Is Islam the Solution? Comparing Turkish Islamic and Secular Thinking toward Ethnic and Religious Minorities

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Can Islamic political actors manage ethnic diversity better than secular political actors? From Muslim Brothers to ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), Islamists with very different orientations have long claimed that they can "absorb and resolve ethnic conflicts on the basis of Muslim unity and brotherhood."[1] In short, they assert that "Islam is the solution." At first sight validating these claims, Turkey's ruling pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) has presided over major initiatives to resolve the country's long-festering Kurdish conflict. It launched major legal-political reforms

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1. R. Hrair Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives," *Middle East Journal* 34, no. 1 (1980): 1–12.

and an ongoing peace process with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). These initiatives have been undermined by developments in neighboring Iraq and Syria; ambiguities of vision, trust and commitment on both sides; and cycles of government oppression and PKK militancy. Nevertheless, the government's bold steps and the limited yet unprecedented cultural and educational rights it has secured have led many observers to conclude that Turkish Islamists have more ideological potential to successfully manage ethnic diversity than their secular counterparts.[2]

Cross-country evidence does not suggest that majority-Muslim countries and, for that matter, Islamic regimes such as Iran or Sudan necessarily fare better in terms of resolving ethnic-national problems; notably, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a major Kurdish conflict, just like the constitutionally secular Turkey.[3] Still, Islamists could argue that the domestic and international political settings in

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2. Hakan Yavuz, and Nihat Ali Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," *Middle East Policy* XIII, no. 1 (2006): 102–19; Hüseyin Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafizasi* [*Turkey's Memory of the Kurdish Problem*] (Istanbul, Turkey: Dogan Kitap, 2011); Gabriel Mitchell, Gabriel, "Islam as Peacemaker: The AKP's Attempt at a Kurdish Resolution," *The Washington Review of Turkish and Eurasian Affairs*, May 2012, http://www.thewashington review.org/articles/islam-as-peacemaker-the-akps-vision-of-a-kurdish-resolution.html. Other analyses reach more nuanced and qualified but similar conclusions regarding the relative potential of Islamist ideology to resolve the Kurdish conflict and other minority problems. See Şener Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

3. For the relation between ethnic divisions and conflict, see, for example, Carsten Jensen and Svend-Erik Skaaning, "Modernization, Ethnic Fractionalization, and Democracy," *Democratization* 19, no. 6 (2012), 1117–37; Klaus Desmet, Ignacio Ortuño-Ortín, Romain Wacziarg, "The Political Economy of Linguistic Cleavages," *Journal of Development Economics* 97 (2012): 322–38; José G. Montalvo and Marta Reynal-Querol, "Ethnic Polarization, Potential Conflict, and Civil Wars," *The American Economic Review* 95, no. 3 (June 2005): 796–816. For Iran, see Nader Entessar, "The Kurdish National Movement in Iran Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979," in *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2007), and Güneş M. Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey: The Paradox of Moderation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). Numerous other Muslim states experience ethnic conflicts—for example, Indonesia: Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Malaysia: Jensen and Skaaning, "Modernization," 1117–37; Pakistan: Theodore P. Wright Jr., "Center-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Sindhis, Muhajirs, and Punjabis," *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 3 (1991): 299–312; Alyssa Ayres, *Speaking Like A State: Language and Nationalism in Pakistan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Farhan Hanif Siddiqui, in Julien Levesque, "Managing Diversity in Pakistan: Nationalism, Ethnic Politics and Cultural Resistance [review essay]," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 2013, http://samaj.revues.org/3551; Algeria, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen: Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Ethnic Conflict and State-Building in the Arab World," *International Social Science Journal* 156 (1998): 229–42.

which they have operated in modern times have not allowed them to fully put their ideas into practice.[4] Thus, it is hard to accept or refute the Islamist peace claims based on the actual performance record of Islamic versus secular political actors.

Hence, this article evaluates the merit of the "Islam is the solution" thesis mainly on an ideational level by comparing Turkish Islamic and secular actors in terms of their ideas and proposals. We do so based on a comprehensive content analysis of Islamic and secular press, complemented by other evidence such as political party reports and opinion polls. The content analysis compares representative samples of Islamic and secular writers. It examines the contents of more than forty-one thousand newspaper articles between 1996 and 2004, and in 2007 and 2010, with respect to subjects including nationalism, ethnic-religious pluralism, conflict resolution, and issues related to Kurds and the Kurdish question itself.[5] We draw on wide samples and specific issues—rather than abstract theological principles or the visions of a few renowned intellectuals. By doing so, our goal is to assess how well Turkish Islamic actors are prepared to address ethnic problems in terms of values and ideas that are widely circulated within their group discourse and in response to real political events.

While asking these questions, we will not investigate whether secularism or secular ideas played any historical role in the emergence of ethnic-national problems. Islamist claims often combine two causally and analytically separable arguments. The historical argument can be called the "secularism was to blame" argument. Islamists maintain that modern ethnic conflicts in Muslim majority states resulted from the establishment of nation states and are products of secular nationalist ideologies and national identities, which they tend to *ipso facto* associate with ethnicity, race, and often, antireligious politics. The prescriptive argument asserts that a shared Islamic identity and ideology and ideas, values, and principles inspired by Islam would be an effective recipe to address contemporary

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4. In the words of one author, Bengali nationalism grew in "East Pakistan" because of the "public policy failure to develop a religious identity based on Islamic ideas," even though Islam constitutionally became the basis of nationhood for all Indian Muslims. See Muhittin Ataman, "Islamic Perspective on Ethnicity and Nationalism: Diversity or Uniformity?" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2003): 98.

5. For the methodology and other findings from the content analysis, see Murat Somer, "Media Values and Democratization: What Unites and What Divides Religious-Conservative and Pro-Secular Elites?" *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 4 (December 2010): 555–77; Murat Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?: Lessons From Islamic and Secular Elite Values in Turkey," *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (2011): 511–45. Research on 2007 and 2010 were conducted in 2012 and 2013.

ethnic-regional conflicts. In fact, even if the historical argument were shown to be true, this would not imply that the prescriptive claim should necessarily be valid. Thus, we evaluate the prescriptive claim by itself.

Prior to further examination, a brief note on the terminology is in order. We use the terms *Islamic* and *secular* loosely and for lack of better terms whenever an Islamic or secular orientation forms a major dimension of a social-political actor's identity, respectively. We use the terms *Islamist* or *secularist* whenever a pro-Islamic or pro-secular ideology or social-political agenda seems to be even more pronounced. These categories may share many traits and are internally diverse. For example, Islamists, who invariably come from Sunni Islam in Turkey, include actors who fight to replace secular democracy with a Sharia-based system,[6] as well as people who pursue social-cultural and ideological Islamization without necessarily overhauling existing state structures. Similarly, while authoritarian-secularists defend the legacy of Atatürk's (1881– 1938) secular-Westernizing reforms by trying to forcefully exclude Islam from the public sphere, more democratic-minded secularists uphold the same legacy without necessarily denying Islam a public-political role. Nevertheless, our empirical analysis shows that the elites writing in the newspapers we name Islamic and secular form two distinct groups in terms of their average views on issues related to religion and secularism.

The Political and Academic Debate and Our Specific Hypotheses

In an attempt to achieve regime legitimacy and social-political unity based on an overriding common identity, the Turkish Constitution defines all Turkish citizens simply as Turks, regardless of ethnicity, race, and religion. But the actual practice heavily favors Sunni Muslims and Turkish ethnicity, culture and identity. For example, while the "teaching of" minority languages is now possible as elective courses, the constitution bans "teaching in" minority languages, demanding that Turkish remains the language of education.[7] No legal-formal recognition, separate rights, or autonomy are offered

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6. A numerically and politically marginal group in the Turkish case.
7. Non-Muslim minorities who make up less than 1 percent of the population have legal protection and their own cultural and educational institutions but suffer from many problems of discrimination and oppression. See Peter Alford Andrews, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, compiled and edited with the assistance of Rüdiger Benninghaus (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989); Ayhan Kaya, *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

to numerous ethnic-linguistic and sectarian groups Turkey harbors such as the Alevis, Arabs, Bosnians, Circassians, and the Laz. Many of these groups have politically mobilized, demanding more recognition and rights, especially since the 1990s. However, by far the most important ethnic-national question has been the Kurdish conflict.

Turkish national censuses do not include questions on ethnicity and race. Depending on whether Kurdishness is defined based on mother tongue or self-identification, Kurds are estimated to constitute between 15 and 19 percent of Turkey's population. Approximately two-thirds of the Kurdish population are concentrated in eastern Turkey and form the majority in areas bordering the predominantly Kurdish regions of neighboring Iraq and Syria.[8] Turkey's Kurdish conflict goes back to the late Ottoman period when state elites tried to foster common nationhood among ethnically Turkish, Kurdish, and other Muslims in the name of Ottoman state centralization-modernization. After the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923, even more radical steps of nation building and nation-state formation were implemented in Kurdish areas. This time, these were enforced in the name of Turkish nationalism and within a narrower geography because the Ottoman Kurds were divided between Turkey and the British and French mandates of Iraq and Syria.[9] A series of Kurdish rebellions and state repression followed during the 1920s and 1930s.[10] An assimilationist state policy was continued under successive military interventions and elected center-right and center-left governments, which denied even the existence of a Kurdish minority until the 1990s. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis ideology of the 1980–83 military rule reinforced this pattern in the name of both religion and nationality. Until the last decade, mainstream Turkish actors mainly perceived Turkish nationalism as nonethnic and inclusive, Kurds as actual or "potential" Turks, and

8. Server Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (1996): 517–41; Ayşe Gündüz-Hoşgör, and Jeroen Smits, "Intermarriage between Turks and Kurds in Contemporary Turkey: Interethnic Relations in an Urbanizing Environment," *European Sociological Review* 18, no. 4 (2002): 417–32; Martin van Bruinessen, *Ağa, Şeyh, Devlet* [*Agha, Sheik, State*] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003); Konda, *Kürt Meselesi'nde Algi ve Beklentiler* [*Perceptions and Expectations in the Kurdish Question*] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayinlari, 2011).

9. Robert Olson, *The Kurdish National Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

10. Mesut Yeğen, "The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 216–29; Kemal Kirisci, and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

the public expression of ethnic pluralism as a threat to national and territorial unity.[11]

Up to forty-two thousand people lost their lives due to the war with the PKK, which has fought the Turkish state since 1984 for Kurdish rights and self-rule from both within Turkey and neighboring Iraq and Syria.[12] Short-lived attempts to recognize Kurdish identity during the 1990s failed to solve the conflict in an environment of violence, weak governments, and military tutelage over civilian politics. A period of relative peace and democratic reforms began in 1999 with the PKK leader Öcalan's capture—whose death sentence was later converted to a life sentence—and the EU's recognition of Turkey as a candidate for membership. This period witnessed relative democratization, the beginning of EU accession negotiations in 2005, and many unprecedented EU-inspired reforms regarding the Kurdish question, even though these reforms fell far short of Kurdish nationalists' expectations.[13] The PKK resumed its armed struggle in 2004, as the regional context of the conflict changed with the war and the emerging autonomous Kurdish entity in Iraq.[14] The AKP has ruled the country since the end of 2002. Helped by the weakening of military supervision over Turkish politics, the party tried to address the Kurdish question through cultural reforms such as a new public TV channel in Kurdish and political "Kurdish openings" in 2005, 2009, and 2013.[15] These reforms and steps challenged many assimilationist creeds of mainstream Turkish nationalism and state ideology.

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11. Murat Somer, "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: Changing Context and Domestic and Regional Implications," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 2 (2004): 235–53; Mesut Yeğen, "Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (2007): 119–51.

12. Güneş M. Tezcür, "The Ebb and Flow of Armed Conflict in Turkey: An Elusive Peace," in *Conflicts, Democratization and the Kurds in the Middle East*, ed. David Romano and Mehmet Gürses (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 171–88.

13. Somer, "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: Changing Context and Domestic and Regional Implications," 235–53; Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey*; White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks.*

14. Güneş M. Tezcür, "When Democratization Radicalizes: the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 6 (2010): 775–89.

15. Yavuz and Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," 102–19; Murat Somer and Evangelos G. Liaras, "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening: Religious and Secular Values," *Middle East Policy* XII, no. 2 (2010): 152–65; Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey*; Teczür, "The Ebb and Flow of Armed Conflict in Turkey: An Elusive Peace," 171–88.

All this led many political actors and observers to unequivocally celebrate the AKP's Islamic identity and ideology.[16] Many nuanced and balanced studies also reckoned that Turkey's new Islamic or "Muslim-nationalist" political actors have more ideological promise to address ethnic conflicts; they ostensibly displayed "greater sensitivity to minority and individual rights" than their secular rivals, which makes "[Kurdish openings] possible."[17] White concluded: "[W]hile not immune from militant nationalism [. . . and sharing] with Kemalist nationalism a belief in the superiority of Turkishness . . . the Muslim definition of the Turkish nation appears to be less boundary- and less blood-driven than that held by Kemalist nationalists. Muslim nationalists consciously model their concept of the nation on the historical, flexibly bounded, and multinational Ottoman Empire."[18] Aktürk agreed that a new "counterelite" armed with an "Islamist multiculturalist new thinking about ethnicity" established its political hegemony and moved Turkey to multiculturalism.[19]

The debate is not new. Turkish Islamist thinkers have long maintained that "by representing a secular, 'antireligious nationalism' based on ethnicity, official Turkish nationalism contributed to the rise of its twin sister, Kurdish nationalism."[20] "Once Islamic values were replaced by Western rules of culture and thinking, Islam lost its role as a religion calling for peace and promoting mutual sympathy among the fellow Muslim Turks and Kurds. As a result, brotherly feelings toward each other gave way to 'strangling each other.'"[21] Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011), former prime minister and the founder of Turkey's first explicitly Islamist political movement and party, put it succinctly in 1994:

> For centuries, the children of this country have started the school day citing the *besmele* (in the name of God). What did you replace it with? "I am Turkish, I am righteous, I am diligent." When you did this, it became rightful

16. Yavuz and Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," 102–19; Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafizasi* [*Turkey's Memory of the Kurdish Problem*]; "Islam as Peacemaker: The AKP's Attempt at a Kurdish Resolution," *Washington Review of Turkish and Eurasian Affairs*, http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/islam-as-peacemaker-the-akps-vision-of-a-kurdish-resolution.html.
17. White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, 53.
18. Ibid., 53, 95–96.
19. Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey*, 39.
20. Ümit Cizre Sakallioğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective: The Discourses of Turkish Islamist Writers," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (1998): 77. Sakallioğlu offers a detailed and insightful examination of Islamic writing on the Kurdish question in Turkey.
21. Ibid.

for our Muslim child of Kurdish origin to say "I am Kurdish, I am righteous, I am more diligent."[22]

How would Islamic actors address the Kurdish conflict, which allegedly resulted from secular-nationalism? Hayrettin Karaman, an Islamist theologian influential among AKP circles maintains that "under an Islamic state, citizenship would be replaced by religion, and full equality would be established based on religious unity and being just."[23] Both Erbakan's party and the AKP have been popular among Kurdish voters.[24] It has been argued that the AKP identifies secularism "as a cause of division between Turks and Kurds" and offers "its own solution—'Islam as cement'—to end the societal polarization of Turkey."[25] President and former AKP leader and Prime Minister Erdoğan condemned both Turkish and Kurdish "ethnic nationalisms" and highlighted the value of unification and brotherhood on the basis of "common citizenship" in the Republic of Turkey.

Erdoğan's understanding of common "citizenship" (Turkish *vatandaş*) has a historical and emotive content rooted in Islamic brotherhood and common Ottoman-Islamic ancestry.[26] His 2011 speech in Diyarbakır, the symbolic capital of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish Southeast, began with a long opening filled with references to Muslim ancestry and brotherhood:[27]

> We are all descendants of the great soldiers of the great leader Selahaddin Eyyubi [a historical Kurdish-Muslim hero who battled against the Crusaders and founded the Ayyubid dynasty] who conquered Palestine and Jerusalem. . . . I am against both Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms.

22. Ruşen Çakir, "Erbakan 20 yil önce ne yapmişti?" ["What Did Erbakan Do 20 Years Ago"], *T24*, January 3, 2012, http://t24.com.tr/haber/rusen-cakir-erbakan-20-yil-once-ne-yapmisti,189772. Also see Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafizasi* [*Turkey's Memory of the Kurdish Problem*], 417.
23. Hayrettin Karaman, "Altan Tan Kardeşime" ["To My Brother Altan Tan"], *Yeni Şafak,* May 24, 2012.
24. Seda Demiralp, "The Odd Tango of the Islamic Right and Kurdish Left in Turkey: A Peripheral Alliance to Redesign the Centre?" *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 2 (2012): 287–302; Zeki Sarigil and Omer Fazlioglu, "Religion and Ethnonationalism: Turkey's Kurdish Issue," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 3 (2013): 551–71.
25. Yavuz and Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," 103.
26. Ruşen Çakir, "İslam kardeşliği" Kürt sorununa çözümün anahtari olabilir mi?" ["Can Islamic Brotherhood Be the Key to a Solution for the Kurdish Question"], *Vatan*, June 2, 2011. Also see, "Erdoğan: Milliyetçilik ayak altinda," *Hürriyet*, February 18, 2013, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/22621388.asp.
27. AK Party (2011), 1 Haziran Diyarbakir Mitingi konuşmasinin tam metni (full text of the speech in the June 1 rally), http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/1-haziran-diyarbakir-mitingi-konusmasinin-tam-metni/8230.

> All the Kurds and Turks are my brothers. . . . We turn our faces towards the same qibla [the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest place of Islam].

But many scholars have approached the employment of Islam as a means to address ethnic conflicts with suspicion and reservation. Sakallıoğlu observes that even though Turkish and Kurdish Islamist writers find a common discourse and inspiration in Islam, their perceptions of the Kurdish question and courses of action differ significantly: "Kurdish-Islamist writers tend to search for a 'space' for Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness within the framework of the suggested formula of *ummah*, the Islamic community of the faithful, while the position of the Turkish-Islamist writers leans heavily toward defending the integrity of the Turkish state rather than toward acknowledging Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness."[28] Houston remarks that both "statist" Islamists such as those associated with the Gülen community and "Turkish Islamists" want the Kurds to subordinate their Kurdish difference to "Turkish-Muslim" and "Muslim" identities, respectively.[29]

Similarly, Sarigil and Fazlioglu, and Gurses note that Kurdish Islamists—including those groups who draw on the very same textual sources as their Turkish counterparts—rely on Islamism to further Kurdish causes and think that Turkish Islamists instrumentalize the Islamic fraternity discourse to suppress Kurdish interests.[30] Yavuz and Sakallıoğlu maintain that the employment of Islamic medium in Kurdish politics results in the ethnicization of Islamic politics as much as the other way around.[31] Sarigil and Fazlioglu also find that calls for Islamic unity are received differently based on sectarian differences among Kurds. Other authors such as Kandiyoti add that, even if Islamic policies can help to bridge ethnic differences, a byproduct would be the undermining of rights and freedoms for groups such as women.[32]

A more subtle criticism by Sakallıoğlu asserts that Islamist thinking on complex ethnic-national questions lacks sufficient philosophical and historical depth and overlooks the importance of institutions and distributional conflicts:

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28. Sakallıoğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective: The Discourses of Turkish Islamist Writers," 74.

29. Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds, and the Turkish Nation State* (New York: Berg, 2003), 161, 172.

30. Zeki Sarigil and Omer Fazlioglu, "Religion and Ethnonationalism: Turkey's Kurdish Issue," *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 3 (2013), 551–71; Mehmet Gurses, "Is Islam a Cure for Ethnic Conflict? Evidence from Turkey," *Religion and Politics* 8, no. 3 (2015), 135–54.

31. Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 7, no. 3 (2001): 1–24; Sakallıoğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective," 73–89.

32. Kandiyoti, "Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Islam and Women's Rights," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2007): 503–17.

> By channeling the discussion of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism to its "roots causes" identified as Ottoman-Turkish modernization, [Islamists] shift the focus away from distribution and concentration of political power, the role of institutions and strategies of control. . . . Instead, spreading . . . European consciousness . . . is assumed to give rise to what it does everywhere else, that is, the dissipation of religious values and beliefs as the most pervasive guide to moral conduct. The precondition for nationalism [and ethnic conflicts] is then reduced to a decline in moral values.[33]

Another critique, Sami Zubaida holds that across different countries Islamists in power have poor records of managing ethnic conflicts within a framework of pluralism:

> As an opposition movement, Islamism may coincide with particular aspects of Kurdish struggles. But Islamists in power are no more attracted to democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law than their secular counterparts. They can be self-righteous in their rejection of democracy and pluralism as imperialist, Western divisive poisons. The organicist emphases of Islamist ideologies preclude pluralism, including national pluralism. Note the antagonism of Algerian Islamists to Berber national expressions. . . . [Islamism] is . . . more likely to attempt to eliminate the question in the name of Islamic identity, much as Atatürk denied Kurdish ethnic identity in favor of a national unity.[34]

Which side is right in this ongoing academic and political debate? The question is not only to what extent Islamists can transcend nationalism. From Israel to Northern Ireland to Muslim cases, it is common that religious actors can embrace nationalism as much as the secular.[35] Regardless of their level of nationalism, another question is whether Islamic actors may be readier to address ethnic-regional questions than secular actors because they have more ideational preparation for specific reforms. Hence, the following hypotheses can be put forward:

(1) Islamic elites and/or constituencies are less nationalist than their secular counterparts.
(2) Islamic elites and/or constituencies talk and deliberate on specific policies and institutional solutions such as Kurdish education and autonomy more frequently and more favorably than their secular counterparts.

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33. Sakallioğlu, "Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective," 80.
34. Sami Zubaida, "Introduction," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1991), 6–7.
35. James P. Piscatori, *Islam in A World of Nation-States* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Steve Bruce, *Politics and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003); Uri Ram, "Why Secularism Fails? Secular Nationalism and Religious Revivalism in Israel," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 21 (2008): 57–73.

A third hypothesis can also be formulated. The Islamic peace argument is based in the premise that ethnic minority identities compete with secular national identities because they are both ethnic, but not with Islamic common identities. If this is the reason why Islamic actors are not threatened by ethnic minority identities, then the relationship should be reversed with respect to religious, sectarian, and secular minorities:

(3)   Islamic actors are less open to accommodating non-Muslim minority and Muslim sectarian differences, perceived "heterodox Muslim" minorities, and perceived "un-Islamic" minorities such as gays.

Do Islamists Have More Ideational Potential to Manage Ethnic Conflict?

The empirical evidence in this section comes from three sources. The main one is a systematic content analysis of Turkish newspapers.[36] Trained graduate student coders analyzed the contents of more than forty thousand articles in printed versions of 4,850 newspaper issues for the time period from 1996 to 2004. Three Islamic newspapers (*Zaman*, *Yeni Şafak*, and *Milli Gazete*) and two secular newspapers (*Cumhuriyet* and *Milliyet*) were analyzed.[37] A supplementary fourteen hundred articles from 384 newspaper editions of *Zaman*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Milliyet*, and another secular newspaper (*Hürriyet*) were coded later for the years 2007 and 2010.[38] Coders covered the whole content of the papers except for the sports sections and advertorials. In the interest of space, we only show the findings from 2007 and 2010 whenever they added significant information to those from 1996 to 2004. In categorizing the papers into religious and secular, we went by their average views on religion and secularism and acknowledge that there is no shared ideology encompassing all of the writers in a particular paper.[39]

36. Somer, "Media Values and Democratization: What Unites and What Divides Religious-Conservative and Pro-Secular Elites?" 555–77; Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?" 511–45.
37. Ideologically and to some extent organically, *Zaman* is associated with the Islamic Gülen movement, *Yeni Şafak* with the AKP, and *Milli Gazete* with the aforementioned Erbakan's National Outlook movement. *Cumhuriyet* and *Milliyet* have leftist-nationalist and social democratic–liberal orientations, respectively.
38. This second analysis covered fewer newspapers and issues due to budgetary limitations.
39. Somer, "Media Values and Democratization," 555–77. Unless stated otherwise, all the differences between secular and religious newspaper groups and between the individual papers were found to be statisically significant at least within the 99 percent confidence interval, according to standard two-tail *t* tests.

Complementing the findings from this research, we invoke findings from Konda, a nationwide representative survey that was conducted on July 17–18, 2010, with 10,393 respondents.[40] The third source is seventeen reports commissioned by secular and Islamic political parties during the 1990s and 2000s.

Hypothesis 1: Are Islamists Less Nationalist?

Are Islamists Less Nationalist in General?

The subject of nationalism was defined prior to the content analysis as any view that fully or partially addressed the idea that Turks should unite and/or defend their identity, interests, culture, nation-state, national security, national unity, territorial integrity against domestic and external threats coming from non-Turkish actors and/or enemies. The coders first identified any articles that fully or partially addressed this idea or discussed the idea of nationalism in general. Then they coded whether the article included views that were supportive (positive), critical (negative), or neutral toward nationalism. If an article included more than one type of these normative judgments, then coders marked all that applied.

At first sight, the findings seem to support the Islamic peace thesis. In figure 1, the numbers in parentheses indicate the total numbers of coding in each category. On average, the religious newspapers contained less supportive and more critical views on nationalism than the secular papers.

Closer examination, however, reveals a different picture. Figure 2 ranks individual papers according to their support of nationalism. "S" and "R" next to the name of each paper indicate whether the paper is secular or religious, respectively. In terms of positive evaluations of nationalism, the most nationalist newspaper is secularist *Cumhuriyet*, and the next two most nationalist are Islamic *Zaman* and *Milli Gazete*.[41] The least nationalist are the Islamic *Yeni Şafak* and the secular *Milliyet*. Thus, views on nationalism differ along a spectrum that cuts across the religious–secular cleavage.[42] And, in 2007 and 2010, the secular *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* were the most critical of nationalism, although they also entailed a higher percentage of supportive views than *Zaman* and *Yeni Şafak*.

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40. Konda, *Kürt Meselesi'nde Algi ve Beklentiler* [*Perceptions and Expectations in the Kurdish Question*].

41. The difference between *Milli Gazete* and *Zaman* was significant only at the 90 percent confidence interval.

42. See Somer and Liaras, "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening: Religious and Secular Values," 152–65, for additional findings on the use of the term *separatists* (*bölücü*).
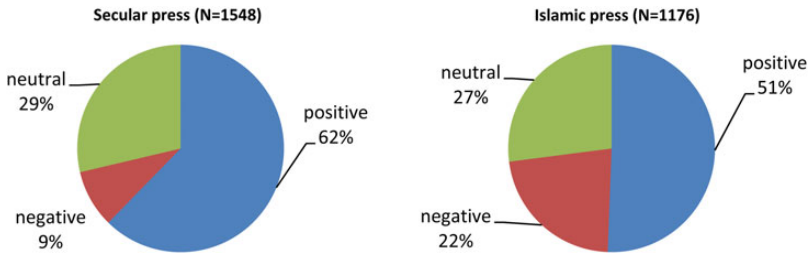
Figure 1 The normative views on nationalism in secular and Islamic press, 1996–2004.
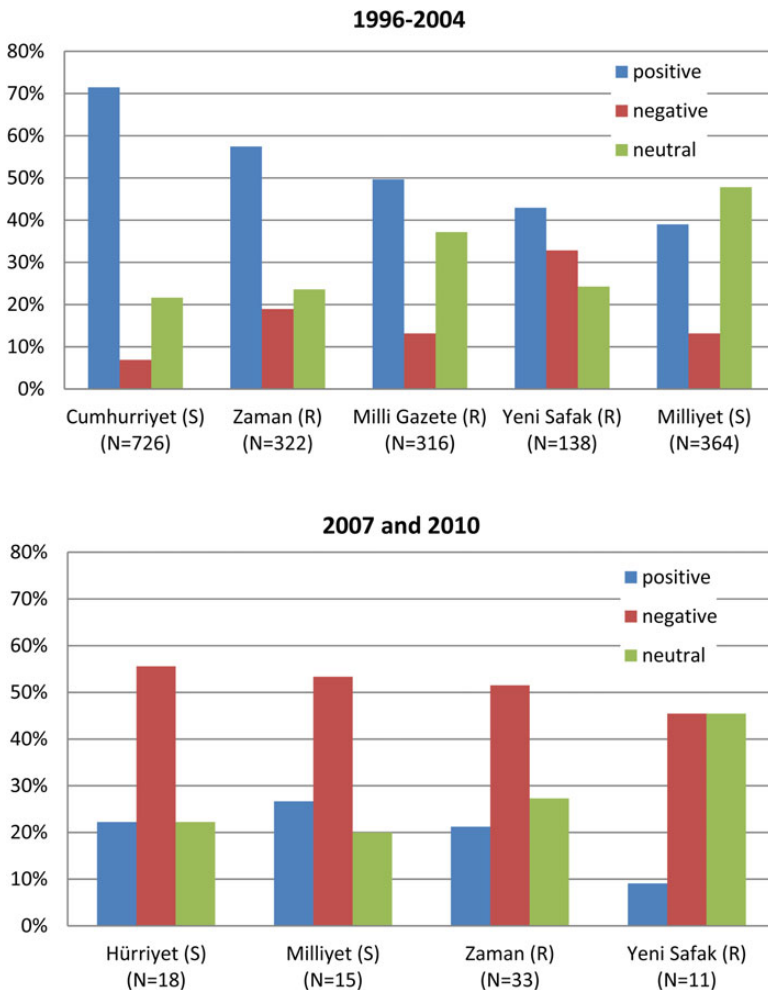
Figure 2 Normative evaluation of nationalism in individual newspapers.
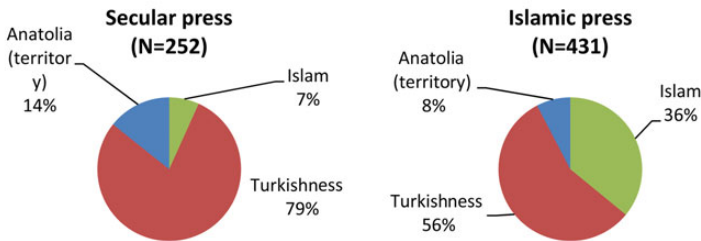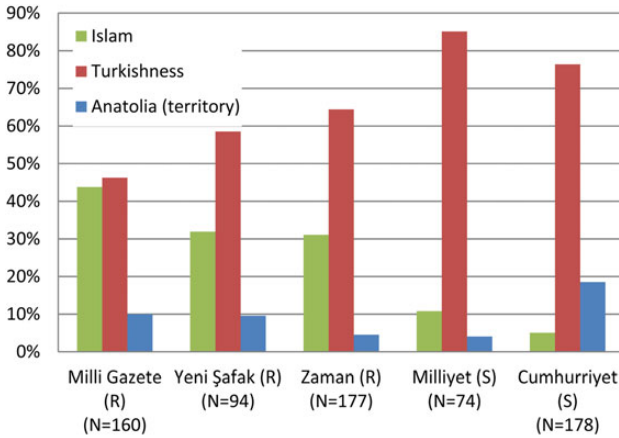
13

Figure 3 The content of national identity in secular and Islamic press, 1996 to 2004.

Are Islamists Less Turkish Nationalist in the Sense of Their Conception of National Identity?

Do Islamic actors imagine national identity in a way that enables them to be more open to ethnic-national diversity? As figure 3 shows, there is limited evidence supporting this possibility. As expected, Islamic papers put more emphasis on Islam than secular papers in defining national identity. But the difference on Turkishness is not great, especially if one leaves out *Milli Gazete*, the most Islamist among the three Islamic papers. Sixty-two percent of the references to national identity drew on Turkishness in *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman* combined, compared with 79 percent in *Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet* combined.[43]

In terms of constituency values, pro-secular CHP (Republican People's Party) voters' conception of Turkish citizenship seems to be slightly more open to ethnic diversity. According to Konda (2011), the majority of CHP voters (56.7 percent) believed that it was not

43. The difference between *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman* was statistically significant only at the 95 percent interval.
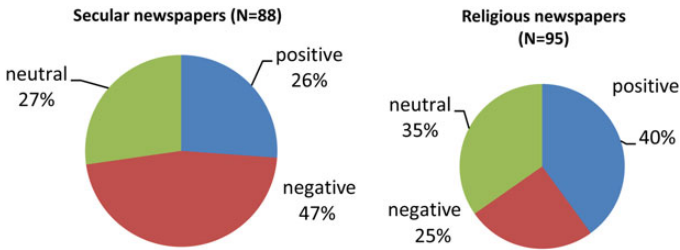
Figure 4 The right to form ethnic parties in the secular and Islamic press, 1996–2004.

necessary to be ethnically Turkish to become a citizen of Turkey. The corresponding figure was slightly lower for AKP voters.

Are Islamists Less Nationalist in the Sense of Being More Welcoming to Kurds and More Open to Kurdish Ethnic Politics?

An important barrier to finding a political solution for the Kurdish question has been the Turkish mainstream fear of ethnic politics as a divisive force and aversion to negotiating and cooperating with Kurdish parties. Ethnic politics is a constitutional crime that can cause the abolition of political parties, although legal reforms during the 2000s raised the standards of proof for doing so. Seven Kurdish parties were either shut down or dissolved themselves under threat of being banned between the 1960s and 2008. The currently main pro-Kurdish party (Peoples' Democracy Party, HDP) was established in 2012.

Hence, ideational openness to ethnic politics may help a political actor to manage the Kurdish question. This is an area where Islamic elites appear to have an advantage over their secular counterparts.[44] Figure 4 captures normative views on the right of ethnic parties to exist in Islamic and secular press.

Nationalism can also be measured indirectly via normative references to Kurds. The twenty-five-year-long war with the PKK can be expected to have fed anti-Kurdish sentiments. However, most references to Kurds were found to have a neutral tone in all newspapers. The majority were positive in *Yeni Şafak* in both periods and in *Zaman* in the second period (2007 and 2010) (figure 5).

In terms of constituency values, anti-Kurdish feelings seem to be more present among Islamic AKP's voters than among secular CHP's voters. According to Konda (2011), almost half of the AKP voters (47.8 percent) stated that they would eschew Kurdish

44. Due to the relatively low number of observations, however, the difference between the two groups of newspapers was not found to be statistically significant.
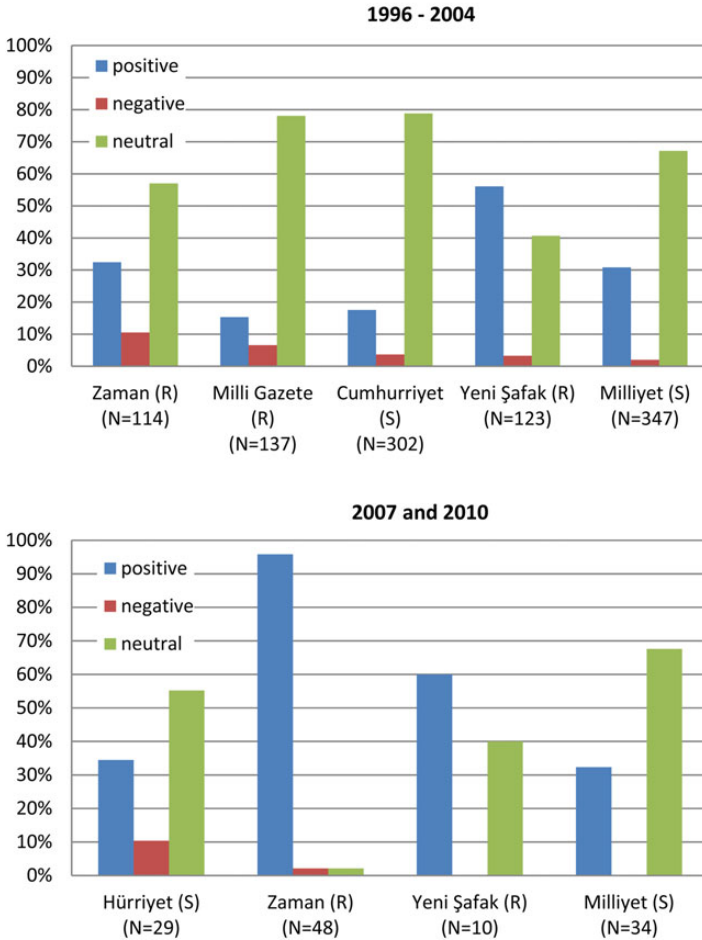
1996 - 2004

2007 and 2010

Figure 5 References to Kurds in individual newspapers.

neighbors, business partners, or spouses—even though presumably more Kurds are AKP voters than CHP voters.[45] Among CHP voters, the percentage was lower (43 percent).

Hypothesis 2: Do Islamic Actors Have More Ideational Preparation for Specific Reforms to Resolve the Kurdish Question?

Regardless of their normative predispositions toward nationalism and ethnic politics, political actors must implement specific policies

45. Demiralp, "The Odd Tango of the Islamic Right and Kurdish Left in Turkey," 287–302.
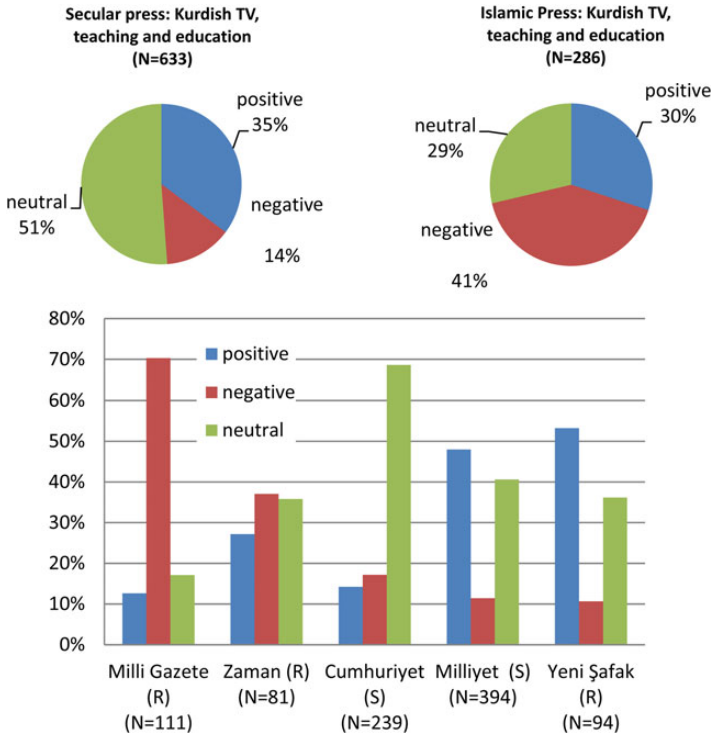
Figure 6 References on education and TV in Kurdish in the secular and Islamic press, 1996–2004.

to address Kurdish demands. Did Islamic actors discuss these specific reforms more widely and more supportively than the secular did?

Figure 6 demonstrates that, per newspaper and between 1996 and 2004, the secular papers had thrice as many references to Kurdish education and broadcasting—two major demands of the Kurdish minority—as the Islamic papers. They also discussed the subject more approvingly, although the majority of the discussion in *Yeni Şafak* was also positive. The 2007 and 2010 research included more detailed and separate codings for cultural rights such as Kurdish education and political rights such as political-administrative autonomy. Figure 7 illustrates that, although religious papers seem to be slightly more open to cultural rights, they had strikingly little discussion of political rights (N = 5).

According to Konda (2011), the pro-secular CHP's voters were more aware of, and more sympathetic to, Kurdish ethnic-cultural demands than AKP voters were. A higher percentage (58.5 percent) of CHP voters than AKP voters (52.1 percent) endorsed the idea of state
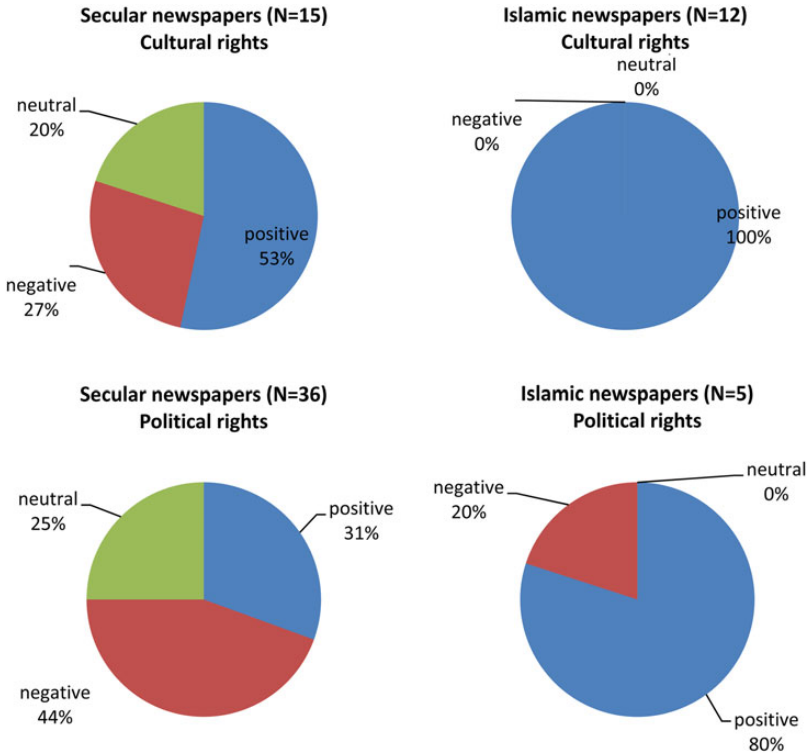
Secular newspapers (N=15)
Cultural rights

neutral
20%

positive
53%

negative
27%

Islamic newspapers (N=12)
Cultural rights

neutral
0%

negative
0%

positive
100%

Secular newspapers (N=36)
Political rights

neutral
25%

positive
31%

negative
44%

Islamic newspapers (N=5)
Political rights

negative
20%

neutral
0%

positive
80%

Figure 7 Discussion of cultural and political rights, 2007 and 2010.

support for ethnic groups. Similarly, 44.6 and 31.1 percent of the CHP voters thought that the Kurdish question resulted from restrictions on "Kurds' ability to express their own identity" and from "state discrimination against Kurds," respectively. By comparison, only 39.7 and 24.8 percent of the AKP voters concurred.

Table 1 shows that reformist reports produced by or presented to secular parties appear to have been relatively more frequent and elaborate. However, most of their reports were prepared during the 1990s; during the 2000s, they became more conservative and nationalist because of their distrust of AKP-led reforms, among other reasons.[46]

Hypothesis 3: Are Islamic Actors Less Open to Non-Muslim and Perceived "Un-Islamic" Minorities?

As figures 8 and 9 show, compared with secular elites, Islamic elites feel more threatened by non-Muslim minorities and their public

46. Sinan Ciddi, and Berk Esen, "Turkey's Republican People's Party: Politics of Opposition under a Dominant Party System," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 3 (2014): 419–41.

Table 1 Secular and Islamist party reports on the Kurdish issue

Suggestion to solve the Kurdish question	Secular political parties and actors	Islamic political parties and actors
Right to education in native language	SHP (1990, 1992) CHP (1996, 1999, 2001)	RP (1991) AKP (2010)
Right to teach Kurdish language	SHP (1990, 1992) CHP (1996, 1999)	RP (1991) Özdemir (1993) AKP (2010)
Foundation of Kurdish Institute	SHP (1992) CHP (1996, 1999)	AKP (2010)
Kurdish Broadcasting	SHP (1992)	RP (1991) Kahveci (1992) Özdemir (1993) AKP (2010)
Public names	SHP (1992)	AKP (2010)
Right to give Kurdish names to children	SHP (1992)	—
Support for further administrative (local administration) reforms	SHP (1992) CHP (1996, 1999)	AKP (2010)
Support for participatory pluralist administration	SHP (1992) CHP (1996, 1999)	—
Constitutional recognition	—	—

The data in the table are acquired from the following reports: SHP Southeast Report (1990), SHP Newroz Report (1992), CHP Tunceli Report (1996) , CHP East and Southeast Report (1999), CHP Democratization and Human Rights Report (1999), Algan Hacaloğlu Report (2000), CHP Democratization and Human Rights Report (2001), ANAP Southeast Report (1993), ANAP Democratization Declaration (1999), Kaya Toperi-Aslan Guner Report (1992), Adnan Kahveci Report (1992), Kemal Yamak Report (1993), Hikmet Ozdemir Report (1993), MCP East and Southeast Report (1991), RP Kurdish Report (1991), RP Southeast Report (1994), AKP Democratic Opening Handbook (2010). See Yayman, *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafizasi* [*Turkey's Kurdish Problem Memory*], for further references.

activism—in terms of negative views and in the case of Christian missionaries also greater attention—even if one leaves out the most militant-Islamist newspaper, *Milli Gazete*. However, the other two religious newspapers also contain more positive general views on non-Muslim minorities than the secular newspapers.

The 1996–2004 research found that, compared with secular elites, Islamic elites were considerably more suspicious of social pluralism in general, whether it resulted from religious, Muslim-sectarian, gender-based, or lifestyle differences.[47] Figure 10 shows that Islamic elites were more critical of social pluralism than the secular

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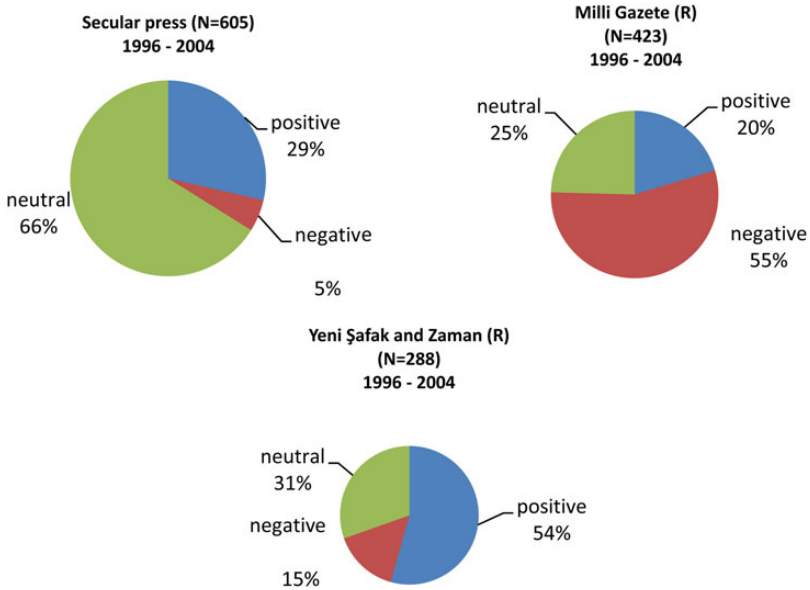47. Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize?" 511–45.

Secular press (N=605)
1996 - 2004

positive
29%

neutral
66%

negative
5%

Milli Gazete (R)
(N=423)
1996 - 2004

neutral
25%

positive
20%

negative
55%

Yeni Şafak and Zaman (R)
(N=288)
1996 - 2004

neutral
31%

negative
15%

positive
54%

Figure 8 Normative views on Christian and Jewish minorities in Islamic and secular press.

Secular press (N=7)
1996 - 2004

neutral
29%

positive
14%

negative
57%

Islamic press (N=98)
1996 - 2004

neutral
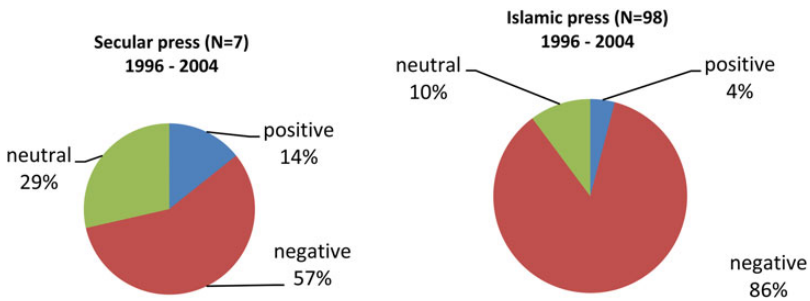10%

positive
4%

negative
86%

Figure 9 Normative views on Christian missionaries in Islamic and secular press.

elites in 2007 and 2010, but critical views had decreased for both types of press compared with 1996–2004.

These findings lend limited indirect support to the "Islamic ethnic peace" hypothesis via the Islamic elites' greater suspicion of religious, sectarian, and secular diversity (in line with hypothesis 3). But they also suggest that, even if they were successful in addressing ethnic conflicts, Islamic identity-based models would reinforce problems of nonethnic groups such as secular groups, women, and Alevis.
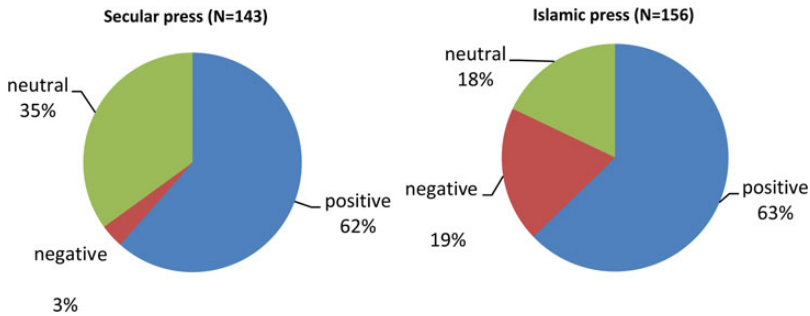
Secular press (N=143)

neutral 35%

negative 3%

positive 62%

Islamic press (N=156)

neutral 18%

negative 19%

positive 63%

Figure 10 Values on social pluralism among Islamic and secular elites, 2007 and 2010.

If the Islamic Peace Thesis is Invalid, Why Do Islamists Seem to Do More to Resolve the Kurdish Question?

Table 2 summarizes the particular reforms enacted by secular and Islamic political actors since the 1990s. Few reforms were made during the 1990s in the midst of a bloody war with the PKK. But the rather short-lived center-left and right coalition government (May 1999–November 2002) led by the secular Democratic Left Party (DSP) initiated reforms.[48] The coalition became reasonably reformist once the political environment improved after PKK leader Öcalan was captured in February 1999 and the EU recognized Turkey's candidacy for membership in December 1999. This evaluation seems warranted, especially if one takes into account the fractured nature of the government, the disastrous financial crises in 2000–01, and the strength of the nationalist military, which was suspicious of Kurdish rights. Thus, structural conditions—such as single-party governments and strong electoral mandates, the EU anchor, relative lack of violence with the PKK, and civilian government autonomy vis-à-vis the weakened military—rather than Islamic ideology may explain at least some of the reforms under the AKP.

During the AKP era, many reforms were facilitated by the EU accession process.[49] Resolving the Kurdish question was considered crucial to prove Turkey's respect for minorities, a major condition of the Copenhagen criteria for candidate countries.[50] After 2005,

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48. The DSP had been in power in a minority government since January 1999 when Öcalan was captured.

49. Ziya Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists: Political Parties and Paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online* 9, no. 3 (2009): 252.

50. European Council, *European Council in Copenhagen, June 21–22, 1993, Conclusions of the Presidency.* SN 180/1/93 REV 1; Frank Schimmelfennig, Stefan Engert, and Heiko Knobel, "Costs, Commitment and Compliance: The Impact of

Table 2 Reforms accomplished on Kurdish issue by secular and Islamist parties[a]

Reform or measure to address the conflict	Secular parties	Islamic parties
Lifting the ban on the use of Kurdish as forbidden language/nonofficial language	ANAP (1991, Law no. 2932) DSP-MHP (Nationalist Action Party)-ANAP (Motherland Party) coalition 2001: 1st harmonization package, law no. 4709 articles 9 and 10; 2002, 2nd harmonization package: article 16/5 in press law no. 5680 DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition, August 2002: 3rd harmonization package: constitutional adjustments allowing broadcasting and Kurdish in private courses	AKP (2002), extension of the Law on Foreign Language Education and Teaching to "Languages and Dialects Used Traditionally by Turkish Citizens in their Daily Lives" 2004, Legal changes allowing public broadcasting in radio and television 2009 Launch of first TV channel in Kurdish 2010 and 2013 right of electoral campaigns in Kurdish 2011 Kurdish language and literature programs at university level 2012 Kurdish courses at fifth school grade 2013 Kurdish teaching at private schools, limited defense in Kurdish at courts, allowance of letters q, w, and x on keyboards[b]
Abolition of death penalty (converting Öcalan's—and potentially other PKK members—sentence to life in prison)	August 2002: 3rd harmonization package	
Lift of prohibition of Kurdish personal names		AKP (2003)
Possibility for villages to revert their names to their original Kurdish names		AKP (2013)
Limiting possibilities for the ban of political parties	DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition (2001, 1st harmonization package, law no.4709 on freedom of thought and basic rights)	AKP (2010, constitutional change)

Cooperation with Kurdish political parties	SHP (Social Democratic People's Party)-HEP (People's Labor Party) electoral alliance (1991)[c]	
Reducing the military's powers in National Security Council	DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition 2001, 1st harmonization package: law no. 4709 on freedom of thought and basic rights: change of status	AKP (2003, 7th EU harmonization package: change of duties, meeting, and membership rules; 2004, 9th EU harmonization package: change of article 118 of constitution)
Lifting state emergency rule (OHAL) in southeast Turkey	1994–July 2002: in nine provinces, various governments; July 2002: two provinces, DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition	AKP (November 2002): Diyarbakır and Şırnak provinces
Reform of the criminal code with consideration for principles of universal human rights.		AKP (2004)
Transfer of range of crimes from State Security Courts to the Regional High Criminal Courts		AKP (2004, article no. 5109)
Anti-Terror Law		AKP (2004, amendment of Anti-Terror Law No. 3713)
Public discourse on Kurdish identity and question	Demirel/SHP-DYP coalition (1991)	AKP (2009, parliamentary and public discussion on the Kurdish problem)
Abolishment of the "Oath of Allegiance" of primary students to the Turkish nation		AKP (2013)

[a]See Gözde Yilmaz and Didem Soyaltin, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization: Promotion of Fight against Corruption and Minority Rights in Turkey," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014); 11–29; Teczür, "The Ebb and Flow of Armed Conflict in Turkey," 171–88.

[b]Q, w, and x are not part of the Turkish alphabet, but they are used in Kurdish.

[c]Murat Somer, "Why Aren't Kurds Like the Scots and the Turks Like the Brits? Moderation and Democracy in the Kurdish Question," *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (2008): 220–49; Gülistan Gürbey, "The Development of the Kurdish Nationalism Movement in Turkey," in Robert W. Olson, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 26; Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict*.

when accession negotiations formally began, the credibility of the EU weakened due to various factors on both sides.[51] But strategic considerations help to explain why the AKP continued the reform path. First, fulfilling the EU demands signaled to the AKP's critics that the Islamic government would not interrupt Turkey's Westernization, helping to safeguard the party's position vis-à-vis Western allies and investors, and domestically, vis-à-vis skeptical, secularist elites in the administration, military, media, and business, who still dominated the political system then.[52] Second, the electoral success of the AKP was based on maintaining its anti–status quo reputation.[53]

But as the EU's credibility weakened, the AKP consolidated its power, and violence resurged between the PKK and the state,[54] attention to EU reforms gradually waned. As table 2 indicates, even though the government's generally supportive attitude continued toward ethnic minority rights, few programmatic, major advancements were made targeting the Kurdish question after 2005. Instead, the focus has been "selective,"[55] targeting the electoral support for the government among Kurdish voters, while leaving out the more controversial political and constitutional reforms. Electoral shifts between Islamist and pro-Kurdish parties are possible because, among other reasons, both appeal to Kurdish voters as parties opposing urban elitism in Turkish politics.[56] Both the 2009 and 2013 openings were motivated to considerable extent by domestic and external strategic interests and expediencies, and the AKP's framing of the openings oscillated between inclusive narratives of peace and prosperity for all and exclusive narratives vilifying major Kurdish groups and opposition parties.[57]

EU Democratic Conditionality on Latvia, Slovakia and Turkey," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 41, no. 3 (2003): 496.
51. Yilmaz and Soyaltin, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization," 11–29; Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists," 253, 257; Neill Nugent, "The EU's Response to Turkey's Membership Application: Not Just a Weighing of Costs and Benefits," *Journal of European Integration* 29, no. 4 (2007): 481–502.
52. Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists," 252–53.
53. Ibid., 253; Yilmaz and Soyaltin, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization."
54. Öniş, "Conservative Globalists versus Defensive Nationalists," 254, 256; Yildiz, *EU Conditionality and Minority Rights: A Comparative Study on Romania and Turkey* (Master Thesis: Uppsala University, 2011), 44.
55. Yilmaz and Soyaltin, "Zooming into the 'Domestic' in Europeanization," 11–29.
56. Demiralp, "The Odd Tango of the Islamic Right and Kurdish Left in Turkey," 287–302.
57. Johanna Nykänen, "Identity, Narrative and Frames: Assessing Turkey's Kurdish Initiatives," *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 2 (2013): 85–101.
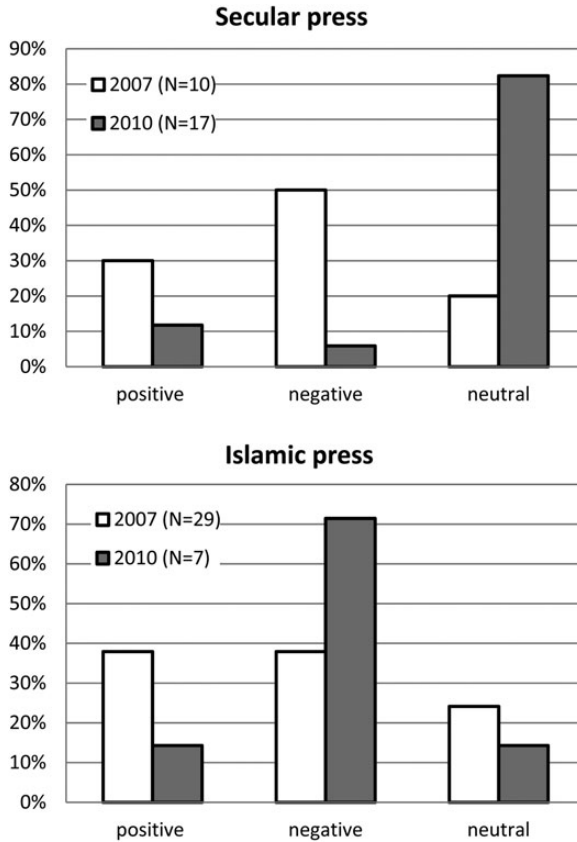
Secular press

Islamic press

Figure 11 EU support in secular and Islamic newspapers, 2007 and 2010.

Public support for EU membership declined among both support-ers and skeptics of the AKP government.[58] Findings of the content analysis from 2007 and 2010 are consistent with these observations. Figure 11 shows that positive evaluations of the EU decreased in both types of the press, although they were slightly more frequent in the Islamic press. But negative evaluations of the EU almost doubled in the Islamic papers, while they dropped significantly in the secular papers.

These findings suggest that political opportunities and strategic considerations contributed to the support for the EU and for the EU-linked reforms among Islamic actors.

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58. Support for EU membership and trust in the government in Turkey (Eurobar-ometer surveys 2004 to 2011). On the interaction of partisanship, religiosity, and EU support, also see Ali Çarkoğlu, "Who Wants Full Membership? Characteristics of Turkish Public Support for EU Membership," *Turkish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003): 171–94.

Conclusions

As ethnic and sectarian wars involve Islamist contenders for power from Yemen to Libya to Nigeria and international military campaigns are waged against the radical Islamist ISIS in Syria and Iraq, examining the relationship between Islamism and ethnic divisions is as timely as ever. In Turkey, the PKK leader Öcalan stressed that Turks and Kurds had lived side by side under the "banner of Islam" for thousand years before the proliferation of "mini nation states" among Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic peoples under Western imperialism.[59] Then–Prime Minister Erdoğan highlighted Turkey's Islamic-Ottoman heritage and the Muslim brotherhood of Turks and Kurds. Thus, both leaders were to differing degrees invoking Islamic values as a basis for peace.

These statements echo expectations prevailing among many scholars as well as Muslim social-political actors. But the Islamic peace thesis is rarely put to the test of dispassionate theoretical and empirical analysis. The evidence we offer in this article indicates that the Islamic AKP's activism in addressing the Kurdish question is insufficient to support the Islamic peace thesis. While relatively more open to ethnic politics and the public expression of ethnicity than their secular counterparts, Turkish Islamic actors are not necessarily less nationalist. They have less ideational preparation for specific policies and reforms to address ethnic grievances. They are also considerably more suspicious of social pluralism in general, sectarian differences, and non-Muslim and "un-Islamic" diversity. These findings are consistent with earlier research indicating that Islamic elites—who embrace many creeds of democracy—remain highly critical of secular democracy. They prefer more religious involvement in both social and state affairs and often oppose the pursuit of full equality for various groups such as women and Muslim minorities.[60] This may also undermine their ability to manage ethnic diversity because, many in Western democracies may see such social and political norms about equality as the normative basis of the political-institutional frameworks within which modern polities address ethnic conflicts more or less successfully.

Thus, rather than ideological and ideational superiority, structural factors such as the reduction of the military tutelage and electoral strategies may better explain the AKP's Kurdish peace initiatives.[61]

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59. Öcalan's statement reflected an attempt to appeal to both religious and secular sensitivities as he also announced that he embraced Western values of enlightenment, equality, freedom, and democracy.

60. Somer, "Does It Take Democrats to Democratize," 511–45.

61. Somer and Liaras, "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening: Religious and Secular Values," 152–65.

Similarly, the root cause of the Kurdish question may not necessarily be republicanism, secularism, or Islamism per se. While rejecting secular nationalism and the idea that loyalty to nation should supersede all other loyalties, Islamism does not necessarily eliminate hierarchy between different identities and loyalties. Arguably, it merely substitutes the supremacy of Islam—or nationhood based in Islam—for the supremacy of secular nation. Hence, according to one sympathetic writer, there would be "some constraints on the freedom of ethnic minorities in an Islamic state." Their freedoms should not "contradict with the basic principles of religion," must serve "public interest," and "ethnicity cannot be used for ethnic competition that potentially causes fragmentation and discrimination."[62] These constraints are remarkably similar to the constraints imposed by secular nationalists in the name of national unity, harmony, and interest. Simple replacement of secular nation with religion does not provide the principles and institutions that would prevent majoritarian practices and successfully accommodate minority interests.

We are not arguing that Islamic actors cannot resolve the Kurdish question or other ethnic-regional problems. We are merely maintaining that the ability to successfully manage ethnic diversity depends on structural opportunities, normative and ideational preparation for concrete solutions, and political ability and willingness to implement these recipes. Islamic as well as secular actors can resolve ethnic conflicts if they meet these conditions.

Hence, the key steps, which societies should take in order to successfully address ethnic minority problems, involve choices regarding politics and institutions, not necessarily choices between religion and secularism and between religious and secular ideologies. Neither secular nor religious identities automatically eliminate ethnic-regional conflicts of interest. Rather than secular or religious ideologies per se, the root causes of ethnic-regional conflicts lie in majoritarian and authoritarian political decisions, institutions and values. They sacrifice minority interests for majority interests. And even with political will to cherish difference, there is often a lack of ideas and institutional solutions to effectively accommodate ethnic-regional differences.

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62. Ataman, "Islamic Perspective on Ethnicity and Nationalism," 89–102.