

# **Democratization, Clashing Narratives, and ‘Twin Tolerations’ between Islamic-Conservative and Pro-Secular Actors**

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## **Introduction**

The three years period, which began in 2007 with the controversies preceding the election of Turkey’s eleventh president Abdullah Gül, was critical for Turkish democracy. During these years, some examples of the tensions and intrigues in Turkish politics have included massive pro-secular and anti-government rallies, an online military ultimatum to the democratically elected government rooted in (former) Islamist parties, a case heard at the Constitutional Court to outlaw the governing party for ‘anti-secularism’, fierce battles in the domestic and international media in which the adversaries have presented themselves as the defenders of democracy or of secularism, calls by the Prime Minister to boycott the country’s largest, mainly pro-secular media group, and arrests of former military officers along with pro-secular intellectuals on various charges including conspiracy to topple the government.

These social and political crises and frictions represent a seeming paradox because, in many ways, Turkish democracy made major advances during the last decade. During the late 1990s reformist Turkish Islamists were transformed into a ‘conservative-democratic’ force represented by the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP, AKP). This enabled the AKP to gain the support of major segments of the secular intelligentsia in the name of democratic reforms and EU membership.<sup>2</sup> Political stability, economic growth, and legal-institutional reforms since 2001 have combined to considerably expand the autonomy of civilian political actors from the military-dominated guardian state that has stifled democratization, in the name of democracy, since 1960 (Heper and Keyman 1998, Cizre 2004, Özbudun, 2007). For example, the AKP government publicly denounced the online military ultimatum in 2007, and, former military officers have been prosecuted by civilian courts for conspiracy against the government, both for the first time in the country’s history. The legal-institutional reforms have strengthened the ground for military accountability as well as a more transparent and accountable government. They have also increased the *de facto* pluralism of the socioeconomic and political space, if not exactly the normative acceptance of it by the actors themselves. Accession talks with the EU started in 2005.

Yet, these steps of democratization seem to have divided the social and political actors, rather than unite them behind more reforms that would further strengthen democratic institutions and secure the rule of law. In particular, the level of political polarization between the self-anointed protectors of secularism on one hand, and the self-anointed defenders of democracy on the other hand – within the realms of

politics, bureaucracy, and civil society –seems to have intensified, not diminished. The pro-secular actors turned suspicious of the reforms led by the government, while the government lost its reformist zeal and seemed to resort to ‘illiberal’ means in order to pacify the opposition and consolidate its power. Furthermore, the discursive clashes between the mutually distrusting pro-secular and religious-conservative actors have often taken the form of a seeming clash between secularism and democracy as competing values. These developments undermine the development and, worse, stability of pluralistic democracy.

Rather than being seen as a paradox, this increased level of polarization in Turkish politics may actually be viewed as an expected outcome of the fact that democratic development is not necessarily linear (Carothers 2002). Democratization decreases the level of certainty about the future precisely because democracies produce ‘uncertain outcomes’ (Przeworski 1988). By increasing the possibility that opponents may come to power and have the power to make changes in laws and policies, the process of democratization may thus increase the sense of insecurity for many and thus induce polarization. Indeed, the coming to power of the AKP and the subsequent reforms were products of democratization and increased the autonomy of the civilian political actors and the opportunities available to civilian political actors to transform the state and the society.

However, identifying enhanced polarization as a possible product of democratization does not imply that scholars do not need to examine the particular causal mechanisms that drive the sense of uncertainty in each case. On the contrary, this is the only way that scholars can produce concrete policy suggestions as to how actors can bridge these divisions so that the democratization process may continue.

A variety of domestic and international, political and socio-economic causal mechanisms drive the religious/secular polarization in Turkey today. In particular, the weakness of civilian-political checks and balances in the system needs more theorization, in addition to the long-standing deficit of Turkish democracy vis-à-vis military intervention in politics (Somers 2007a). A full examination of these mechanisms is beyond the scope of this essay, however. Rather, the focus will be on examining how clashing extreme narratives inform many religious-conservative and pro-secular actors’ perceived interests, increase their perception of zero-sum interests, and, ultimately, undermine their democratic cooperation.<sup>3</sup> These narratives regard issues such as secularism and democracy, the legacy of Turkish modernization, and the country’s identity in the world. The essay will also discuss whether or not there may be any room for the reconciliation of these narratives in the future.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Current Religious-Secular Divide**

A religious/secular divide, or, divisions between secular and Islamic visions of modernization, have marked Turkish politics and society since at least the 1920s and 1930s when modern Turkey was established through a series of secularizing and westernizing cultural and institutional reforms (Mardin 1973 and 2003, Berkes 1998,

Karpat 2001, Tunaya, 2007). During this period, liberal, Islamic-conservative and Islamist actors opposed radical transformations such as the abolition of the Caliphate and religious law.

Two differences distinguish the current rift from the earlier ones. First, the levels of legal-political and economic development and external support (insofar as the EU integration process continues) are significantly higher than before. Second, the current developments are taking place under the government of a political party founded by former Islamists. The latter used to be viewed as an anti-systemic, anti-democratic political force but went through a discursive and ideological transformation in the late 1990s. The current process is also occurring in an environment where Islamic-conservative actors in government, politics, economics, and the rest of civil society have gained newly enhanced self-confidence and self-assertion. In fact, this may be called Turkey's 'new Muslim pluralism' (Sommer and Tol 2009). Conversely, pro-secular actors are less sure of their dominance, not only in a political and socioeconomic sense, but also in terms of the dominance of the pro-secular 'master narratives' as the dominant narratives in state and society.<sup>5</sup> The results of these changes are highly visible in Turkish politics, as a brief account taken from some principle events over the last couple of years will illustrate.

In April 2007, the ruling AKP nominated its number two figure, the then Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gül for President. The decision faced strong opposition from pro-secular state and non-state actors, partly because Gül's earlier career in Islamist political parties and partly because his wife wore the Islamic headscarf that the pro-secular actors view as a symbol of opposition to secularism.<sup>6</sup> Along an online ultimatum from the military followed, hundreds of thousands attended a series of 'republican' mass rallies 'to uphold secularism (*laiklik*).' The government called for early elections which it won in a landslide victory and duly elected Gül President.<sup>7</sup> In a conciliatory speech following his electoral victory, Prime Minister Erdoğan pledged that his government would embrace all Turkish citizens, secular or religious.

Soon afterwards, however, the party amended the constitution (with the support of two other parties) so as to lift the restrictions on the Islamic headscarf in universities. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (RPP or CHP) took recourse to the Constitutional Court, where the amendment was annulled for being in violation of the principle of secularism, as enshrined in the constitution. The chief public prosecutor charged the party with being 'a center of anti-secular activities' and called for its abolition. In July 2008, the Constitutional Court decided not to ban the party - by a margin of one vote - but issued a warning and financial penalty because some of the party members' activities and statements were viewed as in contravention of the secularism principle.

Along with the unrelated problems in Turkey's EU relations, this political polarization contributed to the slowdown of the legal-political reforms. Although it had supported numerous constitutional reforms during the past decade, the CHP now declined to back the AKP's already waning efforts.<sup>8</sup> The 2008 report of the EU Parliament noted

a third year of weakened reforms, following a period of major reforms that had improved Turkey's freedom rating from 9 in 2000 to 6 in 2005.<sup>9</sup>

The antagonisms between the political parties ran alongside polarization among the intelligentsia. Fierce 'media battles' occurred between the supporters of the government and its skeptics, suspicious of what they saw as a hidden Islamist agenda. PM Erdoğan called his supporters to boycott the pro-secular Doğan media group soon after its newspapers published controversial reports linking the government to a Turkish-Islamic charity organization convicted of embezzlement in Germany. Soon thereafter, the Ministry of Finance charged the Doğan group with tax fraud and a penalty of over 500 million USD.<sup>10</sup>

These battles divided the public support for crucial initiatives toward democratization, as revealed by the so-called 'Ergenekon' investigation and cases against the unlawful elements within the state apparatus, in particular the security forces.<sup>11</sup> Pro-secular political and civil society actors such as the CHP and pro-secular business and labor associations had supported similar initiatives against Turkey's so-called 'deep state' in 1996-7.<sup>12</sup> This time, however, they were divided as some feared that the government might use these initiatives to pacify the pro-secular opposition. Some regarded the Ergenekon investigations as revenge on the part of the government for the attempt to ban the AKP or as a deliberate attempt to weaken the pro-secular army and other pro-secular actors as part of a long-term strategy to wrest the state away from its founding principles.<sup>13</sup>

A sure sign that democratization is the victim of the religious/secular confrontation is the deterioration in the level of media freedom.<sup>14</sup> According to one rights watchdog, the number of 'journalists, writers, politicians and children' prosecuted for thought-related 'crimes' doubled from 254 in 2007 to 435 in 2008 (Bianet 2008). Although many of these prosecutions ended with acquittals, they severely limited a free environment for thought and expression. The Turkish publisher of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* was among those prosecuted, alongside a novelist charged with insulting religious feelings.<sup>15</sup> While the government did not necessarily initiate these cases, - many were opened by radical religious or nationalist groups - it did not denounce them either, or take concrete steps to protect freedom of thought.

When the popular science magazine of the governmental Foundation for Scientific and Technological Research cancelled an issue on Darwin commemorating the bicentenary of his birth, it was seen by many pro-secular actors as just another example of creeping Islamization.<sup>16</sup> In turn, religious-conservative actors have launched public debates on the issues of science, religion, and creationism, charging 'positivist secularism' with hostility against religion. They have also condemned a widely publicized qualitative study documenting secular individuals' experiences of religious-conservative pressures.<sup>17</sup> The study was critical of religious communities' growing clout in society and politics (Toprak et al 2008). While the AKP government truculently dismisses the existence of any 'Islamization,' the perception is shared by major segments of society. A reported 32.6 percent of the people questioned in a

survey believed there to have been an increase in the number of people desiring a Shari'a-based religious state and social system in the last 10-15 years (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006).<sup>18</sup> Equally, it should be noted, many pro-secular actors tend to dismiss any research that documents religious individuals' experiences of exclusion in areas such as education, government, and corporate world (Özdalga 2003, Bayramoğlu 2006). This tendency to dismiss information that discredits one's own version of social-political reality, prevalent among both types of actors, can be seen as both cause and product of social-political polarization.

### **Values and Turkish Democratization**

The current troubles of Turkish democracy have important aspects that revolve around struggles between secular and religious elites for material interests such as power, status, and wealth. A newly emergent religious-conservative 'counter-elite' has for some time now been challenging the power of the pro-secular elites within the state, business, and the intelligentsia (Heper 1997, Göle 1997a). However, the division cannot be reduced to a simple struggle for power or wealth. A thorough examination of the public discussions taking place shows clearly that it has a major ideological dimension.<sup>19</sup> The religious/secular divide is simultaneously a cleavage of competing narratives which reflect partly conflicting values and beliefs in regard to questions such as religion's role in state and society, social pluralism and women's rights, the nature and desirability of an ideal model of modernization, and the country's identity in the world.

The normative conflicts generated by the oppositional narratives held by religious and pro-secular actors turn distributional and other conflicts into zero-sum cultural divisions difficult to mediate for democratic institutions. They convert material conflicts into conflicts that look like conflicts of identity. Even a nation-wide economic crisis may be seen by some elites as an opportunity to displace their rival elites.<sup>20</sup> The conflicts thus undermine the emergence of social and political consensus over reforms that would further strengthen democracy. Thus, the quality and strengthening of democracy may require some degree of reconciliation between conflicting narratives, not only the resolution of distributional conflicts and cooperation based on material interests.

Current research and political analyses insufficiently capture the complexity of the division. Part of the research focuses on the social and ideological transformation of Islamic movements in Turkey and successfully illustrates their changing and modernizing nature. This body of work, however, tends to view all indigenous movements 'vernacularizing modernity' as necessarily or inevitably contributing to democracy (Göle 1997b, Yavuz 2003, Özdalga, 2006). Journalistic accounts are also inclined to treat economic modernization as equivalent to democratization, and tend to reduce the politics of religious-secular divide to a class struggle over distribution.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, far from reflecting primarily class-based distributional interests, Islamist political parties have been argued to bring together cross-class coalitions comprising groups

normally expected to have conflicting distributional interests (Öniş 1997). It is true that pro-secular sensitivities are positively correlated with wealth, urban background, and education, while religiosity is negatively so (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006, Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2007). However, unless the class and secular-religious cleavages are cumulative, i.e. the secular-religious cleavage more or less overlaps with socio-economic splits along the lines of rich/poor, urban/rural cleavages, or well-educated/poorly educated, then one cannot be reduced to the other. Nor can one overlook the fact that the contending parties do, in fact, argue mostly about values rather than about money and status. To offer an analogy, most ethnic conflicts, the Irish conflict for example, have a significant social class dimension, but this does not imply that we can ignore ethnic identity in explaining them.

The contingent nature of democratization should not be ignored and it should not be assumed that mere adaptation to political and economic opportunities would gradually and automatically give rise to democratization through a concomitant ideological evolution. In fact, while these opportunities provide an important potential for democratization, elite divisions and ideological conflicts can nevertheless hinder democratic consolidation.

In turn, studies that problematize democratic consolidation and elite divisions focus on the cleavage between Turkey's strong state elite on one hand, and the political elite and social-political movements on the other (Heper and Keyman 1998, Özbudun 2000). In the 2000s, this categorization is less adequate. The religious/secular divide cuts across the other divisions. Former Islamists and religious conservatives have now for example become part of the state and political elite (and wealthy, urban and highly educated). There is a need for new categorizations (Somer 2007b, Öniş 2009).

### **Pro-secular and Religious Narratives**

Through a comprehensive examination of the pro-secular and religious media contents and the political actors' rhetoric over the years, as well as interviews with social and political actors, one can discern that extreme versions of two oppositional narratives underlie the political fissures.<sup>22</sup> While a systematic conceptualization of these narratives is not possible here, a brief discussion may be helpful. Three components of these narratives will be considered here with a view to inform the discussion ahead: secularism and democracy, the legacy of secular Turkish modernization, and to a lesser extent, the issue of the country's identity in the world.

The first, pro-secular narrative can be called the *republican narrative* which until recently could claim to be the 'master narrative,' at least on behalf of the state and the mainstream elites. With respect to the three components above, it can be summarized as follows. (1) Secularism is necessary for democracy *and* modernization, (1') Islam-inspired ideologies such as Islamism are an impediment to modernization and democracy (2) Turkey's secular modernization made democracy possible through political, economic, *and* social-cultural development, and (3) Turkey's pro-western and pro-EU orientation is incompatible with its growing political and socio-economic linkages to Muslim countries in general and to Middle Eastern countries in particular.

These are viewed as mutually exclusive goals which cannot be sustained simultaneously in the long run.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to (2) above, religious actors have long claimed that Turkish secular modernization did not in fact translate into socioeconomic development, especially in the ‘periphery,’ i.e., outside the major urban centers such as Istanbul and Ankara and especially in rural areas. A second claim has more emotive power because it pertains to people’s private identities. Religious actors have maintained that secular modernization has alienated Turks from their history and tradition and led to an ethical deficit, or a deficit of values, in people’s private and social lives. This issue was recently raised also by Şerif Mardin when he seemed to refer to a normative and aesthetic deficit in the republican ideology, maintaining that the ‘republican teachings’ entailed insufficient efforts to produce new collective values about ‘the good and the beautiful,’ which weakened ‘the republic’s teacher and school ‘vis-à-vis’ the imam and the mosque.’<sup>24</sup> Prime Minister Erdoğan seemed to agree when he argued that ‘we adopted the West’s immoralities in conflict with our own values, rather than its science.’<sup>25</sup>

With respect to (3) above, religious actors have maintained that Turkey should embrace its Ottoman past more and its potential roles in the Muslim world, especially with its Middle Eastern ‘near abroad.’ Economically, this is argued to be of benefit to Turkey’s development by attracting capital from the Gulf region (as an alternative to western finance). Politically, religious actors have emphasized the leadership roles that Turkey can play by drawing on its relatively developed economy and government, Ottoman legacy, cultural links with the Muslim world, and strategic geography.

With respect to (1) and (1’), religious actors long criticized Turkish secularism of being ‘anti-religious’ and ‘anti-democratic.’ In the 1980s and 1990s, liberal Turkish intellectuals mainly of secular orientation endorsed secularism’s importance for democracy but critiqued the authoritarian or undemocratic aspects of Turkish secularism. Such aspects include for example government involvement in religious affairs that hinders the government’s impartiality vis-à-vis different religions and different interpretations of Islam, the understanding of secularism as a lifestyle, and restrictions on the Islamic headscarf and religious education at private schools (Erdoğan 1990). This critique was also adopted by Islamist and Islamic-conservative actors who added that religious versions of ‘multiple modernities’ were possible.

One also observes, however, the rejection of authoritarian secularism and the defense of ‘democratic secularism’ is often taken a stage further. It is transformed into an argument contradictory of (1), that ‘secularism is *unnecessary* for democracy.’<sup>26</sup> In the religious-conservative media, the overwhelming majority of the discussions with a content related to secularism are focused on the problems caused by Turkish secularism. In the religious newspapers content analyzed, the argument that ‘there can be democracy without secularism’ was supported 14 times in the context of a discussion on liberal democracy; and 50 times in the context of a discussion of

secularism. Secularism in general was discussed 290 times with negative terms such as prohibitionist (*yasakçı*), despot (*zorba*), ideological laicism, meddling (*müdahaleci*), and enemy of Islam (*İslam düşmanı*). There also was strong support for the idea that ‘religion should be more influential in social affairs.’ (Somer, forthcoming 2010 and 2011).

### **Twin Tolerations, Secularism, and Democratization**

Stepan (2000 and 2005) observes that, first, many states with secular, or pro-secular, regimes are not democracies, and, second, advanced democracies have a variety of different institutional arrangements to organize the relations between state and religion (i.e. these arrangements do not fit a simple and narrow definition of secularism in the sense of a strict separation of state and religion). In fact, a strict separation of state and religion as in the case of the US is exceptional among democracies, and the more developed democracies in fact have more ‘state involvement in religion’ (Fox and Sandler 2005, Fox, 2008). Stepan thus concludes that, first, secularism is not necessary for democracy, and, second, what enables democracy is not the separation of state and religion but the emergence of a ‘twin tolerations’ between political institutions on one hand, and religious authorities on the other.

Stepan defines twin tolerations in terms of three freedoms, namely, (i) the freedom of elected governments from any ‘constitutionally privileged’ influence that religious institutions may have on them, (ii) complete freedom of worship, and (iii) the freedom of the pious to express their values in both civil society and politics unless they impinge on other people’s liberties. Hence, he maintains that democratization requires simultaneous adjustment from both the state and religious actors. They should learn to share the public domain through constant ‘construction and reconstruction’ of the boundaries between the state and religion.

I will not concern myself here with the question of whether or not Stepan is right in his claim that democracy and secularism are unrelated principles. Suffice it to say here that cross-country evidence shows that a strict separation of state and religious is unnecessary for democracy *per se*, i.e. for the transition from autocracy to an elected system of political leadership. But the same evidence also suggests that a broad notion of secularism may well be a necessary ingredient for a country to take the next step and develop into an advanced, pluralistic democracy. Almost all countries considered to be consolidated democracies seem also to be secular in a broad sense, i.e. in terms of a high degree of practical state *autonomy* from religion, coupled with freedom of religion and conscience in general. There is also strong cross-country evidence pointing to strong correlation between socio-economic development coupled with egalitarian democratic institutions and the spread of pro-secular values such as individual freedoms and autonomy (Norris and Inglehart 2005). Thus, some notion of secularism supported by twin tolerations may be a necessary corollary of successful democratic development (Somer 2007a). Indeed, the three conditions that characterize Stepan’s twin tolerations may be interpreted as pointing to such a democratic notion of secularism.<sup>27</sup>

The value of Stepan's model for the argument here is that he seems to propose a mechanism, the emergence of twin tolerations, through which the relations between state and religion can be configured in a way that is compatible with pluralistic democracy. Accordingly, successful democratization may not necessarily depend on *what* exactly the state-religion relationship is - although, as argued, some broad notion of secularism seems to be necessary - but, rather, it on *how* the state-religion relationship is determined, i.e. whether or not it is established democratically, through the promotion of twin tolerations.

From this perspective, the key question for the success of Turkey's continued democratization is whether or not it can produce the emergence of twin tolerations between state and religion on one hand, and between the pro-secular and religious-conservative social-political actors on the other hand. As I will consider further below, Turkey's laicist model of secularism involves the state's control of religion through heavy regulation, and support, of religious institutions and activities. Both liberal and religious-conservative actors in Turkey demand that this model be reformed to reduce the state's involvement in religious affairs. This is necessary to make Turkish laicism compatible with a more pluralistic democracy in which religious actors enjoy more freedoms, the state is more neutral vis-à-vis different religions and religious interpretations, and the state's role is shifted from controlling public religion to ensuring that religious liberties do not impinge upon other liberties such as secular freedoms of expression (as implied by Stepan's third freedom above). In light of the discussion here, it can be argued that the success of such reforms would not simply depend on the extent to which they reduce the state's involvement in religion, on quite *what* the future role of the state in religion would be. Rather, the key question is *how* the reforms are to be put in place, through which social and political processes are the state-religion relationship and religion's proper public role to be determined.

The gist of Stepan's argument seems to be that secular and democratic institutions should emerge through processes of cooperation, contestation, and compromise between religious and secular actors, rather than through authoritarian power-yielding in the name of rigid definitions of secularism or of hegemony-seeking notions of religious-conservative identity or morality. Applying this notion to the Turkish case, the republican and religious-conservative narratives become crucial because they shape the actors' perceptions of interest and, thus, the possibility of cooperation and compromise.

During the course of the present decade, many liberal, pro-secular intellectuals, writers and academics have 'cooperated' with religious-conservative actors to promote a more democratic version of secularism, i.e. one that is more amenable to the emergence of twin tolerations. Appreciating the justice in many religious-conservative claims, they have supported a relaxation of the restrictions on religious expressions. Arguably, this has been a positive development from the point of view of twin tolerations.

However, such cooperation is much less conceivable if, for example, religious-conservative actors argue that secularism is not necessary for democracy. Floating the idea of democracy without secularism would raise the prospect of ‘Islamic democracy’, in the sense of a clerical democracy such as has been developed, however imperfectly, in Iran, or in the sense of an ‘illiberal’ democracy in which religious-conservative groups employ social and political pressures to homogenize society and the state fails to protect individual and minority freedoms. This would threaten the fundamental interests of pro-secular actors, such as the freedom of (secular) thought and expression. Similarly, religious actors would not cooperate for a rigid version of secularism that disregards their demands for more visibility and freedoms in public.

### **Turkish Modernization Revisited**

Could the narratives informing the pro-secular and religious-actors be reconciled so that cooperation between the two becomes more likely, or are these narratives just too different for this? What are the prospects of social and political actors with an interest in democratization producing more positive-sum versions of their narratives, versions that have more potential to produce twin tolerations? While the answer to this question depends on numerous factors outside the scope here, some limited projections can be made. With respect to the clashing claims of the two narratives regarding secularism (1 and 1’), the discussion above suggested that narratives which acknowledge the importance of secularism for democracy but envision less state-dominant and more democratic versions of secularism may be one way to reconcile the two and encourage cooperation between religious-conservative and liberal pro-secular actors — they have helped in the past. Thus, the focus in the rest of this section will be on (2), and, to a lesser extent, on (3).

#### *Turkish Modernization and Religion*

The more extreme claims of the religious-conservative and the republican narratives, i.e. that Turkey’s secular modernization was anti-religious and that all Islamic worldviews are inherently opposed to modernization and secularization, are hard to reconcile. However, a dispassionate reading of the historical record does not corroborate either of these extreme claims — which suggests that there may be room for the emergence of more ‘balanced’ narratives.

Republican Turkish secularism resulted from a modernization project that was at the same time both an extension of and a radical break with Ottoman modernization (Shaw 1977, Ahmad 1993, Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997, Mardin, 2005). Religion had been a crucial element shaping the organization of the Ottoman state and the multi-confessional Ottoman society. However, Turkish *Islamism* emerged as a possible recipe to reverse the Empire’s long decline by employing an Islam-inspired version of modernization (parallel to the emergence of Islamism in places like India), as an alternative to the ideologies that were also emergent at that time, such as constitutional monarchism, Turkish nationalism, and, to a lesser extent, liberal cosmopolitanism (Karpat 2001; Hanioglu 2008). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sultan

Abdülhamid II also upheld Islamism as a means to depersonalize state authority and to enhance the state's legitimacy and image among the Muslims worldwide. This occurred especially after *Ottomanism* failed to become popular among the empire's Christian peoples and became mainly associated with Muslim Ottomans.

But the Ottoman state was not a theocracy, and Islamists did not pursue a theocracy either. The state was in control of religion as much as religion was in control of the state. Especially, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century on, the Ottomans made major efforts to become a modern and secularizing European state. They tried to centralize the state, modernize the army and took steps to establish a constitutional regime alongside the Sultanate that combined religious and temporal authority in the personage of the Sultan. They formed secular schools alongside religious schools, and codified the Shari'a as a way to modernize the traditional-religious legal system. Many religious-legal scholars - *ulama* - did not oppose the adoption of either social-technological innovations, like the printing press, or legal, such as aspects of European law selected with a view to support commercial modernization (Kuran, 2004). The republican reforms to a considerable extent built on these Ottoman attempts at modernization, continuing many Ottoman institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Foundations.

The republican reforms resulted from the belief prevalent among some reformist elites that Ottoman modernization was partial and therefore ineffective, and were designed to surpass it and to avert the return of the Ottoman system. Under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk, republican reforms during the 1920s and 1930s constituted a complete overhaul of the traditional religious institutions such as the Islamic schools, orders, and foundations (*vaqfs*). Many were substituted by secular alternatives (e.g. the secular schools and legal system). Others were replaced by supposedly pro-secular yet religious institutions that were strictly regulated by state agencies, which thus led to a fusion of secular state and religion. An example is the colossal Directorate of Religious Affairs, which, among other things, pays the salaries of all the imams and oversees all the mosques in the country.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, these reforms were aimed at controlling religion, especially the kind of Islam that has a claim to organize public life. But, apart from the more radical periods during the 1920s and 1930s, it is hard to interpret the laic system that emerged as 'anti-religious' in the sense of being comparable to the anti-religious secular models in countries like China. True, the Constitution prohibits any political actor from trying to institute religious principles as a basis of the state's workings;<sup>29</sup> the legal principle of gender equality and the restrictions on Islamic headscarves in schools and government offices violate mainstream Islamic teachings (Kalaycıoğlu 2005);<sup>30</sup> and government business hours do not allow religious civil servants to observe some of their religious rituals such as praying five times a day.

Against this, however, many laws and state institutions actively support religion. The Constitution assigns the state the task of supervising (and providing) religious and moral education, to which end the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the state manages, and partly finances, the 79,000 mosques in the country (compared to 42,000 primary

and secondary schools); unlike their French counterparts, Turkish politicians freely flaunt their religious convictions and relationships for voter support; and many Turkish governments, in particular the 1980-83 military regime, have actively promoted religious (Sunni Muslim) feelings ostensibly to provide the national identity and unity.

Thus, neither republican narratives portraying the Ottoman heritage as a subversive heritage stemming from a theocratic ancient regime, nor religious narratives that portray the republican reforms as anti-religious fit well with the reality of what actually happened.

#### *Turkish Modernization and Democracy*

Similarly, historical record corroborates neither the extreme religious-conservative claim that secular political and economic development completely excluded Islamic-conservative actors nor the extreme republican claim that pro-Islamic actors are necessarily against democracy and modernization.

The early republican reforms were authoritarian reforms that built on an authoritarian state legacy. That it was possible for them to be implemented relatively peacefully was primarily due to Kemal Atatürk's charismatic leadership and the strong popular legitimacy that the Kemalists enjoyed after their leadership in the national War of Liberation (1919-1922). The liberal wing of the Kemalists, the Islamists, and the traditional-religious elites never fully consented to these reforms, but their opposition was largely passive, or successfully oppressed by the Kemalists. (Ahmad 1993, Küçükcan 2003, Zürcher, 2005). However, the long term vision of Atatürk and prominent republican leaders such as İsmet İnönü clearly included democracy. (Heper 1998). There were, for example, short-lived experiments in establishing opposition parties during the 1920s and 1930s. Most importantly, while watchful of the external world, the RPP single party regime voluntarily introduced the multiparty system in 1946 and allowed a peaceful transition to opposition rule in 1950 (Whitehead 1986; Heper 1998). Thereafter, the opposition to secularist reforms translated into support for center-right (e.g. the Democrat Party in the 1950s and the Motherland Party in the 1980s) and religious-nationalist parties (e.g. the Nationalist Action Party since the 1970s), and, after the 1960s, into support for the new Islamist parties.

The resulting political system produced mixed incentives for Islam-inspired political actors. On one hand, it was shaped by the security concerns of pro-secular state elite vis-à-vis autonomous (i.e. free of state oversight) religious actors in general and Islamists in particular. The Turkish Constitution outlaws the mixing of 'sacred religious feelings with state affairs and politics' and the employment of any rights and liberties with the purpose of dismantling 'the democratic and secular republic.'<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, eight political parties have been banned with the charge of anti-secularism since 1946. Perhaps more importantly than legal restrictions, the Turkish military, bureaucracy, and pro-secular civil society reined in Islamist parties whenever they were perceived to cross the line. The last example of this was the bitter experience of February 28, 1997, the 'postmodern coup, when a fierce pro-secular

public campaign instigated by the military compelled the Islamist Welfare Party to resign and a political witch hunt of alleged Islamists and liberal ‘conspirators’ in the government, business and media followed.

On the other hand, comparatively speaking, the Turkish political system has allowed ample participation by Islamic actors. Being active within center-right parties and via political clientelism, they were able to gain representation as well as benefits, such as a steady increase in the religious *imam-hatip* schools (Bozan 2007). Moreover, the political system permitted significant participation for Islamist political parties, through what may be called ‘conditional but promising participation’ (Sommer and Tol 2009). Participation was conditional because the parties were faced with sanctions (by the judiciary and military) whenever they crossed pro-secular boundaries, but it was also promising in that they could participate in democratic politics, freely contest elections, and come to power in local or national governments.

Hence, the five Islamist parties founded after 1971 participated in democratic politics for an average of about 6.5 years before closure. Two of them ruled the country in coalition governments, and they gained considerable experience in local governments especially during the 1990s. Islamist parties therefore had major incentives to adapt to secular democracy in order to influence the system through campaigning in freely contested elections and by coming to power, and to distribute social and economic benefits to their constituencies while in power. This becomes quite manifest when these incentives are contrasted with those in many other Muslim countries such as Egypt and Algeria where Islamists are either not fully permitted to contest elections or else not permitted to rule if they win them.

However, a crucial point from the point of view of twin tolerations is that the opening of the system to religious demands did not occur through inclusive public-political deliberation, negotiation, and compromise. There were no political pacts that brought about these changes through open negotiations or through electoral contests based on clearly expressed political platforms. Rather, the changes mainly occurred through the administrative decisions of conservative governments despite pro-secular opposition, implicit compromises between Islamist and pro-secular parties within coalition governments, or, as a product of clientelistic relations with religious constituencies. As mentioned, some of the changes were merely authorized by the 1980-83 military government influenced by Islamic-conservative intellectuals who envisioned a synthesis of religion and nationalism (*Türk-Islam sentezi*).

Hence, neither pro-secular nor religious actors perceived these developments as positive-sum compromises. Secular constituencies perceived them as losses incurred through political deceit or corruption, while religious actors perceived them as gains that they wrested from unwilling pro-secular actors. In other words, the opening of the system to religious demands was mainly understood as coerced (forced and determined by opponents) rather than voluntary (chosen freely as a positive move in the right direction). It hardly occurred in a way that could give rise to twin tolerations.

On the social-economic front, Turkish state-led development strategies displayed a focus on urban-based capital accumulation at the neglect of agriculture and the conservative countryside. Nevertheless, the system did allow for social mobility, and religious actors amply participated in economic development (especially but not exclusively during center-right governments). Most of Turkey's biggest business tycoons, such as Koç and Sabancı family corporations, which now symbolize big business based in Istanbul, originated from Anatolian cities (then merely towns) such as Ankara and Adana. This process gained momentum during the 1980s when the country was opened up to the rest of the world through political and economic liberalization. Religious actors in relatively conservative Anatolian provinces like Konya and Kayseri became active and salient in such areas as export-oriented businesses, business and labor associations, banks, charity organizations, and the media (Mehmet 1990, Öniş and Türem 2001, Buğra 2002, Yavuz 2003, Yavuz and Esposito 2003, European Stability Initiative 2005).

As a result of these political and economic opportunities, Islamic social and political actors have long been diversifying and adapting to both market economics and multiparty democracy (Öniş 1997, Yavuz 2003). Islamic entrepreneurs benefited from the legal opportunities provided by the transition from a mainly Islamic-based legal system to a Western-based system in such areas as inheritance, contracts, and corporations (Kuran 2004, Kuran 2008).<sup>32</sup> Islamists also benefited from these social and economic opportunities. Thus, contradicting the highly critical accounts of secular modernization developed by some religious narratives, Turkish Islamists are also beneficiaries and products of secular modernization. Their education, political socialization and culture, consumerism, technology, and visions often attest to this. To quote an insightful observation at the beginning of the 1990s:

‘In the end, it was secular schooling and social progress that opened the ‘eyes and minds’ of the Turks and slowly but surely contributed to a new and more confident sense of Turkish national identity, strong enough to take a critical look at Kemalism itself, to weigh the relative benefits of westernization, and to attempt a synthesis with its Ottoman-Islamic past’

(Mehmet 1990).

The last and most impressive product of this process has been the AKP, founded in 2001 by reformist Islamists who broke away from the Islamist Virtue Party. The AKP has a drastically more liberal-democratic and pro-West discourse and practice than its predecessors (Dağı, 2006). The party has secured major legal-political reforms that made Turkey a more pluralistic and democratic country according to most accounts. Thus, the record does not support the extreme republican claim that Islamic actors are necessarily subversive of modern democracy and economic development.

It is true that the AKP is a socially-conservative party rooted in an Islamist ideology in many ways. Some of its policies in areas such as public recruitment and the indirect effects of its image as an Islamic party increased the presence, visibility and influence

of Islamic and pro-Islamic actors in government and society, feeding religious-secular polarization (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006, Somer 2007a). However, the flaws of the Turkish political party system and the weaknesses of the pro-secular and ‘effective and constructive’ opposition parties, in particular a European style social democratic party, are probably as much to blame for the JDP’s liberal-democratic deficits as the Islamist roots of the party itself (Sayarı and Esmer 2002, Rubin and Heper 2002, Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2007, Somer 2007a, Öniş 2009). Indeed, under a more effective future political party system in which pro-secular and religious-conservative parties effectively check and balance each other on a platform of EU-led reforms, the AKP may well adopt further liberal-democratic policies in order to maintain its constituency. Lacking effective opposition, the AKP’s hegemonic and ‘moralist’ tendencies gain strength (Somer 2007a).

Zero-sum narratives are a major part of the polarization apparent in Turkish society and political life today. In fact, the difficulties of the political parties and other social-political actors in generating new narratives that promote secularism, democracy, religious *and* non-religious freedoms, and development generally in more democratic and inclusive ways can be seen as a major weakness of these actors.

### **In Lieu Of Conclusions**

This essay has analyzed the current troubles of Turkey’s democratization at the political and discursive levels and argued that the consolidation of a pluralistic democracy would benefit from the emergence of mutual toleration and trust between religious and pro-secular social and political actors. This, in turn, is linked with normative adjustments of the dominant narratives of both types of actors, in addition to strong institutional and political checks and balances. Research should do more in the area of theorizing and documenting how such toleration and trust can emerge in a majority-Muslim society where secularism was a formative ideal of the state institutions and Islam is a main component of the majority society’s identity and culture.

During the religious/ secular polarization of 2007-2008, the supporters and critics of the government troublingly declared themselves the self-appointed defenders of, respectively, democracy and secularism, dismissing the legitimacy of each other’s grievances. This gave rise to a misconceived tradeoff between secularism and democracy and transformed the division into a zero-sum conflict.

The supporters of the government, critical of Turkish laicism’s excesses, presented any restrictions on religious actors as an infringement on religious liberties, while the critics, skeptical of the perceived Islamists’ intent and ability to truly endorse democracy, presented bureaucratic and authoritarian forces, the military and judiciary especially, as the ultimate checks against the growing influence of religious actors. The supporters of the government tended to claim that any qualms regarding secularism were simply disguised attempts by the pro-secular elite to cling to power. They tended to charge the pro-secular actors of trying to undermine the government

and to exclude religious actors and symbols from the public sphere. Any evidence of problems related to religious-conservative exclusionism in areas such as government recruitment and procurement, or religious pressures on pro-secular individuals, was readily dismissed as ‘biased.’ In turn, many critics of the government all too readily dismissed any religious-conservative grievances as instruments of ‘creeping Islamization,’ even if these grievances were expressed as deficits of democratic freedoms.

The reconciliation of these opposing views and perceptions poses a major challenge to, at a critical juncture, the consolidation of pluralistic democracy in Turkey. Pro-secular actors may recognize that in a context of liberal democracy supported by effective checks and balances, religious actors can contribute to political and economic development by expressing and promoting their own versions of modernization. They may also acknowledge that under adequate institutional settings, religious actors can embrace modernity and secular democracy, and may have legitimate grievances regarding religious freedoms and regarding social and political equality with secular actors.

Religious-conservative actors, equally, may recognize that Turkey’s secular modernization has served them also, that they are products and beneficiaries of the country’s modernization as much as are the secular actors. They may also acknowledge that pro-secular actors are not necessarily against religion and tradition, and may have legitimate concerns regarding anti-secular politics and religious pressures on freedom of thought and secular life styles.

Twin tolerations may require recognition on the part of both types of actors that their mutual interests might best be served by secular democratic institutions which are secured by shared principles of pluralism, and by a political system where consensus-seeking pro-secular and religious-conservative actors check and balance each other.

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<sup>2</sup> This support diminished in recent years when the government seemed to take an 'illiberal' turn.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the argument here does not claim that democratization necessarily requires a 'substantive compromise' between actors' goals and values. Any reconciliation of the religious-conservative and pro-secular narratives would be a mechanism through which trust could increase among actors and actors could more easily cooperate for achieving 'institutional compromises.' Stated differently, reconciliation of clashing narratives may help actors to make 'credible commitments' to each other vis-à-vis institutional reforms. See Kalyvas (2003) and Mecham (2004) for the importance of credible commitments.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the essay, the argument will draw on observations made during research since the spring of 2006, which entailed the systematic content analysis of four 'religious-conservative' (*Zaman*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Milli Gazete*, and *Vakit*) and two pro-secular (*Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet*) newspapers - covering about 42,000 relevant articles in about 5000 issues between 1996-2004 – together with interviews with newspaper editors and writers. The content analysis examined the coverage with respect to 13 categories including democracy, social and political pluralism, nationalism, and the external world. For more information, see Somer (forthcoming, 2010 and 2011) and Somer and Liaras (2010).

<sup>5</sup> For a conceptualization of 'master narrative,' see Migdal (1997).

<sup>6</sup> Among others, 'Turkey's Foreign Minister Gul, in Presidential Bid, Pledges to Adhere to Secular Principles,' *The International Herald Tribune*, Monday, August 13, 2007.

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- <sup>7</sup> The Parliament's vote for Gül's election before the call of early elections was taken to the Constitutional Court by the main opposition party and annulled on a technicality.
- <sup>8</sup> Another sticking point is the issue of Kurdish rights and the definition of Turkishness in the Constitution.
- <sup>9</sup> Adopted from Freedom House, Washington, DC.
- <sup>10</sup> Tülin Daloğlu, *The Washington Times*, March 4, 2009; Selcuk Gokoluk, *Reuters*, February 19, 2009; Andrew Higgings, *The Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2009.
- <sup>11</sup> Daniel Steinvorth, *Der Spiegel*, January 26, 2009; Sarah Rainsford, *BBC News*, October 23, 2008.
- <sup>12</sup> Stephen Kinzer, 'In Turkey, New Accusations of Links Between Police, Politicians and Criminals,' *The New York Times*, December 31, 1996.
- <sup>13</sup> Among others, Sarah Rainsford, *BBC News*, October 23, 2008.
- <sup>14</sup> Freedom House reported that 'reform efforts toward enhanced freedom of expression stalled in 2007' – quantified as a slip from 48 in 2005 to 51 in 2008 (on a scale of 0-100, with 0 optimum).
- <sup>15</sup> *The Daughters of Allah* by Nedim Gürsel. See International Freedom of Expression Exchange, IPA-IFEX - Geneva-Toronto, March 09, 2009.
- <sup>16</sup> Abbott, Allison. (2009) 'Turkish scientists claim Darwin censorship,' *Nature*, published online 10 March 2009 <<http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090310/full/news.2009.150.html>> (accessed on 10 March 2009)
- <sup>17</sup> See 'Study: Secular Turks Face Discrimination, Pressure,' *International Herald Tribune*, February 26, 2009; Binnaz Toprak, 'Eleştiri sınırlarını aşip kampanyaya çevirdiler' (They went beyond criticism and launched a campaign) *Milliyet*, January 20, 2009; Ekrem Dumanlı, 'Medya Ayak Uydurunca' (When the media goes along) *Zaman*, September 9, 2008; Ayşe Böhürler, 'Türkiye'de Farklı Olmak' (Being different in Turkey) *Yenişafak*, December 20, 2008; Fatih Vural, 'Binnaz Toprak'a tepki gösterdi: İnsanları kalıba sokamazsınız' (She [Elif Şafak] criticized Binnaz Toprak: 'You cannot categorize people!') *Zaman*, February 19, 2009.
- <sup>18</sup> Figures indicate that the actual number of people desiring Shar'ia decreased during that period. All figures were for 2006. See also Tarhan Erdem, 'Sorunumuz Andıç mı?' (Is Our Problem the [Military] Memo?), *Radikal*, June 15, 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> Supranote 4.
- <sup>20</sup> Murat Yalnız and Metin Under 'Paranın Dini,' (Money's Religion) *Newsweek Türkiye*, January 21, 2008.
- <sup>21</sup> See Sabrina Tavernise, 'In Turkey, Is Tension about Religion? Class Rivalry of Both?' *New York Times*, February 19, 2008. For more qualified and nuanced academic accounts, see Gülalp (2001), White (2002).
- <sup>22</sup> See supranote 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Among others, see Türker Alkan . 'Türkiye'nin bölgesel liderliği' (Turkey's Regional Leadership) *Radikal*, March 3, 2009.
- <sup>24</sup> Ruşen Çakır, Interview with Şerif Mardin, 'Öğretmen'e kaybettiren küçük bir eksiklik' (A Small Deficit That Made the Teacher Lose), *Radikal*, May 25, 2008.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Erdoğan: Batının ahlaksızlıklarını aldık' (Erdoğan: We Adopted the West's Immoralities) *Milliyet*, January 24, 2008. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/01/24/son/sonsiy18.asp>
- <sup>26</sup> See Murat Somer, 'Democracy-Secularism Relationship Revisited,' *Today's Zaman*, January 25, 2009, for a critique.
- <sup>27</sup> Note that the argument is *not* that all actual experiences of secularism are products of democratization. It is that successful democratization would entail some notion of secularism.
- <sup>28</sup> According to government statistics in 2008, the Directorate's personnel comprised 83,000 people, compared to the approximately 71,000 of the Ministry of Justice (excluding unfilled positions).
- <sup>29</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 24.
- <sup>30</sup> See also the *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, US Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90204.htm> . Accessed on April 11, 2010.
- <sup>31</sup> The 1982 and 2001 (revised) Constitutions; the Preamble and Article 14.
- <sup>32</sup> Also see Enis Tayman, Interview with Timur Kuran, 'İslami sermaye çok ama Türkiye bir İslam ekonomisi değil' (Islamic capital is plenty but Turkey is not an Islamic economy) *Referans Gazetesi*, March 14, 2009.