not flagged as hate speech



([Armenian Weekly 2020](#)). In 2021, a viral video of a man abusing Syrian refugees for buying bananas that they could barely afford led to socio-economic tension in Turkey between Syrians and Turkish. The tension was then evolved into a “banana campaign”. This video went viral and was not taken down by regulation bodies, despite the controversies. A total of 11 Syrian refugees who defended the assaulted were then deported, and the migrant group was increasingly scapegoated for Turkey’s economic problems ([De Foucaud 2021](#)).

Religious leaders in Turkey have used their social media platforms to vilify certain individuals or groups. One example is Ali Erbaş, the president of Diyanet, who accused LGBTQ+ activists of ‘spreading HIV’ ([Duvar 2020](#)). This statement was supported by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services and President Erdoğan, sparking a social media battle ([ILGA Europe 2021](#)). The Erdoğan regime has always focused on raising a “pious youth” and has openly declared atheists and LGBTQ+ identities as a social threat to the nation ([Gall 2018](#)). The ruling party in Turkey, the AKP, has targeted the “West” and certain youth groups in its efforts to delegitimise protests and restrict freedom of speech. The party has utilised rhetoric that portrays Western values as corrupting the future of Turkey, and specifically targets the LGBTQ+ community. The social media law of 2020 was particularly effective in limiting the reach of social activism and freedom of speech in both digital and physical spaces. On Twitter, Turkish ministers have used their platforms to demonise LGBTQ+ youth as “deviants”, as seen during the Bogazici University protests in Istanbul in 2021 ([Kucukgocmen 2021](#)). It is worth noting that being a member of the LGBTQ+ community is not illegal in Turkey. However, the AKP has censored LGBTQ+ content on TikTok, a platform widely used by young people around the world and has curtailed advertising on various social media platforms, such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Periscope, to “clean up” the online space and limit the reach of opposition groups ([Woodward 2019](#); [Euro News 2021](#)). This move was motivated by a personal vendetta of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was outraged by trolling on social media about his daughter and son-in-law. In this charged anti-LGBTQ+ atmosphere, the streaming service Netflix was prohibited from airing a movie with an LGBTQ+ storyline ([Banka 2019](#)), and Twitter trends advocating for a ban on LGBTQ+ content have been mobilised with hashtags, such as #LGBTfilmgunleriyasaklansin (LGBT film days shall be banned) and #İstiklalimizeKaraLeke (disgrace to our independence) ([Sarı 2018](#)).

In 2011, the BTK “Safe Use of the Internet” campaign called for the use of a Turkish-built filter called the ‘family filter’. Despite the name, the campaign only targeted the use of the internet in public places, such as cafes and libraries, without restricting the use of the internet within domestic settings. The campaign was signed to block foreign and domestic sites that contained adult content as the law has been positioned to safeguard young children from non-age-appropriate content. Without the family filter being mandatorily installed in the household, presumably, it is the parents’ responsibility to supervise the internet use of their children. Children’s privacy is not necessarily discussed in the campaign. However, over the years, many have speculated that by applying the ‘family filter’, the state is able to block not only pornographic websites from the screens of Turkish citizens but also critical voices in the digital space ([Hurriyet Daily 2014](#); [Brunwasser 2011](#)). The ambiguous nature of the blacklisting criterion and the power condensed with state authorities has paved a path to digital oppression conducted by the AKP ([Yesil et al. 2017](#)). In the name of safeguarding children and youth, the BTK has blocked approximately 1.5 million websites, as of 2017, in areas such as cafes and refused to share a list of the websites it blocks ([Yesil et al. 2017](#)).

Constitutionally, Turkey is considered a secular state, but its laws surrounding blasphemy have been amended to allow for charges to be brought against individuals under Article 216 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK). Although this legal provision does not explicitly mention a specific religion, it has been frequently used in relation to Islam. For instance, individuals who expressed support for the Charlie Hebdo caricatures that mocked the Muslim faith and symbolism faced trial and potential sentencing. Similarly, renowned figures such as pianist Fazıl Say and actress Berna Lacin were sentenced to prison due to

their online scepticism towards Islamic values. In 2016, two journalists were handed a two-year sentence for reprinting the aforementioned caricatures, and in 2020, journalist Enver Aysever was arrested and charged for mocking religious leaders and their behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic (FORIS 2021). Additionally, the individuals who shared a video of the song “Bella Ciao” being played in a mosque in Izmir were warned of potential charges under the same blasphemy law (The Freedom of Thought Report 2021). As a result, the digital space is also becoming Islamised with restrictions being placed on blasphemy, heresy, heterodoxy, and pornography, which are used to further suppress opposition groups.

## 10. Conclusions

In the past decade, particularly since 2016, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has been progressively exerting control over the digital landscape. Both formal and informal institutions and individuals aligned with the AKP have tried to monopolize digital spaces at various levels, ranging from micro to macro. Through the dissemination of conspiracies, fear, and emotionally charged narratives, curated by President Erdoğan and his network of supporters and religious entities like Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs), the AKP has not only justified digital authoritarianism but has also targeted political opponents, companies, websites, and individuals on online platforms. A combination of legal measures, fatwas (Islamic legal opinions), harassment of dissenting voices, and surveillance has created a climate of deterrence and, to some extent, self-censorship. The AKP and its allies continue to assert control over cyberspace in the name of protecting their vision of a “pious youth” and a predominantly Islamist nation.

This paper highlighted how religious populist justifications have consistently been employed to legitimize control mechanisms and advance pro-AKP rhetoric in the digital realm. Several strategies have been employed to use religion in support of digital authoritarianism. Firstly, sermons and speeches delivered by imams in state-controlled mosques have been carefully crafted to promote government policies regarding digital media and internet censorship. They also emphasize the perceived dangers of social media in spreading what is deemed “immoral” content online. Secondly, religious organizations and foundations have been utilized as vehicles for disseminating government messages through social media and other online platforms, presenting digital authoritarianism as a necessary means of safeguarding Islamic values and morality. Thirdly, religious leaders and scholars have been co-opted to endorse government policies and advocate for increased control over digital media. Lastly, state-controlled religious media outlets, including television channels and newspapers, have been utilized to propagate the government’s message and launch attacks against opposition voices and critics of digital authoritarianism.

In summary, the paper highlights how the AKP has progressively exerted control over the digital realm, employing religious justifications to legitimize its actions. It showcases the ways in which religion has been used to promote digital authoritarianism, including through imams’ sermons, religious organizations, the endorsement of religious leaders, and the utilization of religious media outlets. By employing these strategies, the AKP seeks to maintain its grip on power, protect its ideological agenda, and control the digital space in the pursuit of its vision for a “pious” and Islamist-dominated nation.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation, AZ 01/TG/21, Emerging Digital Technologies and the Future of Democracy in the Muslim World.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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

## References

- Akgul, Mustafa, and Melih Kirlidog. 2015. Internet Censorship in Turkey. *Internet Policy Review* 4. Available online: <http://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/internet-censorship-turkey> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Akyol, Riada A. 2016. Iranian Film about Prophet Muhammad Causes Stir in Turkey. *Al Monitor*. November 15. Available online: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/11/turkey-iranian-movie-about-prophet-causes-stir.html#ixzz7BczW8uvz> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Anderson, Janna, and Rainie Lee. 2020. Many Tech Experts Say Digital Disruption Will Hurt Democracy. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/02/21/many-tech-experts-say-digital-disruption-will-hurt-democracy/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Armenian Weekly. 2020. Sharp Rise in Hate Speech Threatens Turkey's Armenians. *Armenian Weekly*. October 8. Available online: <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/10/08/sharp-rise-in-hate-speech-threatens-turkeys-armenians/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Banka, Neha. 2019. Why Netflix Cancelled a Turkish Drama after Row over an LGBTQ Character. *Indian Express*. July 22. Available online: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-netflix-cancelled-a-turkish-drama-after-row-over-an-lgbtq-character-6518401/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Bauman, Zygmunt, Didier Bigo, Paulo Esteves, Elspeth Guild, Vivienne Jabri, David Lyon, and Rob B. J. Walker. 2014. After Snowden: Rethinking the impact of surveillance. *International Political Sociology* 8: 121–44. [CrossRef]
- BBC. 2016. Zaman Newspaper: Seized Turkish Daily 'Now Pro-Government'. March 6. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35739547> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Bellut, Daniel. 2021. Turkish Government Increases Pressure on Social Media. *DW*. September 9. Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/urkish-government-increases-pressure-on-social-media/a-59134848> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Bennett, Philip, and Moisés Naim. 2015. 21st-Century Censorship. *Columbia Journalism Review* 53: 14.
- Bennett, W. Lance, and Steven Livingston. 2018. The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European Journal of Communication* 33: 122–39. [CrossRef]
- Bianet. 2020. There Are 54 Million Social Media Users in Turkey. July 2. Available online: <https://m.bianet.org/urkish/society/226764-there-are-54-million-social-media-users-in-turkey> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Bimber, Bruce, and Homero Gil de Zúñiga. 2020. The Unedited Public Sphere. *New Media and Society* 22: 700–15. [CrossRef]
- Briar, Narin. 2020. Negligent Social Media Platforms Breeding Grounds for Turkish Nationalism, Hate Speech. *The Armenian Weekly*. October 29. Available online: <https://armenianweekly.com/2020/10/29/negligent-social-media-platforms-breeding-grounds-for-turkish-nationalism-hate-speech/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Brunwasser, Matthew. 2011. Turkish Internet Filter to Block Free Access to Information. *DW*. January 6. Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/urkish-internet-filter-to-block-free-access-to-information/a-15123910> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Buchholz, Katharina. 2021. The Cost of Internet Shutdowns. January 6. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/chart/23864/estimated-cost-of-internet-shutdowns-by-country/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Bulut, Ergin, and Erdem Yörük. 2017. Digital Populism: Trolls and Political Polarization of Twitter in Turkey. *International Journal of Communication* 11: 4093–117.
- Daily Sabah. 2021a. Rate of Internet Users in Turkey Rises to 82.6%. August 26. Available online: <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/rate-of-internet-users-in-turkey-rises-to-826/news> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Daily Sabah. 2021b. Turkey to Open Social Media Directorate. August 23. Available online: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/legislation/turkey-to-open-social-media-directorate> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Daily Sabah. 2021c. Turkish Parliament to Create 'Digital Map' of Country. May 24. Available online: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/legislationurkish-parliament-to-create-digital-map-of-country> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Danforth, Nick. 2020. The Outlook for Turkish Democracy: 2023 and beyond. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Available online: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/632> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- De Foucaud, Ludovic. 2021. Syrian Refugees in Turkey Face Deportation over Viral Banana Videos. *France 24*. November 5. Available online: <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20211105-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-face-deportation-over-viral-banana-videos> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Diamond, Larry. 2021. Rebooting Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 32: 179–83. [CrossRef]
- Diyanet. 2020. Technology Addiction and Social Media Ethics. January 17. Available online: <https://dinhizmetleri.diyamet.gov.tr/Documents/Technology%20Addiction%20and%20Social%20Media%20Ethics.doc> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Duvar. 2021. Turkish Religious Authority Recommends Islamic Jurisprudence to Curb Social Media in New Book. September 7. Available online: <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-religious-authority-recommends-islamic-jurisprudence-to-curb-social-media-in-new-book-news-58737> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Ebert, Hannes, and Tim Maurer. 2013. Contested cyberspace and rising powers. *Third World Quarterly* 34: 1054–74. [CrossRef]
- Eldem, Tuba. 2020. The Governance of Turkey's Cyberspace: Between Cyber Security and Information Security. *International Journal of Public Administration* 43: 452–65. [CrossRef]
- Elmas, Tuğrulcan, Rebekah Overdorf, Ahmed Özkalay, and Karl Aberer. 2019. Ephemeral Astroturfing Attacks: The Case of Fake Twitter Trends. Available online: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336638958\\_Ephemeral\\_Astroturfing\\_Attacks\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Fake\\_Twitter\\_Trends](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336638958_Ephemeral_Astroturfing_Attacks_The_Case_of_Fake_Twitter_Trends) (accessed on 11 May 2023).

- Ergun, Doruk. 2018. National Security vs. Online Rights and Freedoms in Turkey: Moving beyond the Dichotomy. Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM). Available online: <https://edam.org.tr/en/national-security-vs-online-rights-and-freedoms-in-turkey-moving-beyond-the-dichotomy/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Euro News. 2020. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Vows to Curb Social Media in Turkey. July 1. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/01/president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-vows-to-curb-social-media-in-turkey> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Euro News. 2021. Turkey Bans Advertising on Twitter and Pinterest under Social Media Law. January 19. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/19/turkey-bans-advertising-on-twitter-and-pinterest-under-social-media-law> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Feldstein, Steven. 2019. *The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Freedom House. 2021. Turkey. Available online: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-net/2020> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Freedom of Religious Institutions in Society Project. 2021. FORIS Report. May. Available online: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57052f155559869b68a4f0e6/t/60b038f02ff5745470dce12d/1622161653878/FORIS+2\\_Blasphemy\\_ONLINE.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57052f155559869b68a4f0e6/t/60b038f02ff5745470dce12d/1622161653878/FORIS+2_Blasphemy_ONLINE.pdf) (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Gall, Carlotta. 2018. Erdoğan's Plan to Raise a 'Pious Generation' Divides Parents in Turkey. *The New York Times*. June 18. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/world/europe/Erdoğan-turkey-election-religious-schools.html> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- GIT North America. 2016. Pro-AKP Media Figures Continue to Target Academics for Peace. *Jadaliyya*. March 18. Available online: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33208> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Greenwald, Glenn. 2014. *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*. New York: Picador.
- Gürkaynak, Gönenç, İlay Yılmaz, and Nazlı Pinar Taskiran. 2014. Protecting the communication: Data protection and security measures under telecommunications regulations in the digital age. *Computer Law and Security Review* 30: 179–89. [CrossRef]
- Howard, Philip N., Samuel Woolley, and Ryan Calo. 2018. Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* 15: 81–93. [CrossRef]
- Howard, Philip N., Sheetal D. Agarwal, and Muzammil M. Hussain. 2011. The Dictators' Digital Dilemma: When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks? *Issues in Technology Innovation*. Number 13. Available online: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10\\_dictators\\_digital\\_network.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10_dictators_digital_network.pdf) (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Howells, Laura, and Laura A. Henry. 2021. Varieties of Digital Authoritarianism: Analyzing Russia's Approach to Internet Governance. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 54: 1–27. [CrossRef]
- Hoyng, Rolien, and Murat Es. 2015. Censorship and Conspiracy Theories Rule the Day in Post-Election Turkey. *Open Democracy*. November 3. Available online: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/censorship-and-conspiracy-theories-rule-day-in-post-election-turkey/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- HRW. 2022. *World Report 2023*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Hurriyet Daily. 2014. 'Turkey's New Internet Law is the First Step toward Surveillance Society,' Says Cyberlaw Expert. February 24. Available online: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-new-internet-law-is-the-first-step-toward-surveillance-society-says-cyberlaw-expert-62815> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Hurriyet Daily News. 2015. Turkey Blocks Website of Its First Atheist Association—Türkiye News. *Hürriyet Daily News*. March 4. Available online: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-blocks-website-of-its-first-atheist-association-79163> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Hurriyet Daily News. 2020. Wikipedia Ban Lifted after Top Court Ruling Issued. January 15. Available online: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/wikipedia-ban-lifted-after-top-court-ruling-issued-150993> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- ILGA Europe. 2021. Turkish Government Steps Up Its Attacks on LGBTI+ Citizens. *Ilga Europe*. February 5. Available online: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/turkish-government-steps-its-attacks-turkeys-lgbti-citizens> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Johnston, Chris. 2015. Facebook Blocks Turkish Page That 'Insults Prophet Muhammad'. sec. Technology. *The Guardian*. January 27. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/27/facebook-blocks-turkish-page-insults-prophet-muhammad> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Karabacak, Bilge, Sevgi Ozkan Yildirim, and Nazife Baykal. 2016. Regulatory Approaches for Cyber Security of Critical Infrastructures: The Case of Turkey. *Computer Law and Security Review* 32: 526–39. [CrossRef]
- Karaman, Hayrettin. 2013. Çogunlugu Kale Almamak. *Yeni Safak*. November 8. Available online: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hayrettin-karaman/cogunlugukale-almamak-40566> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Karaman, Hayrettin. 2020. Internet World and Market. *Yeni Safak*. October 25. Available online: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hayrettin-karaman/internet-deryasi-ve-pazari-2056600> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Karaman, Hayrettin. 2021. Social Media Lies. *Yeni Safak*. October 10. Available online: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hayrettin-karaman/sosyal-medya-yananlari-2059831> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Kenes, Bulent. 2018. Instrumentalization of Islam: Hayrettin Karaman's Role in Erdoğan's Despotism. *PoliTurco*. May 30. Available online: <https://www.politurco.com/instrumentalization-of-islam-hayrettin-karamans-role-in-Erdogans-despotism.html> (accessed on 11 May 2023).



- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism But Silences Collective Expression. *American Political Science Review* 107: 326–43. [CrossRef]
- Kocer, Suncem. 2015. From the 'Worst Menace to Societies' to the 'Robot Lobby': A Semantic Views of Turkish Political Rhetoric on Social Media. In *New Media Politics: Rethinking Activism and National Security in Cyberspace Account*. Edited by Lemi Baruh and Banu Baybars Hawks. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Kocer, Suncem, and Çigdem Bozdag. 2020. News-Sharing Repertoires on Social Media in the Context of Networked Authoritarianism: The Case of Turkey. *International Journal of Communication* 14: 5292–310. Available online: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/13134> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Kucukgocmen, Ali. 2021. Twitter Labels Turkish Minister's LGBT Post Hateful as Students Protest. *Reuters*. February 2. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-security-bogazici-int-idUSKBN2A21C1> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Kurbalija, Jovan. 2016. *An Introduction to Internet Governance*. Malta: Diplo Foundation.
- Lynch, Marc. 2011. After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State. *Perspectives on Politics* 9: 301–10. [CrossRef]
- Lyon, David. 2014. Surveillance, Snowden, and big data: Capacities, consequences, critique. *Big Data and Society* 1: 2053951714541861. [CrossRef]
- Michaelsen, Marcus, and Marlies Glasius. 2018. Authoritarian Practices in the Digital Age. *International Journal of Communication* 12: 3788–94.
- Pearce, James. 2019. Turkey to Introduce New Regulations for OTT Services. *IBC*. August 6. Available online: <https://www.ibt.org/trends/turkey-to-introduce-new-regulations-for-ott-services/4239.article> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Polat, Burak, Cemile Tokgöz Bakıroğlu, and Mira Elif Demirhan Sayın. 2013. Hactivism in Turkey: The case of redhack. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4: 628. [CrossRef]
- Polyakova, Alina, and Chris Meserole. 2019. *Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models*. Policy Brief, Democracy and Disorder Series; Washington, DC: Brookings, pp. 1–22.
- Rogenhofer, Julius Maximilian, and Ayala Panievsky. 2020. Antidemocratic populism in power: Comparing Erdoğan's Turkey with Modi's India and Netanyahu's Israel. *Democratization* 27: 1394–412. [CrossRef]
- RSF. 2023. Türkiye—2023 World Press Freedom Index. *RSF*. May 3. Available online: <https://rsf.org/en/country-türkiye> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Safety, Twitter. 2020. Disclosing Networks of State-Linked Information Operations We've Removed. June 12. Available online: [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/information-operations-june-2020](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/information-operations-june-2020) (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Sahinkaya, Ezel. 2021. Erdoğan Says Media Are 'Incomparably Free,' But Turkish Journalists Disagree. October 13. Available online: <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-Erdoğan-press-freedom/6269435.html> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Saka, Erkan. 2018. Social Media in Turkey as a Space for Political Battles: AKTrolls and other Politically motivated trolling. *Middle East Critique* 27: 161–77. [CrossRef]
- Sarfati, Yusuf. 2019. Religious Authority in Turkey: Hegemony and Resistance. Rice University Center for the Middle East. March. Available online: <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/c873dd82/cme-pub-luce-sarfati-031119.pdf> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Sarı, Elif. 2018. A Critical Forum About LGBTI+ Prohibitions in Turkey. *JADaily*. January 3. Available online: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34951> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Shearlaw, Maeve. 2016. Turkish Journalists Face Abuse and Threats Online as Trolls Step up Attacks. *The Guardian*. November 1. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/01/turkish-journalists-face-abuse-threats-online-trolls-attacks> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Stanford Internet Observatory. 2020. *Analysis of June 2020 Twitter Takedowns Linked to China, Russia and Turkey*. Stanford: Stanford Internet Observatory. Available online: <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/june-2020-twitter-takedown> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- The Freedom of Thought Report. 2021. Turkey. January 5. Available online: [https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/turkey/#Blasphemy\\_law](https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/turkey/#Blasphemy_law) (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- The Guardian. 2017. Turkey Blocks Wikipedia under Law Designed to Protect National Security. April 30. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/29/turkey-blocks-wikipedia-under-law-designed-to-protect-national-security> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Timuçin, Fatma. 2021. 8-Bit Iron Fist: Digital Authoritarianism in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: The Cases of Turkey and Hungary. Master's thesis, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey. Available online: <https://research.sabanciuniv.edu/42417/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Topak, Özgün E. 2019. The authoritarian surveillant assemblage: Authoritarian state surveillance in Turkey. *Security Dialogue* 50: 454–72. [CrossRef]
- Tucker, Joshua A., Yannis Theocharis, Margaret E. Roberts, and Pablo Barberá. 2017. From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 28: 46–59. [CrossRef]
- Tufekci, Zeynep. 2014. Engineering the Public: Big Data, Surveillance and Computational Politics. *First Monday*. 19. Available online: <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/4901/4097> (accessed on 11 May 2023).



- Turkey's Top Religious Official Once again Targets LGBT Individuals. 2020. *Duvar English*. April 25. Available online: <https://www.duvarenglish.com/domestic/2020/04/25/turkeys-top-religious-official-once-again-targets-lgbt-individuals> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Turkish Minute. 2021. Turkey's Top Imam Calls for Social Media Regulation Amid Discussions on New Gov't Body. September 7. Available online: <https://www.turkishminute.com/2021/09/07/rkeys-top-imam-calls-for-social-media-regulation-amid-discussions-on-new-government-body/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Wilks, Andrew. 2021. Turkey's Student Protests: New Challenge for Erdoğan. *Al Jazeera*. February 6. Available online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/6/turkeys-student-protests-new-challenge-for-erdogan> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Woodward, Annabelle. 2019. Documents Reveal That TikTok Once Banned LGBTQ, Anti-Government Content in Turkey. *Forbes*. October 2. Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annabellewoodward1/2019/10/02/documents-reveal-that-tiktok-once-banned-lgbtq-anti-government-content-in-turkey/?sh=5145d5c81d7e> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- World Bank. 2021. Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population). Available online: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=TR> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Yackley, J. Ayla. 2016. Turkey Closes Media Outlets Seized from Gulen-Linked Owner. *Reuters*. March 1. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-media-gulen-idUSKCN0W34ML> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Yang, Fan, Heemsbergen Luke, and Fordyce Robbie. 2021. Comparative analysis of China's health code, Australia's COVID Safe and New Zealand's COVID Tracer Surveillance Apps: A new corona of public health governmentality? *Media International Australia* 178: 182–97. [CrossRef]
- Yerlikaya, Turgay. 2019. Supervision or Censorship? Turkey's Regulation on Netflix and Web-Based Broadcasting. *Politics Today*. August 29. Available online: <https://politicstoday.org/supervision-or-censorship-turkeys-regulation-on-netflix-and-web-based-broadcasting/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Yesil, Bilge. 2016. *Media in New Turkey: The Origins of an Authoritarian Neoliberal State*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Yesil, Bilge, and Efe Kerem Sozeri. 2017. Online surveillance in Turkey: Legislation, technology and citizen involvement. *Surveillance and Society* 15: 543–49. [CrossRef]
- Yesil, Bilge, Efe Kerem Sozeri, and Emad Khazraee. 2017. Turkey's Internet Policy after the Coup Attempt: The Emergence of a Distributed Network of Online Suppression and Surveillance. *Internet Policy Observatory*. Available online: <https://repository.upenn.edu/internetpolicyobservatory/22> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Yilmaz, Ihsan. 2018. Islamic Populism and Creating Desirable Citizens in Erdogan's New Turkey. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29: 52–76.
- Yilmaz, Ihsan. 2021. *Creating the Desired Citizens: State, Islam and Ideology in Turkey*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Galib Bashirov. 2018. The AKP after 15 years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly* 39: 1812–30. [CrossRef]
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Ismail Albayrak. 2022. *Populist and Pro-Violence State Religion: The Diyanet's Construction of Erdoğanist Islam in Turkey*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, and Kainat Shakil. 2021. *Transnational Islamist Populism between Pakistan and Turkey: The Case of Dirilis—Ertugrul*. Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies. Available online: <https://www.populismstudies.org/transnational-islamist-populism-between-pakistan-and-turkey-the-case-of-dirilis-ertugrul/> (accessed on 11 May 2023).
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, Mehmet E. Caman, and Galib Bashirov. 2020. How an Islamist Party Managed to Legitimate Its Authoritarianisation in the Eyes of the Secularist Opposition: The Case of Turkey. *Democratization* 27: 265–82. [CrossRef]
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, Mustafa Demir, and Nicholas Morieson. 2021. Religion in Creating Populist Appeal: Islamist Populism and Civilizationism in the Friday Sermons of Turkey's Diyanet. *Religions* 12: 359. [CrossRef]
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, Saleem Raja Ali, Pargoo Mahmoud, Shukri Syaza, and Idznursham Ismail. 2022. *Religious Populism, Cyberspace and Digital Authoritarianism in Asia: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey*. Think Tank Report. Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies. [CrossRef]

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.