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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL SECULARISM AND ISLAMISM: PHASES
AND TRAJECTORIES OF TURKEY AND IRAN SINCE FIRST WORLD WAR

Master Thesis

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I have written this Master's Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

Abstract

This thesis comparatively examines the politics of Turkey and Iran over the past 100 years in terms of the interaction of secularism and Islamism within the state. The study is conducted by dividing the political history of the countries into historical phases and analyzing them. The analysis of the historical phases is based on the scholarly literature. Using the logic of the MSSD, this paper answers the question of how and why these two countries, which had similar historical challenges with modernization and secularization in the early 20th century and then with re-Islamization in the following years, arrived at different points through their trajectories. The study also identifies critical junctures that symbolize a radical shift in the directions of the trajectories or the beginning of a new historical phase. The findings reveal cyclical patterns in the relationship between political secularism and Islamism. The phases of assertion, then backlash, and adaptation demonstrates that cyclicity provides explanations for the trajectories of these states even in cases where cultural differences (Sunni and Shia) or the level of technological development cannot. In both countries, assertive secularism provoked a backlash that eventually led either to the complete replacement of secularism with Islamism or to a gradual re-integration of Islamic values into the state and society within a democratic system. The study contributes to the debates on secularism and Islamism during periods of social modernization in Muslim-majority states.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AKP - Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

CHP - Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)

MSSD - Most Similar Systems Design

MNP - National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi)

MSP - National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi)

RP - Welfare Party (Refah Partisi)

IRGC - Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Diyanet - Directorate of Religious Affairs

1. Introduction

This thesis examines how religion has shaped state policies in Turkey and Iran and seeks to identify the factors behind their distinct yet occasionally parallel trajectories. By analyzing key historical and political turning points, it explores how secular and religious ideologies have alternated between dominance and decline, influencing governance, societal norms, and public life. The goal of this thesis is to move beyond oversimplified labels—such as characterizing Turkey as entirely secular or Iran as solely an Islamist theocracy—and to provide a more nuanced perspective on the evolving interaction between these forces over time. It examines the extent to which each state has committed to secular or religious ideologies, focusing on their approaches to religion during key transitional periods. Both Turkey and Iran have experienced cycles of secularization followed by re-Islamization. However, Turkey's trajectory includes an additional intermediary phase where the secular framework of the state remains intact, even as movements aimed at reintegrating Islamic values into governance and society begin to emerge. By contrast, in Iran's case such an intermediary phase is absent. And the absence of a multi-party system in Iran limited opportunities for competing ideologies to coexist or evolve. The country moved directly from the Pahlavi dynasty's secular modernization to the establishment of a theocratic regime after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Cases of Turkey and Iran are suitable for comparative analysis because both have somewhat similar historical evolution of the religion–state relations. Both countries desperately embarked on the path of modernization and state building in the early 20th century. Both countries had the same problem of a traditional Islamic society that they had to overcome in order to achieve modernization and secularization of the state. Both countries experienced subsequent re-Islamization of the state and society. Both countries had polarized societies divided between secularists and adherents of Islamic values and traditions. Both countries had a history of using the military to maintain the dominant ideology in the country. Thus, Turkey and Iran have many common problems and solutions that can be studied and compared through various dimensions.

The research question of this thesis is: **How have secularism and Islamism been utilized to shape state policy in Turkey and Iran, and why, despite their initially similar trajectories, have these efforts led to different outcomes?** The answer to this question will be given by a detailed study of the phases of secularization and re-Islamization of countries. Each of these phases has a critical moment that justifies why the country takes the corresponding course for the dominance of a certain political ideology. Each phase has an assessment of the degree of commitment to political ideology through the study of reforms related to religion in government

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and society. A comparative analysis of these phases explains how and why the political trajectories of countries moving in the same vector, differ in intensity and outcomes.

This paper shows how secularism and Islamism are not just two completely separate concepts, but ideologies that can be used to intertwine as regulators of religion in state. Both ideologies were exploited to manipulate religion as a tool to maintain power and navigate state policies within nation.

To analyze the trajectories of secularism and Islamism in Turkey and Iran, this study employs a comparative historical approach which is guided by the logic of the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). Turkey and Iran share several contextual similarities: Muslim-majority populations, post-imperial nation-building efforts, and experiences with both secularization and re-Islamization. However, their unique characteristics make them distinct. For instance, Turkey has the status of a candidate for the EU accession, and Iran is a Shiite theocracy. Here, MSSD is used not to generalize findings across all Muslim-majority countries. Instead, it is used to facilitate a focused comparison that reveals how shared challenges yield divergent outcomes under specific historical and institutional contexts.

Primary data sources include historical records, political speeches, policy documents, and scholarly literature on secularism and Islamism in Turkey and Iran. Through qualitative content analysis, the study examines these sources to identify recurring themes, ideological shifts, and policy changes across key historical phases. The analysis categorizes events and policies according to their alignment with secular or religious ideologies. This framework facilitates a systematic comparison of Turkey and Iran's trajectories, helping to illuminate how specific factors—including political leadership, societal dynamics, and external influences—have driven each nation's distinct yet occasionally parallel paths.

The significance of this work lies primarily in its challenging of simplistic categorization of political ideologies over the past 100 years of these countries' history. The thesis reveals much of the nuance, showing how the countries have experienced different phases of state-religion relations. It can also be useful in examining the nature of the cyclicity of secularism and Islamism in Muslim-majority countries, showing how they can replace each other over time. This can be useful in predicting and interpreting the future in countries with similar contexts. The study puts historical events in the contemporary political landscape, providing context for ongoing debates about the role of religion in governance. For example, the gradual re-Islamization of Turkey under Erdogan and the enduring theocracy of Iran highlight the ongoing relevance of this topic for understanding state policy and societal values. By examining the military's unique role in

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preserving dominant ideologies—Turkey’s military played a role of the guardian of secularism and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards imposing Islamism—the study adds a layer of depth to understanding how state power is exercised. The thesis enriches the fields of political science, Middle Eastern studies, and religious studies by providing a detailed comparative analysis of secularism and Islamism. It contributes to theoretical debates on state-religious relations and ideological governance, and the influence of social and geopolitical factors on national trajectories.

Keywords: Secularism; Islamism; Turkey; Iran; Comparative analysis.

Research classification code(s) (CERCS): S170 Political and administrative sciences.

2. Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the foundation for the theoretical as well as the contextual framework that will guide this thesis. By reviewing various scholarly works, theories, and perspectives, the chapter delves into the dynamics of secularism, Islamism, and modernization in the context of Turkey and Iran. These concepts are important because they help explain how religion and the state interact, evolve, and even collide in Muslim-majority societies. The review of the literature provides a theoretical basis for comparing the two cases.

The chapter begins with an examination of secularism as a concept and its three main theories. It then turns to Islamism as a political ideology and its transformations in the context of two cases. Another angle for Islamism is presented in a separate section as a framework for Islamic identity and values. Modernization theory as a basis for secularism. And finally, in order to add another valuable layer to study, the role of the military in maintaining political ideology is being explored. Altogether, it forms a theoretical framework that allows for comparative study on secularism and Islamism in the context of Turkey and Iran..

2.1. Theoretical foundations

2.1.1. Secularism

Secularization theory is an important factor in understanding why the state changes its relationship with religion. Scholars have proposed various explanations for the mechanisms and outcomes of secularization. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation, these theories are divided into three broad groups: General Secularization Theory, Revised Modernization Theory, and Path Dependency and Cyclicity. With the help of these groups, this paper will be able to explain why the trajectories of state-religion relations in Turkey and Iran changed as they did.

The general theory of secularization suggests that when societies modernize, the natural step is to separate religion from the state. In this theory, secularism is seen as a single, universal explanation that applies to all contexts (Berger, 1999). However, this model is rather simplistic and does not take into account many of the nuances that may arise when studying non-Christian countries. Thus, this theory can only be partially applied in explaining how Turkey and Iran embarked on the path of modernization and secularization. Although, as these countries' political history evolved further, they changed their trajectories in relation to secularism.

Now, revised views on secularization show the limits of the general theory and specifically highlight the importance of cultural and religious contexts. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris argue that modernization can affect societies differently depending on their cultural and religious contexts (Inglehart & Norris, 2004). In the Islamic world, secularization particularly complicated. Inglehart and Norris argue that religious traditions influence modernization differently. And

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scholars like Roy (2007) and Dabashi (2006) delve deeper into the contrasts between Sunni and Shiite Islam. Shiite Islam has this organized clerical leadership. But Sunni Islam is much less centralised and lacks a single religious authority. Thus, these differences play an important part how the two traditions engage with secularization.

The third theoretical group focuses on how historical legacies and cycles influence secularization and the religious resurgence. Alexis de Tocqueville's study of the French Revolution offers an early example for it. He argued that the Catholic Church's close ties with the monarchy were the reason why revolution was so aggressively secular. And later it led to cycles of religious revival and conflict (Tocqueville, 1955). This approach sees secularization as neither straightforward nor universal. Instead, it depends on existing institutions and social struggles. Radical secularization efforts can trigger strong religious reactions, leading to cycles of secularization and re-religionization.

Overall, the thesis aligns with the Path Dependence and Cyclicity approach. Although, it's also drawing insights from the rest of theoretical frameworks. The analysis of Turkey and Iran demonstrates how pre-existing context causes that constant oscillation between secularism and Islamism. Thus, by examining critical junctures and the phases of secularization and re-Islamization, this thesis contributes to understanding how exactly historical legacies and social struggles can shape state-religion relations in Muslim-majority countries.

2.1.2. Islamism

When Islam is politicized and becomes Islamism, it implies the incorporation of Islamic teachings and principles into the governance of the state. Despite this, it can have different degrees of commitment. It can be manifested as radical Islamism, which demands that the state and society be guided by Sharia law. But there are also examples of less radical, passive Islamism that exploit the concept of Muslim identity in order to introduce some Islamic values into politics and society (Tibi, 2012). Islamism in Turkey and Iran developed in response to the aggressive modernization and secularization of the country.

In the book *Islamism and Islam* (2012), Bassem Tibi breaks down an important distinction between Islam as a religion and Islamism as a political ideology. Then he argues that Islamism is a modern political ideology designed to use religion as a framework for governance. Traditional Islamic thought focuses more on guiding people spiritually and morally, but Islamism is all about building a political system based on Islamic principles. Tibi also points out that Islamism often

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shows up as a reaction to secularism and Westernization, especially in places where religion is a key part of people's cultural and personal identity (Tibi, 2012:25).

In Turkey, Islamism really started to stand out as a reaction to Kemalist secularism. The Kemalist reforms tried to push religion out of public life entirely, but Islamist movements pushed back, wanting to bring Islamic values back into politics and society. Asaf Bayat, in *Islamism and Social Movement Theory*, talks about how Turkish Islamism has usually worked within the rules of the secular system instead of outright fighting against it. Leaders like Necmettin Erbakan focused on showing that Islamic principles could work alongside modern political ideas. A more recent example is the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Erdoğan, which blends Islamic values into Turkey's secular system. Bayat points out that this flexible, practical approach has helped Islamism in Turkey adapt over time while sticking to its core ideas (Bayat, 2005:68).

The book *Theology of Discontent* by Hamid Dabashi, author takes a closer look at how the use of Islamism shaped Iran, especially during the 20th century. He describes it as a key driving force behind the opposition to the Pahlavi dynasty's push for secular modernization. Dabashi states that figures like Ayatollah Khomeini gave Islam a new role. The role of a political system, which could stand up to Western imperialism. Eventually, this idea led to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which overthrew Iran's secular monarchy and set up a theocratic state. Dabashi sees this radical form of Islamism as a whole new way of thinking about governance, grounded in Islamic law and leadership (Dabashi, 2006:112).

Olivier Roy, in his book *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994), takes a step back to look at the bigger picture. He argues that Islamism indeed can be really effective as a movement of resistance or opposition. But it also often struggles to hold up once it's in power. Governing a modern state brings challenges that are not easy to solve with ideological goals alone (Roy, 1994:98). This idea actually applies to both Turkey and Iran. The Iranian theocratic system faced backlash for not dealing well with major social and economic issues. And Turkey's AKP efforts to integrate Islamic values within a secular framework caused debates about how far this integration can actually go.

Finally, in *Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously* (2005), Ruud Meijer delves into how Islamist movements operate as social and political forces at the same time. The author points out that Islamism is not universal concept—it's actually a broad spectrum of movements with different goals and strategies. One can see this in Turkey because Islamist groups there vary widely. Some of them push for gradual reforms within the secular system. Others are more radical and aim for a

bigger role for religion in public life. Meijer explains that Islamism in Iran has become deeply institutionalized. Religion is closely intertwined with governance. It has indeed strengthened the Islamist agenda in some ways. But it's also created challenges (Meijer, 2005:52). Now, the system has to balance running a modern state with staying true to its ideological roots—a tough act to pull off.

These studies show just how complex Islamism is as a political ideology. Scholars emphasize how adaptable Islamism can be. It can be adjusted to different political and cultural contexts. But at the same time, they also point out the challenges it faces. For instance, when it moves from being an oppositional force to actually running a government.

2.1.3. Islamic identity and values

The concept of Islamic identity is instrumental for my study, since policies aimed at de-secularization of the state and society cannot always be attributed to Islamism as such. As my research progresses, there will be phases in the case studies where the signifier of Islamism will be promotion of Islamic values and identity. The article *Islamic Identity, Ethical Principles and Human Values* (2017) by Mansoureh Ebrahimi takes a close look at how Islamic identity is built around the ethical and moral teachings of Islam. It argues that this identity is rooted in the principles found in the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. These principals guide individual behavior and shape the moral values of the community. Living under divine guidance is central to this identity. And it is actually influencing how Muslims approach their daily actions and interactions (Ebrahimi & Yusoff, 2017:3). The article also emphasizes that Islamic identity is about applying knowledge in a way that aligns with these ethical principles. The bigger goal calls for creation of civilization that is advanced in science and technology. But apart from that, also grounded in strong moral and ethical values. What stands out is the adaptability of Islamic identity—it can evolve to meet new challenges and contexts while still staying true to its ethical core. This adaptability is particularly important in addressing modern ethical dilemmas, especially those brought about by advances in science and technology (Ebrahimi & Yusoff, 2017:6).

In the context of this thesis, the concept of Islamic identity is revisited and adapted to explore its application in Turkish and Iranian politics. Overall, this concept is about the preservation of Muslim traditions. Like fasting during Ramadan or performing prayers. Additionally, the wearing of the hijab is viewed as a personal choice - not as a political statement. This perspective of Islamic identity implies that such kind of expressions are not calling for Islamic governance. It just reflects a balance between honoring traditions and participating in a modern society. This view of Islamic identity is distinct from radicalism or strict following of every

prescribed duty in Islam. It emphasizes tradition and respect rather than opposition or confrontation with secularism, which can sometimes be perceived as antagonistic to religion and its expressions. Ultimately, it's about finding a harmonious balance between faith, culture, and the realities of contemporary life.

2.1.5. Military's role

The military has often played the role of maintainer of order in the country. But what kind of order to maintain was often determined by those in power. Thus, both Turkey and Iran have not hesitated to use the military to impose and maintain the political ideology they promote. This section will examine the theoretical underpinnings of the military's role in ensuring secularism and religious governance.

In countries where secularism is the dominant and unwavering political ideology, the military assumes the role and obligation of being the guardian of this ideology. In cases where actors attempt to move away from secularism, the military intervenes to stabilize order. Samuel Huntington (*The Soldier and the State*, 1957) described the involvement of the military in the defense of certain state ideologies. Direct example could be the use of Turkish armed forces in guarding Ataturk's secular legacy. The Turkish military has repeatedly organized military coups when the secular system of the state was threatened by Islamist ideology. All these interventions were justified by the military as preserving the secularism that was introduced into Turkey by Ataturk (Zürcher, 2017; Heper, 2011). But the military can also be useful in the establishment of an Islamic state. Thus, in post-revolutionary Iran, the IRGC is in fact an ideological paramilitary institution that monitors the observance and maintenance of Islamism in the state and society (Abrahamian, 2008).

Overall, by taking the role of the military into a theoretical framework, this thesis gains another important angle for examining political development of secularism and Islamism in the two aforementioned states.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case selection

Turkey and Iran have historically been two influential states in the Islamic world. Turkey, since the Ottoman Empire, was the leader of Sunni Islam. And Iran, since the Safavid era, has been the leading state of Shia Islam. Little has changed since then, and these two states still hold significant positions among Muslim countries. This legacy of Islamic identity cannot simply dissolve with the establishment of new republics. It continues to influence the political trajectories these countries take in relation to political ideologies.

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After the First World War, these two empires fell apart. Two ambitious and charismatic leaders appeared on the horizon - Atatürk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran. Under their leadership, both states decided to begin a project of modernization and centralization of their countries. Thus, they began an ideological struggle with religious influence in the state and society. Turkey was more successful in this; it was able to consolidate secularism as the foundation of power. In Iran, Islam was still nominally the state religion, but in fact the influence of Islam was also negated.

Later on, both countries faced a religious revival. In different forms due to different institutional contexts. With the help of multi-party system in Turkey, Islamism began to make its way into power, comforting conservative sections of the population. But in Iran there was no alternative, so the opposition in the form of clergy and dissatisfied citizens carried out a revolution, the consequence of which was the establishment of a Shiite theocratic state. What in fact brings to another similarity that justifies the choice of these cases - deep polarization of society. Turkey and Iran are literally divided into secularists and adherents of Islamist politics. This fact is common to both countries and gives reason to compare the reaction of society in different political phases.

Another area of similarity between the two countries is the role of the military in maintaining the political trajectory. For the last hundred years, the military in Turkey literally had the status of protectors and representatives of secularists. Only in the last 10 years, Erdogan has managed to significantly change this state of affairs. In post-revolutionary Iran, the use of the military for the successful establishment and preservation of the Islamic Republic has become an integral part of it.

With so many similarities, countries have followed different trajectories. This is why these two cases are able to provide an answer to how and why secularism and Islamism are implemented and used differently in similar contexts. Furthermore, through the comparative analysis, the cyclical pattern of its implementation will be explained.

3.2. Research design

In order to analyze and juxtapose the phases of secular and religious dynamics, the chosen comparative approach employs the logic of the MSSD. This study applies its principles specifically to highlight how shared challenges manifest differently in these cases. Important to note, the unique contexts of Turkey (a Sunni-majority country with EU accession aspirations) and Iran (a Shiite theocracy) necessitate an acknowledgment that MSSD logic here serves as a lens for understanding case-specific trajectories. Not for generalizing findings across all Muslim-majority states. These contrasting outcomes make the logic of MSSD particularly suitable for this study, since it provides a structured way to investigate the factors that led to these different trajectories.

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The strength of MSSD lies in its ability to focus on cases with similar backgrounds and isolate those variables that account for divergent outcomes. In this thesis, shared factors such as Islamic heritage, the role of strong reformist leaders, and the influence of global modernization trends create a controlled comparative context. Thus, by applying the logic of MSSD, this study highlights how specific differences in policies, institutional designs or societal responses shaped the variation in state-religion dynamics between Turkey and Iran. This makes MSSD a logical and effective framework for addressing the research objectives of this study.

3.3. Data collection

In order to explore the relationship between secularism and Islamism in the given context, this thesis predominantly relies on secondary sources. Since it pulls from a blend of academic books, journal articles, and comparative studies. This is helpful in building a solid picture of the political and cultural contexts for both cases. To track how things have changed over time, historical accounts and key events are used to map out the major ideological shifts. The analysis is also guided by theoretical ideas on modernization, secularism, and Islamism, which help frame the discussion. When it adds value, primary materials like legislative documents and speeches from important political figures are included to highlight pivotal moments. Still, the focus is on secondary sources because they're more accessible and provide a broader scope for understanding the topic. Altogether, this approach gives a well-rounded look at how secularism and Islamism have played out in these two countries.

3.4. Data analysis

To dissect the political trajectories of secularism and Islamism within Turkey and Iran, a multi-methodological approach will be utilized. It means that in order to track the development of ideologies, comparative historical analysis will be used. Study begins by identifying distinct historical phases in both Turkey and Iran which are relevant to the tension between secularism and Islamism. These phases are characterized by relevant policy shifts or societal movements which reflect changes in manifestations of secular or religious ideologies. A comparative analysis of the identified historical phases in Turkey and Iran will be conducted. The focus is on comparing the political and social responses to secularism and Islamism within each country with examination of patterns over time.

The primary method of data analysis is thematic analysis. It helps to identify recurring patterns related to secularism and Islamism. Additionally, the analysis looks into how these patterns change during different historical phases and how they intersect within the political and social contexts. This strategy is particularly apt for investigating social unrest and its tie-in with shifts in political ideology, as well as for gaining insights into the societal reactions and perceptions

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concerning these ideologies. Drawing on the logic of MSSD, I will compare the phases between Turkey and Iran to identify similarities, differences, and trends in the historical trajectories of secularism and Islamism

3.5. Analytical framework

This analytical model offers a straightforward way to look at political and ideological changes. Especially when it comes to how states manage the balance between religion and governance. For instance, during phases of secularization or re-Islamization. It is designed to break down these transformations step by step, helping to analyze the key phases, reforms, societal reactions, and overall outcomes.

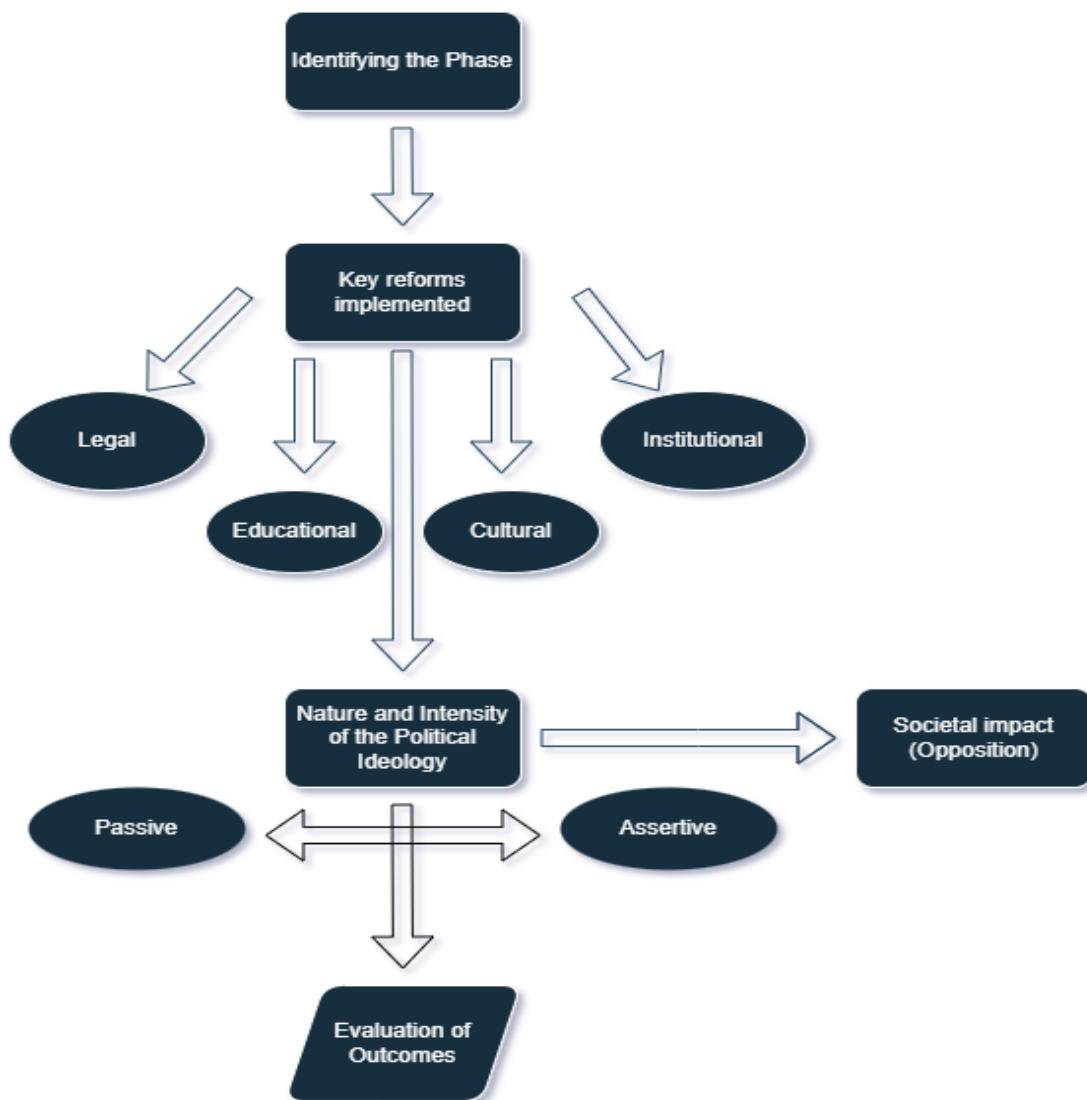


Figure 1, Analytical model for historical phase examination

The first step is figuring out the specific historical phase. It means setting the historical context and understanding the goals of that time. For instance, during a secularization phase, the focus might be on how the state tried to minimize religion's role in governance and public life. In

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a re-Islamization phase, the focus shifts to how religion made a comeback as a major force. Next, the model looks at the reforms that were introduced during that phase. These reforms are split into four main areas: legal, institutional, educational, and cultural.

The third step is about understanding the ideology behind these reforms. How strongly reforms were pushed. Were the secularization policies actively excluding religion from public life, or did the state stay neutral but allowed room for religious expression? This step also considers how intense the reforms were implemented. Then it also needs examination of how society reacted and what is their demand for political ideology now.

Finally, the model wraps up by evaluating the results of the phase. Did the reforms cement in the state and lead to lasting changes? Or did they cause backlash? This step helps assess the broader context of the phase and what it means for the state-religion relations in the long run.

The critical junctures in this research are standing as indicators of secular and Islamist evolution within political and social spheres in Turkey and Iran. They are useful for identifying and setting starting points in the historical phases that I mentioned above. The impact of these junctures on the promotion or repression of secular or Islamist ideologies would be examined, showing what factors drove historical shifts in religious-secular dynamics.

In order to enhance research design, a continuum framework is added. It is used to analyze the secular and Islamist dynamics in both cases. This model is based on the concepts of Kuru, which proposes concepts such as assertive and passive secularism (Kuru, 2009). Although these concepts only imply the nature of secularism, I intend to extend them to the concept of Islamism as well. Therefore, at one end of the continuum there is “Assertive secularism” and at the other end “Radical Islamism”. Thus, the continuum would look like this: Assertive secularism–passive secularism–passive Islamism–radical Islamism. The "Secularization-Desecularization" analytical tool will complement the continuum framework I have previously discussed, serving as a robust analytical instrument for examining the historical phases of secularism and Islamism within Turkey and Iran. Historical phases will be situated along the continuum, which serves as a guiding framework. Each point along this continuum will represent a distinct configuration of secular and religious influences. By integrating it with the continuum, it allows the study to systematically assess the intensity of the political ideology propagated. Finally, this integrated approach will facilitate comparative analysis between Turkey and Iran.

In order to assess political acts in terms of their degree of secularism or Islamism, I need to define each degree. Assertive secularism is a deliberate and forceful approach by the state to reduce, eliminate or take under state control the influence of religious institutions and expressions

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in public life and governmental affairs. This approach is characterized by a series of decisive actions and reforms intended to establish a secular framework within the legal, educational, and cultural domains of society. Passive secularism refers to a state approach where there is a nominal or minimal enforcement of secularism in public affairs, allowing religious practices and expressions to occur relatively freely within the public sphere without significant interference from the state. This form of secularism is characterized by a neutral attitude towards religion in public life, where the state does not actively promote secular values but rather passively allows religious and secular ideologies to coexist (Kuru, 2003).

Passive Islamism describes a situation where Islamic principles and values subtly influence state policies and societal norms without overt or forceful actions by the government to implement an Islamic state or enforce Sharia law comprehensively. In passive Islamism, the state may exhibit a favorable stance towards Islamic teachings and culture, allowing them to naturally permeate various aspects of public life, but without mandating strict adherence to Islamic law across all public and private domains (Asad, 2003). Radical Islamism refers to a political ideology that seeks to fundamentally transform society and governance through the strict and uncompromising application of Islamic principles, often as interpreted by specific religious or political groups. This approach is characterized by a desire to implement Sharia law comprehensively as the sole source of legal and moral authority, replacing secular or pluralistic elements of governance with a theocratic system based on radical interpretations of Islam (Roy, 2007).

Now, after I assess historical phases, I will focus my lens on them closer or further depending on the significance of the phase. For example, critical junctures in both cases will be key phases in which a review of secular and Islamist reforms will be carried out in three dimensions: legal/political, educational, and cultural. The remaining periods will be examined in terms of key events and policies that contributed to the evolution of secularism or Islamism within the state. I will also determine the nature of these processes; each phase will have an assessment of policy implementation from above and from below. The structure of such an analysis will allow me to eventually plot the evolution of these ideologies in Turkey and Iran and understand how similar or divergent they are from each other.

3.6 Ethical considerations and limitations

This research is guided by strict ethical considerations. It uses only publicly available secondary sources, so it makes it impossible for confidential or sensitive data to be used through the thesis. Since the focus is on historical and political developments in Turkey and Iran, the analysis relies on documented events, public policies, and scholarly interpretations. Also, measures

to avoid subjective or culturally biased perspectives are taken. Thus, this study is grounded in objective analysis.

That said, there are some limitations. The research might carry interpretive biases from existing literature because it uses secondary sources. Furthermore, the lack of access to primary documents also limits the depth of the empirical analysis. On top of that, translating complex socio-political dynamics across different cultural and historical contexts can make it harder to apply the findings more broadly.

Even with these challenges, the thesis offers a strong theoretical framework and a thorough analysis. It provides meaningful insights into the cyclical relationship between secularism and Islamism in Muslim-majority countries, contributing to a better understanding of these dynamics.

4. Turkey: Political Phases

4.2. First Phase (1923-1950), Assertive Secularism from above, Passive Islamism from below

The first historical phase in Turkey covers the period from 1923 to 1950. The beginning of the phase is characterized by the abolition of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic. During this period, Turkey faces reforms that completely change the former state system and lay the secular foundation of Turkey. The end of this phase in 1950 characterized by the transition of Turkey to a multi-party system and the election of a new party, which introduced a new phase in Turkish politics, where secular policies faced challenges from a political landscape more accommodating to religious expressions and demands.

4.2.1. Key secularization reforms

One of the most important steps in Turkey's secularization was the Caliphate's abolition on March 3, 1924. Act No. 431 exiled Ottoman Dynasty members from Turkish land and abolished the Caliphate, which was sentenced to be incompatible with the Republic's ideals (Eralsan, 2001:354). This strengthened the secular nature of the state by severing the link between political and religious authority. The Republic cemented its secular and nationalistic stance by removing representations of Islamic political power.

Initially, Islam was established as the official religion by the 1924 Constitution. It was done so, to preserve social harmony during a time of change. However, this action was more symbolic and had no influence on the judicial system, which followed secular and Western values. The dedication to secular governance was further demonstrated in 1928 when Islam was removed as the official state religion and secular affirmations were used instead of religious in deputies' oaths. By defining Turkey's state identity as secular, nationalist, populist, statist, and revolutionary, the

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1937 amendment formally included Kemalist ideology in the Constitution (Ciftci, 2013:150). This ensured that official policies adhered to secularist ideals.

The Ministry of Sharia and Foundations was abolished on March 3, 1924, by Act No. 429, which transferred religious affairs under the Prime Minister's supervision to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Yakar, 2019:435). Because of this centralization, the state was able to control religious organizations and practices to conform it with secularism. However, its existence as a government body responsible for religious affairs can be viewed as contradictory within the framework of strict secularism.

Secularism was further solidified by legal reforms. Atatürk emphasized importance of Western legal foundations and argued for the legal system to be freed from old-fashioned ideas (Mango, 1999). Sharia courts were eliminated and judicial authority was consolidated under the Ministry of Justice as part of a secular restructuring of the judiciary. The Turkish Civil Code, which was adopted in 1926 and was based on the Swiss Civil Code, changed family and personal law, outlawed polygamy, and guaranteed legal consistency across the country. Similar to this, the Turkish Penal Code established secular criminal law with an emphasis on the rights of the accused and the rule of law, drawing inspiration from the Italian Zanardelli Code (Kuru, 2009:220).

After fundamental reforms that changed Turkey's legal sector, Atatürk needed to educate a new generation that would be unfamiliar and cut off from life in the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk understood that the development of a unified and modern national identity depended on contemporary, secular education. He stated: “The keystone of our education is to destroy lack of information. If it is not destroyed, we are in the same place. If we want to have a real escape, firstly we must destroy this lack of information with all our strength, all our ambitions” (Unal, 2006:1718).

The Unification of Education Law of 1924 was the first major reform, centralizing the fragmented Ottoman educational system under the Ministry of National Education. It abolished traditional Islamic schools (medreses), which had perpetuated religious influences, and placed all educational institutions under state control. Thus every citizen, regardless of background, received a standardized, secular education (Nuri, 2021:1572-1573). After creating a secular curriculum that emphasized science, mathematics, and the Turkish language, religious instructions were minimized and eventually removed entirely from schools by 1933 (Karkazis, 2021:4; Nuri, 2021:1575).

The 1928 reform of the Turkish alphabet was equally revolutionary. It substituted the Latin alphabet for the Arabic script. Because it was considered that Arabic script associated with the

Ottoman-Islamic history and was incompatible with the phonetics of the Turkish language. Thus, Turkey was brought into the line with Western scientific and cultural norms. (Nuri, 2021:1574). Furthermore, educational project "People's Houses", which were founded in 1932, helped Atatürk's literacy campaigns to raise literacy rates from 9% to 33% in just ten years. To encourage secularism and lessen conservative influence, these houses offered literature, art, and craft classes (Karkazis, 2021:6; Unal, 2006:1721).

Following the comprehensive educational reforms, the transformation of cultural norms became the next vital step in establishing Turkey's secular and modern identity. The Law for the Maintenance of Order, enacted on March 4, 1925, introduced strict censorship measures, facilitating the implementation of cultural reforms by limiting resistance (Turan, 2004:32). Thus, Act No. 677 of November 30, 1925, mandated for abolishment of Sufi orders and the closure of their religious objects, such as tekkes, zaviyes, and türbes. The religious and cultural fabric of the Ottoman Empire depended heavily on these establishments. By bringing public life into line with secular principles and diminishing the power of Islamic clergy, their closure consolidated religious authority under the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Zürcher, 2017:173; The Turkish Constitution of 1982, Art. 174).

This cultural reformation was represented by the Hat Law of 1925 (Act No. 671). It forbade wearing the fez, which was a representation of Ottoman-Islamic identity, and required hats in the Western style. Despite strong public opposition, this law sought to advance Westernization and modernity in personal appearance (Zürcher, 2017:173). Similar to this, Act No. 2596's 1934 prohibition of traditional Ottoman clothes in public areas and the adoption of Western fashion further reduced religious symbols in public life (The Turkish Constitution of 1982, Art. 174; Kuru, 2009:215).

The 1932 directive requiring the ezan (call to prayer) to be given in Turkish instead of Arabic was one of the most symbolic reforms. It nationalized Islam and reduced Arabic influence on Turkish culture. This reform aimed to bring religious customs into line with the Republic's secular and contemporary agenda (Turan, 2004:33). The reforms also affected the official weekly day off, which was always on Friday. In 1935, the government changed it to Sunday, aligning Turkey with the Western workweek (Kuru, 2009:189).

4.2.2. Opposition

The opposition to Atatürk's reforms was largely subtle and fragmented. Many rural and conservative communities resisted changes passively. They were holding onto traditional practices and cultural symbols. This resistance manifested a deep discomfort with the rapid secularization

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and modernization efforts. Although, it could not form a nationwide movement due to lack of coordination and ideological unity. Thus, to suppress the opposition, government used censorship, legal restrictions like the Law for the Maintenance of Order, and military enforcement (Yavuz, 2000:3).

However, not all resistance stayed fragmented or passive. In 1925, Sheikh Said Rebellion became dangerous and radical challenge to the government's reforms. In fact, this rebellion was a rare instance of organized resistance, because it brought together Kurdish nationalist grievances with religious opposition to secularization. Sheikh Said and his followers aimed to restore Islamic governance and uphold religious customs after the Caliphate was abolished and religious establishments such as Sufi lodges were shut down (Lahdili, 2018:14). The rebellion quickly escalated, capturing attention in eastern Anatolia, where discontent with the government was strongest. The government's response to the Sheikh Said Rebellion was swift and harsh. Military forces were deployed to suppress the uprising, hundreds of participants and leaders were executed. This crackdown demonstrated the state's determination to eliminate any threats to its secular and nationalist agenda (Özoğlu, 2009:193). The rebellion demonstrated the depth of resistance among certain groups, but its failure to gain broader support across Turkey showed the limited appeal of radical Islamist and nationalist opposition during Atatürk's rule.

4.2.3. Analysis of secularization nature

Table 1. Secularization reforms during first Phase in Turkey (1923-1950)

Reform	Year	Assessment
Abolition of the Caliphate	1924	Assertive
Abolition of the Ministry of Sharia and Foundations	1924	Assertive
Unification of Education Law	1924	Assertive
Introduction of the Hat Law	1925	Assertive
Closure of Sufi lodges and türbes	1925	Assertive
Adoption of the Turkish Civil Code	1926	Assertive
Adoption of the Turkish Penal Code	1926	Assertive
Reform of the Turkish alphabet (Latin script)	1928	Assertive
Removal of Islam as the state religion	1928	Assertive

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Mandatory Turkish recitation of the ezan	1932	Assertive
Establishment of People's Houses	1932	Assertive
Prohibition of Ottoman-style clothing in public	1934	Assertive
Official shift of weekly rest day to Sunday	1935	Assertive
Inclusion of secularism in the Constitution	1937	Assertive

The secularization reforms implemented in Turkey in the first phase were very assertive in nature. These reforms were driven by a top-down approach that sought to quickly transform Turkey into a modern and secular nation-state. The measures were sweeping and implemented with determination. In fact, there was no room for negotiation or compromise regarding the implementation of the policies. For example, the abolition of the caliphate and the dissolution of religious institutions such as the Ministry of Sharia and the closure of Sufi lodges were clear signs of the government's determination to separate religion from politics and public life. In addition, legal reforms such as the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code and the Turkish Penal Code emphasized secular principles in family, criminal, and civil law.

Atatürk's policies also targeted cultural and social spheres. Reforms completely changed the way people dress. Education was reformed in order to get rid of religious schools and centralise whole system under secular administration. The introduction of the Latin alphabet, the Turkish ezan, and the shift to Sunday as the weekly day of rest were designed to align Turkey with Western norms and minimize the influence of Islamic traditions. These policies, which were often implemented with strict censorship and legal measures demonstrated a firm commitment to assertive secularism, aimed at transforming all aspects of life in Turkey.

In contrast, the opposition's demands generally leaned toward preserving traditional religious practices rather than proposing a comprehensive Islamic political system. The opposition to Atatürk's reforms can be broadly categorized as passive Islamism, characterized by a defensive stance against the erosion of Islamic traditions and symbols. Most resistance involved subtle acts of non-compliance, such as continuing to wear traditional clothing or resisting changes to religious education. This passive approach reflected a cultural and religious discomfort with the rapid pace of secularization. However, the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 was a notable exception which demonstrated a more radical Islamist response. This uprising combined religious grievances with Kurdish nationalist aspirations. Thus, while most opposition sought to defend traditional practices,

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there were instances of organized radical demands for an Islamic state. Nevertheless, the rebellion's failure to gain nationwide support underscored the limited appeal of radical Islamism during this phase.

Table 2. General assessment of the first Phase in Turkey

Political ideology from above	Political ideology from below
Assertive Secularism	Passive Islamism

In summary, Atatürk's reforms were characterized by assertive secularism, with the state actively reshaping institutions and culture to establish a secular identity. The opposition, on the other hand, was predominantly passive. Most of the conservatives were defending cultural and religious traditions rather than advocating for a full Islamic political system. The limited instances of radical resistance, such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion, demonstrated the complexity of opposition during this transformative era. But overall opposition's demand were passive Islamism.

4.3. Second Phase (1950-2007), Passive Secularism from above, Passive Islamism from below

After Turkey's transition to a multi-party system, secularism still remained as the basis of the state model for the next half century. During this time, due to the embracing political pluralism, conservative voices began to emerge in the political arena. Such parties will seek support balancing between the secular model of the state and satisfying the request of the conservative part of society for accommodating traditional Islamic values, which were suppressed during the first Phase. Often, the appearance of such rhetoric in power was suppressed over time by the military, which was loyal to Kemalism. In such cases, the military acted as a stabilizing factor for the tension in society between adherents of Islamic values and those who followed the path of Atatürk and perceived secular values as top priority. In this section I will examine periods which contributed to drifts towards Islamic discourse in Turkish politics, how they ended up eventually and what implications it had on secular-Islamist dynamics within Turkey.

4.3.1. Key political developments

Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes established the Democrat Party (DP) in 1946. Growing dissatisfaction with the CHP's rigid secularism and top-down modernization policies led to the need for new ruling party. DP were advocating for economic liberalization, increased personal liberties, and a more accommodative attitude toward Islam without overtly opposing secularism. Thus, DP won support over conservative and rural communities (Landau & Heper, 1991:120-121). DP represented a gradual change after seizing power in 1950. Party eased restrictions on religious

activities, such as permitting the ezan to be recited in Arabic (Kuru, 2009:226). Even though the DP upheld the secular structure of the state, conservative elements of society found resonance in this symbolic reform. Subtle changes were also made to religious education, such as the expansion of Imam Hatip schools, which were initially created to train clergy. It signaled a cautious integration of religious education into the secular framework (Kuru, 2009:226). Moreover, the DP permitted increased religious visibility in the public eye. For example, the Quran was broadcast on state radio in 1952 (Kuru, 2009:226). These policies preserved secularism in government while appealing to conservatives. However, public and institutional support for the DP was undermined by economic difficulties, growing authoritarianism, and attempts to curtail military autonomy, which ultimately led to Turkey's first military coup in 1960 (Zürcher, 2017:242).

The DP's policies subtly softened the rigid secular boundaries established by Atatürk, showing that secularism could coexist with limited religious accommodation. While these reforms did not dismantle secularism, they set a precedent for balancing religious sentiments with democratic governance, influencing future political developments.

Next manifestation of Islamic accommodating policy were seen during Turgut Özal's tenure. Under his leadership, Turkish politics underwent a noticeable change that was marked by a more accepting attitude toward religion and economic liberalization. Leading the Motherland Party (MP) as prime minister from 1983, Özal took advantage of the public's desire for political stability and economic expansion after the military takeover in 1980 (Zürcher, 2017:287). A new middle class were consisting of many from conservative Islamic backgrounds who had felt excluded under strict secular regimes. Now they were empowered by his policies of privatization, deregulation, and foreign investment, which opened the economy (Tovsultanov et al., 2022:636).

Important to understand that while Özal avoided overtly Islamist policies, his administration displayed a more permissive attitude toward public expressions of religion. The number of Imam Hatip schools expanded under his reign as well. (Çakmak, 2009:834). Religious brotherhoods (tarikats) and communities (cemaats) gained influence because of Özal's pragmatic approach to integrating Islamic values into a secular framework. In terms of personal religiosity, symbolic actions like Özal's highly publicized Hajj pilgrimage marked a departure from the strictly secular image of previous leaders (Kuru, 2009:230). The headscarf debate also turned into a divisive symbol of the gap between religion and secularism. Özal made limited attempts to ease the ban on headscarves in public institutions, which is indicative of his cautious approach to avoiding direct conflict with the secularist judiciary and military (Kuru, 2009:230).

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Thus, Özal's leadership fostered a broader interpretation of secularism, accommodating religious identity in public life without undermining the secular state. His approach paved the way for a more open integration of Islamic values into Turkish politics and society, influencing the rise of future Islamist movements while maintaining stability during his tenure.

The key figure for the promoting integration of Islamist policies into secular framework during Second Phase, was Necmettin Erbakan. He aimed to incorporate Islamic values into governance starting with the founding of the National Order Party (MNP) in 1970. Despite the MNP's swift dissolution due to its transgression of secularist ideals, Erbakan persevered by establishing the National Salvation Party (MSP) in 1972 (Imisiker, 2002:17-18). In the 1970s, the MSP was a major player in coalition governments. They were promoting closer ties with Muslim nations, interest-free banking, and Islamic education (Imisiker, 2002:18).

After the 1980 coup, which temporarily banned political parties, Erbakan returned to politics with the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) in 1983. The RP steadily gained influence, culminating in its 1995 electoral victory. It was the first time an Islamist party held the largest share in parliament (Imisiker, 2002:20-21). As Prime Minister in 1996, Erbakan promoted Islamic economic policies. Besides interest-free banking, he made efforts to create an "Islamic Common Market" to reduce reliance on Western models (Dal & Dilek, 2022:30). His government also expanded Imam Hatip schools and encouraged public expressions of Islamic identity (Shahnaz & Fahad, 2020:63). However, Erbakan's overt Islamic policies alarmed the secular military and judiciary. The tensions culminated in the 1997 "February 28 Process," when the military issued an ultimatum leading to his resignation. Shortly after, the Welfare Party was banned for violating secular principles, and the military enforced stricter bans on Islamic symbols, including headscarves in public institutions (Kuru, 2009:161; Guveli, 2011:173).

Erbakan's tenure showcased the growing challenge to Turkey's rigid secular framework. While his policies resonated with conservative segments, they heightened societal polarization and reinforced the military's role as the guardian of secularism. His legacy influenced the rise of more moderate Islamist movements, especially the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Founded in 2001 by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and former members of Erbakan's Welfare Party, AKP marked a new era in Turkish politics. Rebranding itself as a "conservative democratic" party, the AKP distanced itself from overt Islamist policies. New image became appealing to a broad coalition of liberals, conservatives, and the business community. This strategic shift enabled the party to gain widespread support and earn a decisive victory in the 2002 elections (Kuru, 2009:178). In its early years, the AKP adopted a cautious approach to religion. Party was

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promoting “passive secularism,” which maintained state neutrality toward religion rather than excluding it from the public sphere. In order to align with Turkey’s EU accession process, Erdoğan focused on reforms concerning improvements in human rights, judicial reforms, and minority rights. These measures also helped curb the military’s influence in politics, reducing the traditional secularist guard’s ability to intervene (Kuru, 2009:170). While the AKP initially avoided controversial religious issues, it gradually addressed symbolic concerns, such as the headscarf ban. Though Erdoğan did not aggressively pursue its removal during this phase, the party’s gradual and inclusive approach softened public perceptions of political Islam (Kuru, 2009:191). At the same time, economic reforms under the AKP spurred growth and stability, enhancing its popularity and consolidating its political power.

The period from 2002 to 2007 under the AKP had seen economic growth, political stability, and an increase in Turkey’s international profile. Domestically, the AKP’s approach softened the public’s perception of political Islam, portraying it as compatible with modern democratic principles. Although the period was marked by democratization and economic growth, it also set the stage for future conflicts over the role of religion in state affairs and initiated a shift towards a more polarized society. Thus, the implications of the AKP’s early years in power are profound, influencing Turkey’s trajectory well into the future and reshaping its identity.

4.2.2. Opposition

During the second phase of Turkey’s political history, secularism remained the foundation of the state. Atatürk’s reforms continued to define the country’s identity, upheld by institutions like the military and judiciary. However, democratization and political pluralism after 1950 allowed religious groups to challenge the strict secular framework. These groups pushed for accommodation policies towards inclusion of Islamic values in public life and politics. Religious opposition during this time had varying demands. Most conservative groups sought to make secularism more inclusive. They wanted religion to coexist with public life, without dismantling the secular state. For example, the DP and Turgut Özal’s MP accommodated religious demands by expanding religious schools, allowing broadcasts of the Quran and allowing to recite ezan in Arabic again (Somer, 2007; Çakmak, 2009). Their goals reflected Passive Secularism, focused on visibility for religion rather than fundamental changes to the state.

However, some movements were more radical. Erbakan’s RP in the 1990s sought deeper integration of Islamic principles into governance. Erbakan promoted policies like interest-free banking and emphasized Islamic identity in education and politics. These demands represented passive Islamism. They challenged the secularist ideals established by Atatürk, while framed within democratic systems (Azak, 2010; Kuru, 2009). Secularist institutions pushed back strongly.

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The military and judiciary viewed themselves as defenders of the secular state. They intervened whenever they perceived threats to secularism. Often, these interventions were executed through military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980. The 1997 “February 28 Process” targeted Erbakan’s government, forcing his resignation (Coleman, 2009; Bedirhanoglu & Buğra, 2019). These interventions were meant to preserve secularism, which the state considered non-negotiable.

The opposition reflected a spectrum of demands. Most religious groups wanted a balance between secularism and religious expression. However, the rise of Erbakan’s Welfare Party showed a push for more harsh pro-Islamic reforms. This created sharp divides between secularists and conservatives, leading to repeated military action. Thus, secularism remained Turkey’s guiding principle, but demands for religious accommodation persisted. While many sought coexistence within the system, some pushed for deeper changes. This tension gave foundation for future conservative parties to persist in politics further.

4.3.3. Analysis of secular and religious dynamics

Table 3, Reforms and policies during second Phase in Turkey (1950-2007)

Reform/Policy	Year	Assessment
Ezan in Arabic	1950	Passive Secularism
Expansion of Imam Hatip schools	1950s, 80s, 90s	Passive Secularism
Broadcast of the Quran on state radio	1952	Passive Secularism
Headscarf ban in public institutions	1980s-1990s	Assertive Secularism
Interest-free banking and Islamic Economic Policies	1996	Radical Islamism
Military interventions to defend secularism	1960, 1971, 1980, 1997	Assertive Secularism

The state’s core remained firmly secular throughout this period. Political leaders like those of the DP and Turgut Özal’s MP upheld secularism while cautiously addressing the demands of conservative religious communities. Policies such as permitting the Arabic ezan, expanding Imam Hatip schools, and allowing Quran broadcasts signified symbolic concessions rather than a fundamental departure from secular governance. These measures reflected a strategy of passive secularism, which maintained state neutrality toward religion while accommodating public sentiment in the country.

However, these concessions did not go unchallenged. Secularist institutions viewed themselves as protectors of the Republic’s Kemalist legacy. Any shift perceived as a threat to secularism was met with decisive action and military interventions. The coups underscored the

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military's readiness to intervene in defense of secularism. These events highlighted the state's insistence on maintaining a secular framework, even as society's demands evolved.

The opposition during this phase reflected a spectrum of demands, ranging from passive accommodations to more radical religious ideologies. Most conservative groups sought a balance between secularism and religious visibility. Their goals aligned with passive secularism, which aimed to make religion more present in public life without dismantling the secular state. The DP and Özal's MP exemplified this approach by integrating religious values into governance in ways that resonated with conservative communities while maintaining the secular foundation.

More radical demands emerged with Erbakan's RP in the 1990s. Erbakan sought deeper integration of Islamic principles into politics. He was promoting policies like interest-free banking and Islamic economic frameworks. His approach represented a more radical form of Islamism, which challenged secular structure established by Atatürk. Erbakan indeed operated within democratic systems but his policies alarmed secularists. Thus, it caused military action in 1997 that led to his resignation and the banning of the RP.

Table 4, General assessment of the second Phase in Turkey

Political Ideology from above	Political Ideology from below
Passive Secularism	Passive Islamism

The state's ideology during this phase can be characterized as passive secularism. While secularism remained the cornerstone of governance, political leaders cautiously allowed limited religious visibility to address societal demands. Opposition movements, on the other hand, reflected varying degrees of Islamism. Most movements aligned with passive Islamism, because they were advocating for coexistence between religion and secular governance. However, movements like Erbakan's RP introduced radical Islamism, pushing for systemic changes that secularists perceived as threats to the Republic's foundation.

In conclusion, the second phase was defined by an evolving secular-religious dynamic. Secularism maintained its central role, but the growing accommodation of Islamic values highlighted the need to adapt to societal shifts. Opposition movements, ranging from passive to radical Islamism, underscored the persistent tension between these two forces. This era set the stage for future conflicts over the role of religion in Turkey's secular framework, shaping the nation's political identity.

4.3. Third Phase (2007-2024), Passive Islamism from above, Passive Secularism from below

As this thesis progresses, I proceed from the nuanced shifts towards Islamic values in Turkey's political landscape between 1950 and 2007, to an important era that marks a biggest transformation in Turkish politics under the leadership of Erdoğan since the outbreak of secularism during establishing the new Republic. The preceding sections have charted the careful, sometimes more bold incorporation of Islamic values within the framework of a nominally secular state, but they were not strong and stable enough to change the vector of political ideology in the country. Often these changes were stopped by military coups as a tool for stabilizing the country's secular system. Nevertheless, this historical groundwork set the stage for the subsequent period, where from 2007 onwards, the narrative of Turkish politics took a gradual turn towards a more pronounced form of Islamist populism which still lives on. In this section I will look at the most important reforms and political developments that conflict with the secular nature of the country that was built by Atatürk. As a result, Turkey has been drifting towards Islamism for more than 15 years and is consolidating this trend in society still.

4.3.1. Key reforms and political developments

Turkey's political landscape underwent a sea change after the 2007 presidential election. Historically, the president served as a bulwark for the nation's secular underpinnings and was frequently occupied by individuals with close military or secular links (Özbudun, 2012:2). Secularists expressed worries when Erdoğan's close associate Abdullah Gül was nominated for president by the AKP. Fears that the AKP intended to alter Turkey's institutions along Islamist lines were heightened by his wife's wearing of a headscarf, which is a sign of religious beliefs at odds with secular standards (Migdalovitz, 2007:3).

The nomination led to massive public protests and an online statement from the military, known as the "e-memorandum," warning against threats to secular principles (Migdalovitz, 2007:4). The opposition CHP challenged the voting process in parliament, and the Constitutional Court annulled the first round of voting. Erdoğan responded by calling early general elections in July 2007. The AKP won decisively with 46.6% of the vote and strengthened its position (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2007). Following a constitutional amendment allowing the president to be elected by popular vote, Gül was elected president in August (Migdalovitz, 2007:3).

In Turkey, the ban of headscarves at public institutions and universities has long been a divisive topic. Erdoğan's administration took action to resolve this issue after gaining control in the 2007 elections. Under the guise of expanding access to education and individual liberties, the AKP passed a constitutional amendment in 2008 that lifted the prohibition on headscarves at universities (Cindoglu & Zencirci, 2008:793). The AKP expanded these measures in 2013 when it

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abolished the headscarf prohibition in all public institutions, with the exception of the military and the courts. In order to address human rights concerns, this was a component of a larger set of "democratization reforms" (Akoglu, 2015:294). The administration portrayed the action as promoting inclusion and redressing a personal liberty violation.

Another important turning point in Erdoğan's plan to consolidate power and erode the role of secular institutions was the 2010 constitutional referendum. Despite being presented as an attempt to bring Turkey into line with EU democratic norms, the revisions drastically changed the responsibilities of the military and judiciary, undermining their ability to serve as secular guardians (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012:4).

The Constitutional Court was expanded from 11 to 17 members, with the president appointing the majority of them personally. This increased administrative control over the judiciary was one of the major reforms. In addition, the number of members of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors increased, and judicial independence was diminished as most nominations were transferred to the president and parliament (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012:5). Furthermore, military tribunals' jurisdiction was limited, which limited their ability to oversee civilian cases and lessened the military's long-standing function as a check on political Islam.

Deep division in Turkish society and conflicts between Erdoğan's administration and secularist factions within the military were brought to light by the 2016 coup attempt. In addition to reversing Erdoğan's growing consolidation of power and integration of Islamic ideas into administration, the coup plotters sought to restore the secular order that Atatürk had founded (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017:62). However, Erdoğan's ability to organize public opposition, the military's lack of unity, and the devotion of important institutions like the police and intelligence agencies were the main reasons the coup failed (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017:61).

Following the coup, Erdoğan accused those connected to the Gulen movement of masterminding the attempt and began widespread purges in the military, judiciary, and other state institutions. Tens of thousands were detained and more than 160,000 were fired, fundamentally altering Turkey's institutions (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017:69). Under Erdoğan's direction, these measures further concentrated power.

This tendency was cemented with the 2017 constitutional referendum, which changed Turkey's system from parliamentary to presidential. Important reforms included giving the president more authority over the judiciary, eliminating the position of prime minister, and giving the president the authority to create and propose the budget (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, rev. 2017). These amendments significantly increased Erdoğan's executive

authority, enabling the AKP to further align state policies with its Islamist ideology while reducing the role of secular checks and balances.

In 2020, the Erdogan government announced the symbolic decision to turn the museum-turned-mosque Hagia Sophia, a UNESCO World Heritage site, into a mosque. Atatürk first converted it to a museum in 1935 as a sign of secularism, which was a significant break from Turkey's secular ideals (Öztürk, 2020:1). According to Erdoğan this measure restored historical justice and a return to Islamic norms. Erdogan gained conservative and nationalist supporters as a result of the decision, which strengthened his standing as a leader of Islamic identity. Additionally, it was a political maneuver to strengthen his base of support in the face of political and economic difficulties (Öztürk, 2020:2-3).

In 2021, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, an international agreement to combat violence against women. The convention was a major step towards gender equality. The Erdogan administration defended the withdrawal, claiming that the pact had been “hijacked” to promote ideals incompatible with Turkey’s traditional and family-oriented culture, particularly over LGBTQ+ rights (Bayar, 2024:27–28). In the face of mounting economic hardship, the decision was presented as a defense of traditional values and a tactic to mobilize support among conservative and nationalist voters. However, some saw it as a major retreat from women’s equality and a departure from Turkey’s secular and progressive values.

Turkey's educational system saw substantial changes under Erdoğan and the AKP, with a greater emphasis on Islamic values. The 2016 failed coup attempt led to a revision of the national curriculum that reduced secular and scientific components while increasing religious content in all disciplines and highlighting Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic roots. A notable change toward a more religiously oriented curriculum was the removal of evolution from high school biology classes (Yilmaz, 2018:9–10). Additionally, the AKP increased financing for Imam Hatip schools and converted public schools into religious institutions. By reducing the grade level at which children might choose religious instruction, legislative measures such as the 4+4+4 education reform in 2012 made it easier for pupils to attend these institutions (Yilmaz, 2018:16–17).

Erdogan’s speech during Hagia Sophia opening: *"The resurrection of Hagia Sophia heralds the liberation of the al-Aqsa Mosque. The resurrection of Hagia Sophia is the footsteps of the will of Muslims across the world to come out of the interregnum. The resurrection of Hagia Sophia is the reignition of the fire of hope of not just Muslims but together with them of all the oppressed, wronged, downtrodden and exploited. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia demonstrates that the*

Turkish nation, Muslims, and all of humanity still have something new to tell the world." (Misztal, 2020).

Erdogan's rhetoric often connects domestic actions to broader Muslim struggles, as seen in references to al-Aqsa Mosque and other symbolic sites. He presents these actions as part of a revival of Islamic identity and unity, describing Hagia Sophia's reopening as a step toward "liberation" and hope for oppressed Muslims worldwide (Misztal, 2020). In his speeches, Erdogan emphasizes Turkey's leadership role in addressing issues faced by Muslim-majority countries. In order to consolidate support domestically and project influence internationally, he frames Turkey as a protector of Muslims all over the globe and a critic of Western policies (Turkish Presidency, 2020). This strategic use of Islamist rhetoric blends religious revivalism with political pragmatism, which makes it appealing to both nationalist and religious sentiments.

4.3.2. Opposition

In the third phase of the Turkey's political history, opposition happened to be secularists. As the AKP strengthened its grip on state institutions, suppressed criticism, and passed laws supporting its Islamist goals, opposition forces faced increasing difficulties. This section examines the main forms of resistance, their demands, and conflicts throughout this period.

The 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations were among the most prominent examples of dissent during this phase. Plans to transform one of Istanbul's few green spaces into a shopping mall provided the initial trigger for the demonstrations. It quickly grew into a larger movement against the AKP's perceived authoritarianism and encroachment on secular life (Özen, 2015:534). Complaints were compounded by the AKP's restrictions on alcohol sales near religious establishments in and its preference for business over environmental protection, reflecting its conservative and pro-Islamic stance (Nazif-Munoz et al., 2022:196). When the police used tear gas and force against the protesters, the public outrage intensified. Erdoğan dismissed the demonstrators as "looters" and refused to compromise. While the protests did not lead to change, they showed how deeply divided Turkish society had become (Özen, 2015:541).

CHP and other political opposition groups found it difficult to challenge the AKP's hegemony. Their function was further undermined by the 2017 constitutional referendum. Turkey's parliamentary form of government was replaced with a presidential one as a result of this referendum. Numerous opposition figures denounced this as a danger to democracy and a step toward dictatorship (Kalaycıoğlu, 2012). Opposition parties did, however, attempt to unite in order to oppose the AKP. The "Nation Alliance," for instance, united many factions in order to increase

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their influence. Erdoğan, however, undermined these partnerships with populist rhetoric. He said that they were either manipulated by foreign forces or anti-nationalist (Yabancı, 2019:298).

The opposition was further undermined by the AKP's hold over the media. Pro-government organizations either took control of or closed down independent media. Many journalists were detained for criticizing the administration, and social media platforms were also restricted (Esen & Gumuscu, 2017:70). Civil society groups that supported human rights and secularism were under a lot of strain. Following the failed 2016 coup attempt, the government was able to target opposition groups by declaring a state of emergency. People who were critical of the administration were prosecuted, and several organizations were shut down (Tansel, 2018).

4.3.3. Analysis of Islamization nature

Table 5, Islamization political developments and reforms during third Phase in Turkey (2007-2024)

Political development/Reform	Year	Assessment
Lifting the headscarf ban	2008, 2013	Passive Islamism
Islamization of education	2010s, 2020s	Passive Islamism
Restrictions on alcohol sales	2013	Passive Islamism
Conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque	2020	Passive Islamism
Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention	2021	Passive Islamism
Islamist populist rhetoric	2010s, 2020s	Passive Islamism

Erdogan gradually changed the political ideology of government toward Islamization throughout the third phase of Turkish history. During this time, Atatürk's secular legacy began to shift as Islamic principles became more and more integrated into governmental choices and reforms. Significant political changes were presented as expanding individual liberties. However, these modifications also played role in a larger plan to standardize Islamic customs in public areas.

Another major point was the 2010 constitutional referendum. Although it was portrayed as bringing Turkey into line with EU democratic standards, it greatly diminished the military's and the judiciary's ability to serve as secular protections. The 2017 constitutional referendum moved Turkey into a presidential system and resulted in even further concentration of authority. These modifications gave Erdoğan broad authority and allowed the AKP to implement Islamist-leaning policies with no institutional opposition. In addition, reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque was one of the most symbolic actions that supported the trend toward Islamization. Secularists were turned off by this decision. Moreover, by connecting domestic policies to international Islamic issues, Erdoğan positioned Turkey as a global protector of Islamic ideals.

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Table 6, General assessment of the third Phase in Turkey

Political Ideology from above	Political Ideology from below
Passive Islamism	Passive Secularism

Turkey saw deliberate efforts to integrate Islamic values into political agenda, public life, and education. These actions clearly demonstrate that the country's ideology is not passive secularism, but for radical Islamism, this is not enough. Erdogan did not try to introduce Sharia laws, did not try to oblige people to wear a headscarf or go to religious schools. Thus, the AKP's political ideology during this phase can be characterized as passive Islamism. The opposition, on the other hand, primarily promoted passive secularism. In order to prevent Islamic values from taking over public institutions, this ideology promotes the coexistence of religion and the state. Secularists opposed the AKP's attack on Atatürk's secular heritage. Their main demands were to defend individual liberties, institutional independence, and pluralism. However, the opposition's capacity to successfully oppose the AKP's expanding power was hampered by various challenges.

Overall, the third phase of Turkey resulted in culmination of the constant confrontations between secularists and islamists from the second phase. The pro-Islamic party emerged from the opposition and entered the government. Having firmly clung and consolidated all power around himself, Erdogan fundamentally influenced Turkish politics and society. In addition to the pro-Islamic agenda, this phase also saw the establishment of the authoritarianism of Erdogan and his party. The military could not prevent this, as was usually the case before. The secularists lost their influence in defending Atatürk's ideas and became the opposition.

4.4. Conclusion

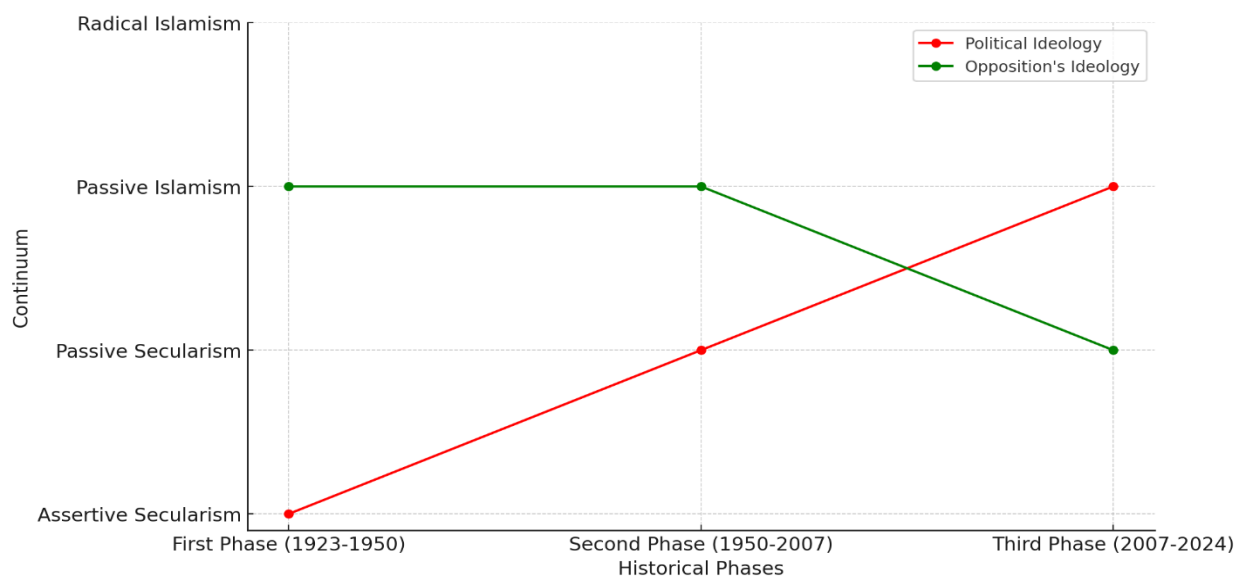


Chart 1, Trajectories of Secularism and Islamism in Turkey

To conclude development of these ideologies within Turkish state through the last 100 years, I'll use Chart 1 to show how secular dominance in the beginning had changed with passive Islamism governance, while preserving secular institutions in charge.

The political evolution of secularism and Islamism in Turkey indeed began with a radical shift from the Islamic Ottoman Empire to the secular Turkish Republic founded by Atatürk. This transition was accompanied with drastic secularization across whole country. Reforms were often implemented forcibly, what made this phase as one dominated by assertive secularism.

As Turkey moved to a multi-party system, the second phase saw the emergence of a space for alternative. Islamic values now, gained a chance to be integrated into politics and society. Despite this, strong secular position maintained by the military, limited the establishment and stabilization of Islamism at the state level. Second phase is characterized by attempts to introduce Islamic values to meet public demand, though these efforts did not undermine the secular framework of the country. The phase served as a formative period for Islamist movements. Erbakan's experience was a certain example for Erdogan to take cautious approach in the third phase. Since he aimed to avoid military backlash and solidify pro-Islamic policies without abrupt disruptions. The overall assessment of the second phase as Passive Secularism reflects the inability to maintain as strict secular regime as in the first phase due to the pressures and demands for more religious inclusion.

The third phase was a platform for developing Turkish Islamism. With parliamentary support and constitutional reforms, Erdogan managed to solidify his regime's stance and integrate Islamic values more thoroughly into state policies. This phase saw the implementation of various pro-Islamic policies, such as lifting the ban on headscarves in educational and public institutions, imposing restrictions on alcohol sales, converting Hagia Sophia back into a mosque and certain de-secularization of education. These actions resulted in shift towards passive Islamism, with a continued working of secular institutions.

Overall, trajectories of secularism and Islamism in Turkey has changed fundamentally. The starting point of Atatürk's secular Republic and its end in Erdogan's new pro-Islamic Turkey mark strong consequences for Turkey's secular system. At the same time, a examining of Erdogan's policies also makes it clear that religion in his hands acts as a tool for consolidating his conservative public support and it possible that one day soon, this majority support can be lost due to autocratic nature of Erdogan's regime.

5. Iran: Political Phases

5.1. First Phase (1925-1979), Assertive Secularism from above, Radical Islamism from below

The time frame of the first phase in Iran is determined by the rise to power of the new Pahlavi dynasty and its political course aimed at deep modernization of the country. During the ongoing modernizing reforms, Reza Shah Pahlavi, and subsequently his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, will significantly reduce the influence of religion and clergy on the state. This course of political secularization, driven by the desire to modernize Iran, began in 1925 and continued until the end of the Pahlavi dynasty, which would be overthrown through the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Thus, this phase is characterized by the dominance of political secularism in the state and will be examined in two stages. The first stage examines key secularization reforms introduced from 1925 to 1941 during the reign of Reza Shah. Then thesis touches upon further secular reforms introduced from 1941 to 1979 during the period of Mohammad Reza Shah. By identifying key reforms, assessment of political ideology is being conducted. The same applies towards opposition's reaction and its demand.

5.1.1. Key secularization reforms under Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941)

Reza Shah Pahlavi's reforms were all about modernizing Iran and reducing the influence of the clergy. One of the biggest changes in the legal system was changing Sharia-based governance to a more secular framework.

It started in 1925 with a new Penal Code, heavily inspired by European legal systems, especially the French model (Sheikholeslami, 1983). Not long after, the Civil Code came in 1928, followed by the Commercial Code in 1931 (Atabaki, 2007:72). These reforms covered everything from criminal law to economic regulations. Before this, Sharia law handled all of these areas. The Civil Code, in particular, brought big changes to personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property rights (Atabaki, 2007:72). That said, these reforms didn't completely get rid of the Islamic legal system. Islamic courts were still around, but their role was greatly diminished—they had much less jurisdiction and influence (Ameli, 2012:142). In the end, Reza Shah's changes reduced the clergy's power in governance and shifted the country toward a more secular system.

Alongside these legal reforms, Reza Shah Pahlavi introduced a major overhaul of Iran's judiciary in 1927, setting up a formal secular court system. This new system included primary courts, appellate courts, and a supreme court, which drastically cut back the role and jurisdiction of traditional Islamic courts. From that point on, religious courts were mostly limited to handling family law and issues related to religious endowments (Lahidji, 2012). To ensure the new system

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worked as intended, judges in these secular courts were required to be trained in the new legal framework. Many of them were actually educated in European institutions (Ameli, 2012:144).

Reza Shah's next big move was taking control of certain religious institutions, and one of the most impactful steps was the nationalization of religious endowments (waqf) in 1933 (Faghfoory, 1993:288). These waqfs were the properties donated for religious purposes. Usually, they were managed by religious authorities. It was a huge source of revenue for the clergy. The waqfs also gave the clergy a level of independence from the state, allowing them to wield significant social influence and sustain religious education and practices (Salarzahi et al., 2010:182). Reza Shah nationalized these endowments. And secular state officials took over the management of waqf revenues, effectively cutting off a critical source of funding for the clergy. It weakened the economic power of religious institutions and also stripped the clergy of much of their independence.

Reza Shah also tried to secularize the education system. He centralized education under state control and introduced a modern curriculum. Now the focus being shifted from Islamic studies to subjects like science, mathematics, and, importantly, Iranian history and culture (Faghfoory, 1993:286-7). This reform was not just about updating the curriculum—it was a strategic move to shape a new generation of educated citizens who aligned with the state's modernist and secular vision. The idea was to create a professional and bureaucratic class loyal to his political ideology, capable of running a modern state. Reza Shah wanted to raise a new generation of conscious Iranians.

In 1928, Reza Shah's government passed a law requiring a unified dress code. Basically, the goal was to diminish the prominence of traditional and religious clothing, which had long been powerful symbols of Islamic identity and faith (Chehabi, 1993:213). Items like the hijab, chador, and turban were not just clothing but represented adherence to Islamic traditions and values. By mandating Western-style dress and banning traditional Islamic attire in public spaces, Reza Shah directly confronted these symbols. This reform wasn't just about fashion—it was a deliberate attempt to weaken the outward expressions of religious identity in daily life and reduce the influence of religious leaders who championed these garments. It sent a strong political message: the secular state had authority over personal choices and cultural traditions, asserting that state law would take precedence over religious customs. The unified dress code became a visible demonstration of the state's power and its commitment to reshaping Iran into a modern, secular nation.

5.1.2. Key secularization reforms under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979)

Like his father, Mohammad Reza Shah continued to push for modernization and secularization in Iran. He worked to further expand the secular education system. Schools and universities that had been established under Reza Shah were developed even more. The legal system also stayed firmly secular, with the same laws and judicial structures his father had introduced still in place. This meant that most civil, criminal, and commercial matters were still governed without religious influence (Clawson & Rubin, 2005).

The White Revolution was the defining period of Mohammad Reza Shah's modernization efforts. It was an ambitious reform program that seriously reshaped Iranian society and politics, accelerating the country's modernization while bringing sweeping changes to its social and economic landscape.

In 1963, Mohammad Reza Shah started an aggressive modernization program-White Revolution. This initiative aimed to modernize Iran's economy and society (Ansari, 2001). The reforms targeted to undermine traditional and religious structures and to promote a more modern state.

One of the most significant parts of the White Revolution was the land reform program. This policy aimed to break up the vast landholdings of the aristocracy and religious trusts (Ramazani, 1974:131). The idea was to weaken the economic power of the feudal lords and the clergy, because they held influence in rural areas. By transforming the rural socioeconomic structure, the Shah hoped to build a more modern, loyal peasant class that would be less dependent on traditional and religious leaders. This reform was a political move to reduce the power of influential groups and shift loyalty toward the state.

One of Iran's major issues at the time was widespread illiteracy in rural areas. In those same areas where religious institutions controlled education. The clergy benefited from this, as a lack of education often fueled distrust in the Shah's modernization efforts. Inspired by Turkey's Village Institutes program, the Shah launched the National Literacy Corps during the White Revolution to tackle this problem (Harris, 1964).

The Corps consisted of young men who, instead of traditional military service, were trained to teach reading and writing in rural areas. This initiative aimed to close the educational gap between urban and rural populations and reduce the clergy's role as the primary educators in these regions (Sabahi, 2002:98). The curriculum emphasized secular themes like nationalism and civic duty, breaking away from the religious teachings of local madrasahs. By promoting literacy and a

standardized education system, the Shah's government not only weakened religious influence but also encouraged critical thinking and a stronger national identity that was less tied to religion.

In summary, Mohammad Reza Shah continued and expanded his father Reza Shah Pahlavi's push for modernization and secularization in Iran. Through the sweeping reforms of the White Revolution, he aimed to reshape Iranian society by reducing the influence of traditional and religious institutions and fostering a secular national identity. The main goal was to build a modern, Western-inspired state. By empowering groups like women and peasants, the Shah wanted to broaden support for his vision.

5.1.3. Opposition

The clergy were the main source of ideological resistance to the Shahs' secularization policies in Iran. By the time Reza Shah began his reforms, the clergy had long been a cornerstone of power (Ghazzal, 2005). Naturally, the Shahs' efforts to diminish their role posed a direct threat, leading to strong opposition from the religious establishment.

However, one of the key factors that made this opposition somewhat manageable for the Pahlavi dynasty. The Iranian constitution of 1906, established during the Qajar era, recognized Islam as the state religion and embedded Sharia law within the country's legal and political systems (Arjomand, 2012). Both Shahs introduced numerous secular reforms. But they were careful enough to frame these changes, so they did not contradict with Islamic principles. Reforms in family law and the abolition of certain Islamic legal practices were justified as being in line with the "progressive spirit" of Islam (Faghfoory, 1993:284). Mohammad Reza Shah frequently emphasized that his policies aligned with a modern and progressive interpretation of Islam. He argued that it was fully compatible with modernization (Sabahi, 2002:227).

Shahs made attempts to present modernization as compatible with Islam. But many religious leaders perceived these reforms as a threat to their religious authority. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was one of them. He managed to gain his prominence during the 1960s and 1970s. Khomeini with other clerics argued that the Shah's modernization policies seriously deviated from true Islamic principles and were overly influenced by Western secular ideals.

Mosques and seminaries became key hubs for organizing opposition to the Pahlavi regime (Yazdi, 1989:146). These spaces were centers of political activism. Opposition were rallying against what many saw as the government's overreach into religious and cultural life. And this opposition was fueled by the belief that the Shahs undermined Islam's constitutional role in the state. This agenda were causing widespread resentment and resistance among both the clergy and their followers.

5.1.4. Analysis of secularization nature*Table 7, Secularization reforms during first Phase in Iran (1925-1979)*

Reform	Year	Assessment
Secular legal system (Penal, Civil and Commercial Code's)	1925, -28, -31	Assertive
Inclusion of secular curriculum in education	1930s	Assertive
Establishment of a Secular Judiciary	1927	Assertive
Western dress code	1928	Assertive
Nationalization of religious endowments	1933	Assertive
White Revolution	1964	Assertive

Secular legal system with New Civil, Criminal, and Commercial Codes fundamentally changed the legal system by suppression Islamic jurisprudence with systems based on European models, directly challenging the influence of religious law. Implementing a secular curriculum was a direct intervention in the traditional religious education system, aimed at promoting secular and modern scientific knowledge over religious teachings. Mandating a Western dress code and discouraging traditional Islamic attire such as the hijab was a forceful secularization measure that sought to visibly diminish religious expressions in public life. By taking control of religious endowments, the government directly reduced the financial independence and influence of religious institutions, a clear assertive secular action. Establishment of a Secular Judiciary suppressed religious courts with secular courts, significantly reducing the role of Sharia law in the judiciary. Land reform diminished the economic power of the clergy and traditional landholding elites, who were often linked to religious institutions, thereby weakening one of the bases of their influence in rural areas. National Literacy Corps aimed to reduce illiteracy through secular education, particularly targeting rural areas where religious institutions predominantly controlled education. It was a direct state intervention to diminish the educational influence of the clergy.

All in all, first phase in Iran with its secularization efforts undertaken by the Pahlavi dynasty can be assessed as assertive secularism. This phase reflects the deliberate and forceful actions Shahs took to reduce the influence of religious institutions and expressions in Iran's public life and government affairs.

In terms of clerical opposition, they argued that the Shah's disregard for Islamic principles in his pursuit of secularization was a violation of the Shia doctrine of justice. They held that a true Islamic state must operate within the parameters set by Sharia law, and any leader who failed to do so was unfit to rule (Dabashi, 2006). This theological stance became a main point for broader

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opposition, attracting not just the devoutly religious but also those who felt culturally and economically marginalized by the Pahlavi's rapid modernization efforts. Opposition's advocacy for an Islamic state based on Sharia law was driven by a desire to counteract the Shah's secularization, preserve Iranian-Islamic identity, and address social and economic disparities through religious governance. Their demands for radical change were rooted in belief that only a theocratic system could align governance with Islamic principles and ensure justice and morality in public life. Thus, opposition's demand for political ideology can be assessed as radical Islamism.

Table 8, General assessment of the first Phase in Iran

Political Ideology from above	Political Ideology from below
Assertive Secularism	Radical Islamism

The process of secularization of the state, as well as society subsequently, is deeply connected with the goal of modernization of Iran by the Pahlavi dynasty. This process of secularization was particularly accessible due to the established authoritarian regime of both Shahs. A distinctive feature of secularization in this phase is that the policy aimed at significantly reducing the influence of the clergy was framed under the guise of the spirit of progressive Islam. Although this was only a façade and the clergy resisted this policy, the Shahs still managed to somehow justify the modernization strategy to society. 54 years this disguised political ideology held power. However, the systematic opposition of the clergy accumulated tension in society. In the last period of the Shah's reign before his overthrow, public discontent manifested itself not only because the Shah's policies alienated Iran from its Islamic foundation. Society was dissatisfied with the repression to which the regime subjected people. Also, the inability of the state to provide jobs for huge number of people who have now received an education. People wanted a change in the regime, and clergy were there in right time to fuel desires of the society under the guise of an Islamic answer to the problems of people.

5.2. Second Phase (1979-2024), Radical Islamism from above, Passive Secularism from below

The time frame of the second phase is determined by the radical change of powers in Iran through the Islamic Revolution. Which makes 1979 a starting point of this phase. Considering the fact that since 1979, the government's political ideology has not changed till the present day, the end of the phase is 2024. Key reforms that were aimed at re-Islamization of Iran is being studied. Opposition in the second phase is represented by society and examined through protests and discontent manifestations.

5.2.1. Critical juncture of Islamic revolution in 1979

The Islamic Revolution is a critical juncture in the trajectory of Islamism during second phase in Iran. This event became a factor contributing to a radical change in the political ideology of the state. The clergy, who had systematically resisted the Shah's policies of modernization and secularization of the state and society, now gained power in Iran and the opportunity to re-Islamize the state back. This shift dramatically changed the role of religion in state affairs because it made Islamic law as the foundation of governance and social life. The revolution was the definitive end of state-led secularization in Iran. New theocratic regime dismantled the secular institutions and replaced them with structures designed to enforce Islamic principles. The establishment of a theocratic state represented one of the most significant real-world implementations of Islamist political theory.

5.2.2. Key Islamization reforms

One of the clergy's first actions was to implement sweeping constitutional reforms. The 1906 constitution was drastically rewritten, guided by Islamic principles under the supervision of the Assembly of Experts—a body largely made up of Shia clerics and scholars loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini. The new constitution, ratified by public referendum in December 1979, became the foundation of the Islamic Republic (Saffari, 1993). At the heart of the new constitution was the principle of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), enshrined in Article 5. This established the position of the Supreme Leader who was a senior Islamic cleric with ultimate authority over all branches of government (Papan-Matin, 2014:167-8). The Supreme Leader is chosen by the Assembly of Experts and is granted extensive powers like the authority to confirm presidential election results (Rizvi, 2012).

The judiciary also falls under the Supreme Leader's influence. Because he appoints the head of the judiciary and then he selects senior judges. With this move, they ensured that the legal system adheres to Islamic law as interpreted by the new regime. The Supreme Leader's grip extends to the executive and legislative branches too. From now on, he has appointed half of the members of the Guardian Council. And what is interesting is that this body can veto legislation and validate election results (Lake, 1982).

Articles 156–174 of the Iranian Constitution define the structure, functions, and role of the Islamic Judiciary. Its primary responsibility is to enforce Sharia law across all areas of life in Iran, covering not only criminal cases but also civil matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property disputes (Papan-Matin, 2014:195-9). The Judiciary is a key institution for upholding the Islamic character of the state. In practice, the Judiciary has also been used as a political tool to suppress dissent. Trials and punishments are often based on broad and flexible interpretations of

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Islamic law, which allows for severe penalties against political opponents under the pretext of defending Islamic morals or protecting national security (Jalaeipour, 2006). This dual role as both a judicial and political instrument reinforces the regime's control and ensures conformity to its ideological and political agenda.

Between 1980 and 1983, Iran's Cultural Revolution aimed to cleanse society of secular and Western influences while promoting Islamic values across public life. One of the boldest moves was closing universities to restructure higher education in line with Islamic principles (Sobhe, 1982). Many professors and students were dismissed. Textbooks and curricula were rewritten to reflect Islamic teachings and political ideology (Razavi, 2009:8). Schools at all levels were overhauled, with new content heavily focused on Quranic studies, Islamic history, and philosophy (Razavi, 2009:10). The government also tightened control over media. They censored films, books, music, and theatre to block anything deemed un-Islamic or against revolutionary values (Tavakoli-Targhi, 1990).

This revolution suppressed intellectual freedom and cultural diversity. It aligned education and media strictly with state-approved Islamic ideology. Indeed, it helped the regime to consolidate power, but it also deepened divisions in society. Conservative factions rallied behind the changes, but secular and moderate groups felt alienated, which led to greater social tension.

The hijab issue, a point of contention during the Shah's era, remained significant in the Islamic Republic. In 1981, the government introduced a compulsory hijab law requiring all women, regardless of their religion, to wear the hijab in public. This includes covering the hair and neck and wearing modest clothing that conceals body shape (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993). The law aimed to enforce Islamic values in public life because hijab is traditionally seen as a symbol of modesty and virtue. By making it mandatory, the regime wanted to shape public spaces according to Islam. Beyond cultural and religious symbolism, the hijab law became a tool of political control. It aimed to unify the population under a single Islamic code and acted as a daily marker of adherence to the regime's values.

The Guidance Patrol or morality police, is another key institution responsible for enforcing Islamist laws in the Islamic Republic. Its most visible role is ensuring adherence to the Islamic dress code. For women it meant wearing of hijab. For men it was prohibition from wearing certain types of Western clothing or hairstyles (Golkar, 2018). The Patrol also monitor behaviors which are considered inappropriate under Islamic law. It can be public displays of affection, interactions between unrelated men and women, consumption of alcohol or social gatherings that violate Islamic norms (Golkar, 2011). The Guidance Patrol is both a symbol and tool of the state's

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commitment to maintaining an Islamic society. It enforces religious laws while promoting the government's vision of an Islamic way of life. This includes educating citizens about Islamic values and punishing those who fail to conform to the imposed lifestyle, reinforcing the regime's authority and Islamist ideology.

In summary, Iran's Islamization policies drastically reshaped society. Reforms steered it toward a theocratic model centered on religious governance. These reforms aimed to build an Islamic society deeply rooted in Islamist ideology. The Velayat-e Faqih principle solidified religious authority in governance, giving the Supreme Leader—an Islamic cleric—ultimate control over political, military, and social matters. This integration of state and religion ensured that every government action carried religious oversight and justification. The Cultural Revolution eliminated secular influences from education and culture, replacing them with Islamic content that reinforced the regime's ideology. Education and cultural expressions were tightly aligned with state-approved Islamic norms, shaping public thought and behavior. The compulsory hijab law and the activities of the Guidance Patrol further regulated public life, embedding Islamic values into the everyday experiences of Iranians. These measures solidified the regime's vision of an ideologically pure public sphere, deeply entwined with its religious foundation.

5.2.3 Opposition

President Mohammad Khatami emerged as a key figure among Iranian authorities who was advocating for reforms and a more open society. His leadership highlighted a significant portion of the Iranian population's desire for change. Especially in response to the Islamist regime's strict public policies. He gained his widespread public support for the promises of reform and greater freedoms (Mehran, 2003:313). Khatami wanted to strengthen democracy in Iran by promoting political pluralism. He also wanted to reform electoral laws, so to enable participation by more candidates and political parties. He also aimed to change Iran's political culture away from authoritarianism (Tarock, 2002:455). One of his most impactful reforms was his push to liberalize media censorship. The press experienced a brief period of freedom under his presidency. These platforms openly discussed political and social issues. Khatami also championed greater social freedoms, including advocacy for women's rights and the protection of minority groups. However, many of his efforts were blocked by powerful conservative institutions, limiting the scope of his systemic reforms (Gheissari & Nasr, 2004:98). Khatami's presidency remains an important chapter in Iran's political history, symbolizing both the potential and the challenges of reform within the framework of the Islamic Republic.

Protests against forced wearing of hijab became one of the symbols for fight with the Islamist regime. In 2009 Green Movement, women used the hijab as a tool of resentment amid

protests. Although initially they were sparked by contested elections (Dabashi, 2017). In 2017, the White Wednesdays campaign, led by Masih Alinejad also encouraged public protests against the hijab law (Basmehchi, 2019). A turning point came with the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, after her detention by the morality police for allegedly violating the hijab law. Her death caused protests across all over Iran. Women were removing their hijabs as an act of protest (Khatam, 2023:303).

Iranian demonstrations in 2017–2018 and 2019 were notable manifestations of the public's dissatisfaction with the regime. Rising costs and other economic troubles served as the catalyst for the demonstrations in Mashhad. At that time, West lifted certain international sanctions and people hoped that it will easier their economic situation. But President Hassan Rouhani failed to bring about economic recovery. It left many Iranians disillusioned (Jones & Newlee, 2022). These demonstrations swiftly expanded to more than 80 cities. Calls for more freedoms, less clerical influence in governance, and even regime change quickly followed economic demands. Widespread political dissatisfaction was seen in chants such as "Death to the dictator" and condemnation of Supreme Leader Khamenei (Alexeev, 2019). These waves of protests revealed growing frustration among Iranians, particularly with economic mismanagement and corruption.

Overall, the sustained opposition indicates a cultural shift among segments of the Iranian population, particularly among the youth and urbanites, who increasingly demand secularization in governance and public life. This shift suggests a growing secular ethos that is less aligned with the Islamic Republic's foundational principles. The resistance is a clear demand for reform that extends beyond just the issue of the hijab or economic disruptions to encompass wider calls for more significant civil liberties and a reduction in religious influence over daily life and governance. One can say that the opposition challenges the regime's religious legitimacy, particularly its authority to impose strict religious observances and moral codes. It questions the moral justification of theocratic governance.

5.2.4 Analysis of Islamization nature

Table 9, Islamization reforms during second Phase in Iran (1979-2024)

Reform	Year	Assessment
Establishment of the principle of Velayat-e Faqih	1979	Radical Islamism
Ultimate authority vested in the Supreme Leader	1979	Radical Islamism
Establishment of the Guardian Council	1979	Radical Islamism
Islamic Judiciary	1979	Radical Islamism
Cultural Revolution	1980-1983	Radical Islamism

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Compulsory Hijab Law	1981	Radical Islamism
Guidance Patrol	2005	Radical Islamism

The Islamization of Iran fundamentally changed both the structure and ideology of the state by embedding religious authority into its core. Islamic principles were codified into the constitution and legal system. Institutions like the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader's office were empowered to oversee and influence governance, from creating laws to managing elections. The Cultural Revolution played a key role in aligning education and cultural output with Islamic ideology, shaping public perception and identity to reflect the state's religious ideals. This shift to theocratic governance placed clerics and religious principles at the center of decision-making, deeply influencing state policies and public life. These Islamist policies have significantly limited political and ideological diversity. They excluded political plurality. By disqualifying candidates who do not adhere to Islamic principles, they made sure that Islamist ideology will endure. The intertwining of state and religion gives the regime "divine legitimacy," framing opposition as not just political dissent but defiance of divine will. Laws like the compulsory hijab mandate and the actions of the Guidance Patrol extend the state's reach into everyday life, regulating personal behavior to reinforce its vision of an Islamic society. This system uses religious compliance as a tool for social control, curtailing civil liberties and suppressing dissent under the pretext of protecting the Islamic foundations of the state. Overall, the second phase in Iran can be assessed as a phase of radical Islamism. The Islamization reforms implemented during this period, fundamentally transformed the nation. It replaced secular frameworks with a radical Islamic governance.

Table 10, General assessment of the second phase in Iran

Political Ideology from above	Political Ideology from below
Radical Islamism	Passive Secularism

Opposition's demands, particularly from the reformist periods and movements like those against the compulsory hijab, often do not call for the outright elimination of religion from public life. Instead, they seek the removal of coercive religious policies and advocate for the personal choice to observe religious practices. This is indicative of a preference for a state where religion can exist but does not dominate public and governmental affairs. The opposition has shown a strong desire for a political culture that is defined by dialogue and legalism, rather than authoritarianism or religious dogmatism. This suggests an appreciation for a pluralistic society

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where multiple viewpoints, including religious ones, can coexist as long as they do not infringe on others' rights or dominate public policies. Thus, the opposition's political ideology can be assessed as passive secularism, since it calls for reduction of the state's enforcement of religious observance, increased personal freedoms regarding religious practices, and respect for religious diversity without allowing any single religious ideology to control state mechanisms.

5.3. Conclusion

The political history of Iran from the first to the second phase reveals a dramatic change in the trajectories of political secularism and Islamism. This transformation is characterized by the replacement of one dominant political ideology with another.

In the first phase of Iran, the Pahlavi dynasty enforced a policy of assertive secularism. Their rule was characterized by a deliberate effort to reduce the influence of the Islamic clergy and religious institutions in governance and public life. This was achieved through reforms in legal, educational, and cultural domains. These measures reduced the power of religious authorities. And also aligned Iran more closely with a secular framework. These changes indeed modernized Iran in many ways. But they also alienated some parts of the population. For many people, rapid secularization and suppression of Islamic identity felt like an attack on their values. Eventually, modernization planted the seeds of discontent that later would cause a revolution.

The growing discontent with the Pahlavi dynasty's secular policies culminated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which marked a dramatic and total rejection of the Shahs' secularizing agenda. The revolution gave rise to the Islamic Republic, a regime committed to re-Islamizing Iranian society and dismantling the secular foundations of the previous government. At the heart of this new system was the principle of Velayat-e Faqih, which established the Supreme Leader as the ultimate authority over all branches of government, merging religious power with political governance.

The transition from the assertive secularism of the Pahlavi dynasty to the radical Islamism of the Islamic Republic highlights a dynamic and volatile negotiation between secularism and Islamism in Iran. Each phase was marked by a top-down imposition of ideology by authoritarian regime, whether it was secular or Islamic ideology. Aggressive approaches often met with significant resistance from portions of the population that felt marginalized or oppressed by the prevailing policies. The case of Iran provides a clear illustration of how political secularism and Islamism have not only alternated but have also evolved and replaced each other. Chart 2 shows how secularism and Islamism, together with their oppositions, developed during both phases.

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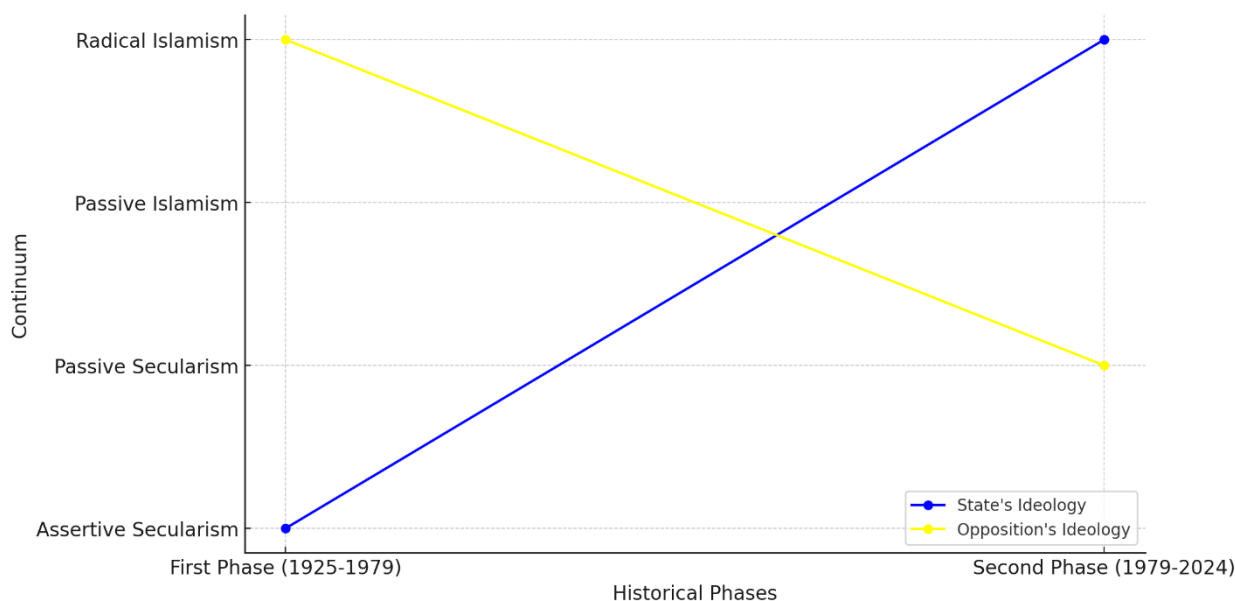


Chart 2, Trajectories of Secularism and Islamism in Turkey

While examining these two phases, it becomes clear how religion acts as a tool for consolidating the regime in both ideologies, although with a different approach. During the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, a vital condition for the course towards modernization and Westernization of Iran was the taking of religion under control, by significantly reducing its influence on the state and society. Thus, keeping religion within limits, the Shah's regime maintains its position and carries out further modernization. One can say that such a strategy did not justify itself, and it was the suppression of religion that caused the Islamic revolution. But among other reasons behind the revolution, the general mass of people was dissatisfied with the economic situation, the repressive regime and feeling of losing their sovereignty due to close relations with United States. The clergy was the glue in this mass of discontent and offered their Islamic solution to all problems.

In the case of the Islamic Republic, religion also plays the role of an instrument that can justify the actions of the state aimed at consolidating its regime. Under the guise of religion, government builds a non-alternative, theocratic model of the state with strong repressive mechanisms, which ensures the survival of the regime. Thus, it is the place and position of religion that is the main factor in these political ideologies. In the Islamic republic, religion is given the honor of being on display for all to see and obey it. But in a secular system, religion and its influence must be distanced from government and society, in order to modernize the country freely without the need to seek religious approval.

6. Comparative analysis

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of religion-state relations in Turkey and Iran. Area of focuses are on their trajectories of secularization, re-Islamization and the role of key

institutions. Building on the previous chapters, it examines how these two countries developed different approaches to secularism and Islamism. The goal of this chapter is to synthesize and contrast key developments that affected secular-religious dynamics.

The analysis is structured around three main themes. First is the secularization and modernization efforts during the first phase in both countries. Then chapter proceeds to compare the processes of re-Islamization and societal polarization between second phase of Iran and second and third phases in Turkey. Finally, the role of institutions such as the military and religious establishments in shaping political ideologies. Comparative analysis highlights the critical factors that explain both the similarities and divergences in Turkey and Iran's religion-state dynamics.

6.1. Secularization and Modernization

While there are many parallels between Turkey's and Iran's first phase, there are crucial differences in how they approached secularization. Both nations aimed to reduce the role of religion in politics and public life and consolidate authority. Charismatic leaders of both countries pushed for it. However, approaches and outcomes diverged.

Atatürk implemented a radical secularization project in Turkey. The abolition of the caliphate in 1924 symbolized decisive separation of religious authority from any kind of power. Religious schools were shut down, Islamic courts were replaced by secular legal codes. And the most important - establishment of Diyanet to regulate religious activities under strict state control. This policy represents approach where religion was limited to the private sphere, but state maintained authority over its expression.

Pahlavi dynasty pursued similar modernization goals in Iran but approached secularization with less rigidity. They indeed implemented measures close to Turkey's in reducing the power of the Shia clergy. But what they failed to achieve was the institutionalization of secularism to the same extent as Turkey. Unlike the tightly regulated religious institutions in Turkey, the Iranian clergy retained relative autonomy. Thus, this difference allowed the clergy still to maintain some of their influence. Subsequently, it played role in organizing Islamic revolution and overthrow de-facto secular monarchy.

In sum, the outcomes show differences in institutional frameworks and their actual long-term impact. Turkey succeeded in institutionalizing secularism on the state-level. But Iran's authorities only limited clergy's influence, instead of taking it under same strict state control as Turkey.

6.2. Re-Islamization and societal polarization

During second and third phases, Turkey and Iran experienced a reassertion of religion. Due to prior established institutional contexts in the first phase, trajectories of secularism was altered. Iran's political trajectory shifted toward radical Islamism in governance. And Turkey experienced gradual rise of Islamism during second and more prominent during third phase. The only thing is that this re-Islamization in Turkey occurred within secular framework.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty and installed a theocratic government headed by Shia clerics. It is critical juncture of re-Islamization in Iran. Widespread discontent with the Shah's modernizing policies was a trigger to revolution. The Shia clergy were able to successfully organize this resentment, thanks to their relative autonomy. With clerics exercising ultimate power and IRGC imposing intellectual and political control, the proclamation of the Islamic Republic solidified religion as the cornerstone of government.

Now, the re-Islamization of Turkey took a different trajectory. Political Islam gained strength through democratic means. The secular framework encountered increasing difficulties in the second phase. Islamist groups like the MNP and its offspring were able to become powerful political forces thanks to the multiparty system. The ascent of Erdoğan and AKP on the edge between second and third phases was the result of the RP representing a growing conservative base by the 1990s. So, in contrast to Iran, Turkey's Islamism functioned inside a secular state, progressively weakening institutional protections without completely destroying it.

Both nations experienced serious societal division during these phases. Political Islam gained prominence in Turkey. Therefore the gap between Islamists and secularists widened. Cycles of conflict and adjustment resulted from the recurrent interventions of the military. Societal polarization also arose in Iran. Especially between those who desired more political freedom and those who supported the theocratic model of the Islamic Republic.

These divergent re-Islamization trajectories prove the impact of prior political systems and institutional legacies. After Islamic revolution, religion was fully incorporated into the Iranian state and society. On the other hand, Islamism's gradual rise in Turkey showed how flexible political Islam can be in a democratic setting. All in all, these trajectories demonstrate the ways how religion may reclaim its place in politics and society.

6.3. The role of institutional forces

Institutions like military, as well as religious establishments had prominent influence on political trajectories of both nations. These institutional forces influenced the implementation of

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secularization and re-Islamization policies. Apart from that, they also determined how each country responded to societal and political challenges.

In Turkey, military as a secular guardian was forged during first phase. Institution was used by authorities to suppress any kind of resistance to secularization. Then, in order to protect secularism from political Islam in the second phase, military were intervening into state affairs repeatedly. The coups of 1960, 1971, 1980 and the “post-modern coup” of 1997 were all driven by the military’s commitment to maintaining a secular state. Through these interventions, military ensured that secularism remained as dominant political ideology for governance. But the truth is, despite Islamist movements gained ground within secular system, military still considered it as a violation of secularism. Diyanet is another institution, which was established by Ataturk to saddle religion. To limit it with taking control over it and then adjust it in line with secular agenda.

The role of institutional forces in Iran was notably different. Shia clergy retained its relative autonomy during first phase. So, it enabled them to stand as a powerful opposition during the Islamic Revolution. After that, clergy institutionalized their power within the framework of the Islamic Republic. And they were the ones who occupied key positions in governance. The IRGC became their walking stick. This paramilitary institution supposed to enforce theocratic rule and protect regime from threats.

All in all, comparison of the institutions of these two countries shows how important and influential their existence is. The military formed under the leadership of Ataturk fiercely defended secularism during all three phases. The exception was their failed coup in 2016, but other than that, they successfully coped with their task. Diyanet also showed that the ideal method to limit the influence of religion is to take it under state control and regulate it in accordance with the agenda. It turns out that the absence of such loyal institutions during the first phase of Iran may be one of the factors in the change of the country's political trajectory from secular to Islamist. Speaking about post-revolutionary Iran, in essence, the IRGC is the same institution as the military in Turkey, the only difference is that one defends Islamism, the other secularism.

6.4. Trajectories

In this section, trajectories of political ideologies in Turkey and Iran are being explored. Focus aims on the trajectories of both the state and opposition forces during different phases. With the help of Chart 3, this analysis demonstrates how each nation transitioned through phases of secularism and Islamism.

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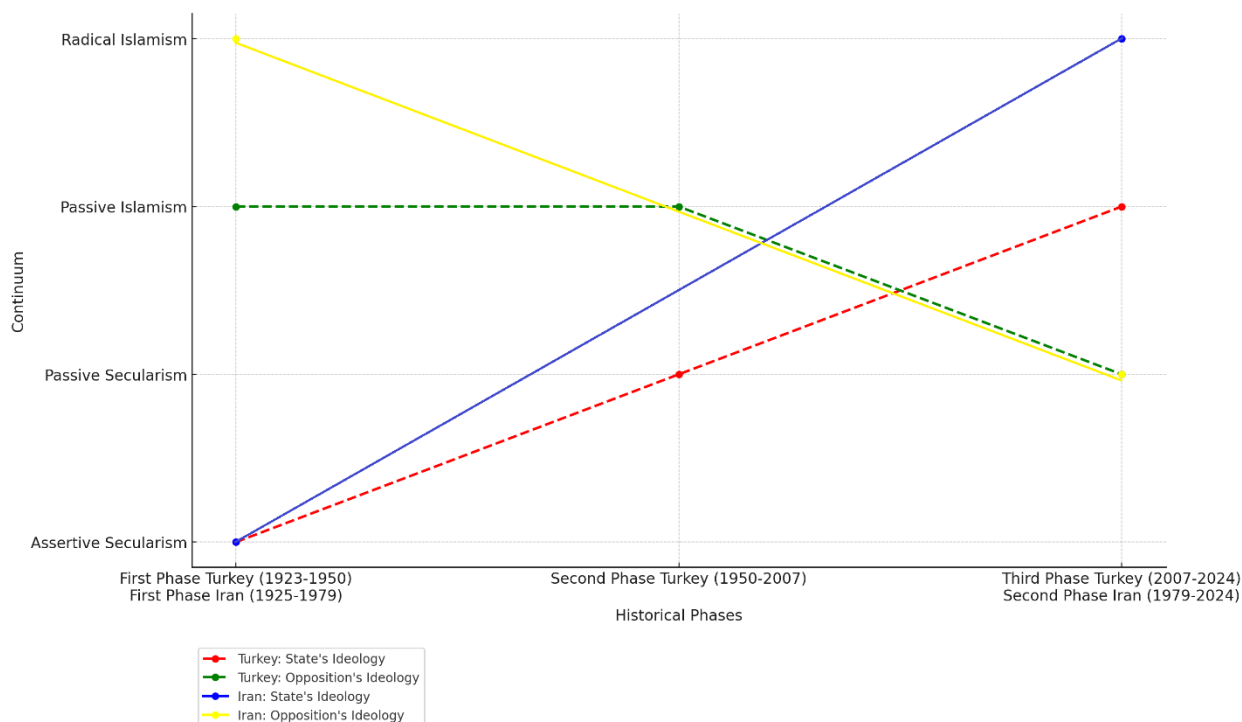


Chart 3, Comparison of trajectories of secularism and Islamism in Turkey and Iran

Turkey and Iran began their first phase from a shared starting point with assertive secularism as their state ideology. Both countries during this period began their project to modernize the country and limit the influence of religion in the state and society. However, their further trajectories diverge due to differences in institutional contexts.

Turkey, thanks to the transition to a multi-party system, begins to experience various attempts by political parties to integrate Islamic values, but reforms were not as radical as they are aimed at easing the assertive reforms of the authorities from the first phase. The military interrupted any attempts to violate the traditions of Turkish secularism founded by Atatürk. Thus, not allowing open Islamists to gain a firm grip in power. Summarizing the second phase, with the help of a democratic system, Turkey's trajectory moved towards passive secularism. In the third phase, Turkey experienced an even more open integration of Islamic values in politics and society. Erdogan introduces Muslim identity into the agenda. By and large, this symbolizes the transition to a new ideology - passive Islamism.

As for Iran, during the first phase of assertive secularism, the clergy, while still retaining some autonomy and influence in society, emerges as an opposition with the ideology of radical Islamism and stages an Islamic revolution, completely turning the tables. Thus, directing Iran's trajectory from assertive secularism in the first phase to the opposite end of the continuum with radical Islamism in the second phase.

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Speaking about the opposition's trajectories, the chart shows that in Turkey, its ideology of passive Islamism was maintained during the first two political phases. In the third phase, the opposition with its ideology was able to break into power and consolidate the regime around itself by rooting its unique system of the state within the democratic framework, but with the integration of a share of Islamic values. In other words, considering all three phases, the opposition successfully achieved its desired political ideology by gradually introducing its agenda into politics.

In Iran, the situation is similar to Turkey in the sense that the ideology of the opposition wins, but there are differences in the assessment of this ideology. Opposition's ideology eventually prevailed and marked the transition to the second phase, where radical Islamism cements theocracy and leads to the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The analytical insights from the graph suggest that in both countries the trajectory of the opposition mirrors and counters the trajectory of the state. Thus, it reflects the struggle between dominant and marginalized ideologies. The chart also proves the adaptability of political ideologies and the role of historical legacies in directing trajectories. Turkey's more gradual and democratic shifts allowed for incremental changes in the balance between secularism and Islamism. But Iran's revolutionary transformation entrenched polarization and then limited opportunities for ideological moderation.

7. Conclusion

A comparative analysis of Turkey and Iran's political histories aimed at answering how and why trajectories of the cases came to different outcomes while started from similar contexts. The research began from a shared premise: both countries pursued ambitious modernization projects in the early 20th century. They aimed to centralize and secularize states, by limiting religious influence. However, their trajectories went in different directions due to varying critical junctures and institutional contexts.

One of the study's key findings is the recurring cycle in the relations between religion and the state, where phases of secularization are followed by phases of renewed emphasis on Islam. In Turkey, this cycle is evident in the shift from Atatürk's strict secularism to the more relaxed secularism of the multi-party era, and eventually to the rise of Islamism under Erdoğan. This evolution reflects a gradual loosening of strict secular policies, influenced in large part by the country's democratic institutions, which provided space for ideological change and negotiation.

In contrast, Iran experienced dramatic shift, when moved from the Pahlavi dynasty's aggressive secularism to a radical Islamic regime after the revolution. Absence of a multi-party

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system and institutional channels for compromise, pushed Iran for a complete revolutionary transformation that entrenched religion at the heart of governance. The cyclical tension in Iran's approach to state-religion relations is reflected in the changing views of its opposition—shifting from radical Islamism during the monarchy to a quieter push for secularism in the years following the revolution, as dissatisfaction with theocratic rule has grown.

This research draws upon three theoretical frameworks in order to explain these political trajectories: modernization theory, cultural and sectarian differences, and the cyclical model of ideological governance. Among these, the findings point to the cyclical model as the most compelling explanation. It captures patterns that go beyond cultural distinctions (such as Sunni versus Shia traditions) or disparities in economic or technological development.

Why is the cyclical model better at explanation than the other two? For example, the general theory of secularism suggests that secularism is a logical consequence of the modernization of the state and society. This can explain the initial impulse of these countries to modernization and secularization. However, it cannot explain the subsequent periods of re-Islamization in both countries. The cultural framework is also not able to fully answer why two countries with different sectarian traditions eventually faced a return to the religious orbit. Therefore, the cyclical model provides best explanation of how the phases of secularism and Islamism replace each other in response to institutional dynamics, social discontent and aggressive imposition of ideology.

In both cases, authorities' efforts to impose either secularism or Islamism in a radical manner usually caused a backlash from society. These actions later led to an ideological resurgence. So, Turkey's assertive secularism from the beginning, actually succeeded in establishing secular framework and strong institutions for defending it. However, later this system could not resist gradual re-Islamization within democratic system. Military prolonged struggle for secularism, but eventually failed before Erdogan's passive Islamism. In Iran, non-alternative nature of its theocratic regime has led to a growing desire for secular reforms among opposition groups. This cyclical dynamics reflects Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that extreme secularization can provoke equally intense religious reactions. This theme plays out vividly in these two contexts.

Another important finding was the role of institutions. This factor turned out to be one of the key ones in determining the ideological trajectory. For example, in Turkey, these institutions softened the pressure of Islamism and made it as gradual as possible, without abrupt changes in ideology. And in Iran, on the contrary, their absence rather entailed a hopelessness for the Islamists. Based on this context, they did not have the opportunity to come to power in a democratic, gradual

way. This left only one option: to completely rewrite rules of the game with the help of an Islamic revolution. Thus, it turns out that according to Turkey, the presence of democratic institutions allows the state and society to change the trajectory step by step, from assertive secularism to passive, then to passive Islamism. But the case of Iran shows that this will lead to an extreme change of ideology, from one end of the continuum to the other.

A comparison of historical phases revealed a pattern. In cases where a country, during its first phase, not only curtailed the role of religion by relegating it to the margins of society but also brought it under direct state control—effectively nationalizing Islam—it achieved a far stronger and more enduring consolidation of secularism. The pattern shows that secularism can be strengthened if the state integrates religion into its administrative and ideological framework. By literally absorbing religious authorities, the state thereby greatly reduces their ability to act as a consolidated and aggressive opposition.

Another generalized contribution is that secularism in the context of Muslim-majority countries, regardless of sectarian traditions or the level of economic development, leaves behind a vacuum for resentment from the religious layer of the population and space for Islamists to manipulate with the concept of Muslim identity. Since this vacuum often emerges from the forceful exclusion of religion from public and political life, this approach alienates the population who see their faith as central to their Muslim identity. These sentiments are often amplified when secular reforms are viewed as imported ideas from abroad. This dynamic has been notable in both cases and revealed another cyclical pattern: when states marginalize religion, they inadvertently create favorable conditions for movements that mix religious identity with political resistance.

This study showed that political secularism and Islamism are not fixed endpoints. They are, in fact, dynamic concepts that change and adapt in response to cyclical bursts of assertion and backlash. Comparing the trajectories of Turkey and Iran confirms how historical legacies, institutional contexts, and public sentiments interact to guide patterned trajectories. The findings raise doubts about the application of classical secularism theory and theoretical perspective on cultural differences in a given context. This thesis contributes to the general field of studies on secularism and Islamism during the social modernization of Muslim-majority states and confirms the applicability of the third theoretical framework that fits for this thesis.

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Resümee

Poliitilise sekularismi ja islamismi võrdlev analüüs: Türgi ja Iraani faasid ja trajektoorid pärast Esimest maailmasõda

Isa Suleimanov

Magistritöö uurib poliitilise sekularismi ja islamismi vahelist dünaamikat Türgis ja Iraanis viimase 100 aasta jooksul. Uurimuse eesmärk on mõista, kuidas ja miks jõudsid need kaks riiki, vaatamata sarnastele väljakutsetele moderniseerumise ja sekulariseerumise algusaastatel, täiesti erinevate tulemusteni. Töö jagab riikide poliitilise ajaloo erinevateks faasideks ja analüüsib nende arengut põhjalikult. Võrreldes ajaloolisi verstaposte ja poliitilisi muutusi, paljastatakse mustrid, mis näitavad tsüklilisust sekularismi ja islamismi vahel, sealhulgas faasid, mida iseloomustavad domineerimine, tagasilöögid ja kohandumine.

Türgis tõi sekularismi kehtestamine kaasa tagasilöögi, mis lõpuks viis kas sekularismi täieliku asendamiseni islamismiga või islami väärtuste järkjärgulise reintegratsioonini demokraatlikus süsteemis. Iraanis viis sekularismi agressiivne rakendamine aga 1979. aasta islami revolutsioonini, mis kehtestas šiiitliku teokraatia ilma vahendava faasita. Uuring demonstreerib, kuidas mõlemal juhul poliitiline ja sotsiaalne moderniseerumine ning sõjaliste ja institutsionaalsete jõudude roll kujundasid nende riikide trajektoore.

Magistritöö panustab olulisel määral sekularismi ja islamismi uuringutesse moslemienamusega riikides, pakkudes väärtuslikke teadmisi ideoloogiate tsüklilisuse ja nende rakendamise kohta. Samuti aitab see prognoosida sarnase kontekstiga riikide tulevikusuundi. Töö kasutab põhjalikku ajaloolist ja võrdlevat lähenemist, tuginedes nii teaduslikele allikatele kui ka kvalitatiivsele andmeanalüüsile.

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