

## “Co-Radicalization”: A Scientific Lens Proposal to Understand the Social Movements in Turkey

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**Abstract:** The term co-radicalization refers to intergroup hostilities leading to conflicts through cycles of reciprocal threat. This article explores the concept of co-radicalization in violent and non-violent terms and its potential application particularly in Turkey and broadly in the Middle East, a region characterized by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, as well as socio-economic disparities. Drawing from the social fragmentations recently observed in Turkey, where scientific research on radicalism and co-radicalization is insufficient, the article offers several subjects of scrutiny, including (1) socio-economic co-radicalization between the native and migrant people in the fringes of the urban spaces, (2) the religious norm carriership led by the state institutions and the rise of “Deism” and atheism in response, and (3) the variety of non-violent radical expressions feeding each other, from music to satire. We conclude that the study of co-radicalization should be distinguished from the reductionist approaches to the concept, which tend to take terrorism and radicalism synonymously; the social scientific goal is to obtain a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics behind societal divisions.

**Keywords:** Radicalization, Social movements, Turkish politics, middle eastern politics, european politics

### Introduction

Europe continues to face several problems revolving around the issues of deindustrialization, migration, and diversity. Civilizational and culturalist paradigms seem to have poisoned the image of migrant-origin people and the integration processes of self-identified Muslims into the majority societies. The same problem of misrepresentation is visible in the case of relatively deprived native youth groups who reside in remote, rural, and mountainous areas in Europe. Populism, Islamophobia, nativism, radicalization, extremism, Islamism, violence, and terrorism are among the issues that are being discussed, deliberated, and communicated in multilateral and transnational venues in contemporary Europe.<sup>1</sup> As a research group, we have contributed to these debates through the findings of extensive empirical research conducted between 2019 and 2024 within the framework of advanced grant funding provided by the European Research Council.<sup>2</sup> This article goes beyond our focus on Europe by arguing that the insights gained may prove valuable in understanding similar challenges in other regions.

In this article, we aim to explore the concept of co-radicalization in the context of Turkey and its potential insights for understanding radicalization in Muslim-majority contexts. The article intends to introduce a scientific lens to analyze some of the present forms of radicalization in Turkey where, we argue, scientific research on radicalism is insufficient. Hence, the article’s main research question is whether we can apply the concept of co-radicalization to Turkey. The article first unpacks the main

contours of our ongoing research in European cities and then revisits the scientific debates on the terms 'radicalization' and 'co-radicalization', considering multiple definitions of violent and non-violent radicalization. In doing so, our objective is to give a different spin to the term radicalization from a critical stance to reinterpret it through the teachings of the Social Movements literature that questions the prevalence of neo-liberal logic that denounces any kind of radical centrifugal movement—be it ethno-cultural, religious, societal, or political. Then, focusing on Turkey as a Muslim-majority context, the article offers new subjects of scrutiny, including (1) socio-economic co-radicalization between the native and migrant people in the fringes of the urban spaces, (2) the religious norm carriership led by the state institutions and the rise of "Deism" and atheism in response, and (3) the variety of non-violent radical expressions feeding each other, from music to satire.

### **A Contested Term: Radicalization**

The term "radicalization" has evolved over its two-century history. Over the 19th century, it developed into an ideology promoting republicanism and emancipation against absolute monarchies in Europe, encompassing pro-democracy manifestos, universal citizenship, and equal rights demands. "Radicals" have often been depicted as violent actors by the defendants of the status quo (Sartori, 1984). In this context, "to radicalize" described adherence to an ideology against the order, while "radicalization" emerged in the 1930s, referring to becoming radicalized. The term's most popular meaning in the present time, as a process leading to violence, gained prominence in the context of Jihadism after 2000 (Khosrokhavar, 2014).

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the meaning of the phrase shifted towards atomism. Since then, radicalization has primarily been viewed as an individual process through which, on the one hand, "lone wolves" became active terrorists and, on the other, domestic terrorism and online radicalization grew increasingly prevalent. These emphases defined the US foreign policy of the 21st century: a global war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). The so-called "refugee crisis," which broke out in 2015, has spurred discussions of "foreign fighters" to take the place of "homegrown terrorists." Those on the road to becoming foreign fighters and their return home have been the focus of talks on radicalization in the public sphere, especially in Europe.

The co-radicalization of right-wing extremists and Muslim extremists, or in other words, between Islamophobists and Islamists, needs to be examined in addition to the escalating discussions on "homegrown terrorism" and "foreign fighters" since 9/11. The concept of co-radicalization refers to intergroup hostilities leading to conflicts through cycles of reciprocal threat (Kaya & Adam-Troian, 2021). Based on the ongoing PRIME Youth research data from four European countries (Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands) supported by the European Research Council (Agreement No. 785934), we question how nativist right-wing populist local youths residing in remote towns and self-identified Muslim youths residing in metropolitan cities co-radicalize each other against one another. As will be shortly elaborated further, our ongoing studies suggest that one of the main drivers of co-radicalization between such groups, who experience similar socio-economic, political, and psychological deprivations, stems from a pervasive absence of effective communication and empathy, exacerbating the chasm between their worldviews, fueling animosity in several contexts (Kaya, 2021).

A question our research project in Europe asks is whether the "young radical" Muslims are politically active to foster social cohesion or dictate religious conviction. As a starting point, the project problematized the neoliberal political tendency to criminalize and pathologize radicalization by reducing the concept to extremism and terrorism. Contrary to this trend, we demonstrate that many youngsters are prone to radicalization but not necessarily violent extremism or terrorism. The nativists, right-wing populists, and white supremacists are on the opposing side of the co-radicalization process. While arguably opposing a neoliberal and elitist order, they take heart from widespread poverty and

structural injustices exacerbated by conventional political parties supporting neoliberal governance (Mouffe, 2018). Votes cast by populists have been intensely concentrated in areas with long-term reductions and a widening urban/rural divide (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

After the two interview rounds scheduled in 2020 and 2021, our research team conducted 307 interviews in four European countries (Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands). Native interlocutors were chosen from small towns away from metropolitan capital cities (Dresden, Aalst, Ghent, Lyon, and Rotterdam), while self-identified Muslim interlocutors from capital cities (Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, and Brussels). While the natives were chosen from those cities and towns that are believed to be “left behind”, youth with Muslim backgrounds were chosen from big cities using a snowball sampling technique.

Based on the interviews that our research team conducted in different European cities, we found that radicalization has been a prevalent experience among the disenfranchised European youth who live in cities, towns, and rural places that are socio-economically and/or socio-politically neglected by local/national governments as well as the mainstream political parties. Given the resentments of both self-identified Muslim youth and nativist-populist youth groups in Europe, we argue that radicalization, as a concept, should go beyond the connotations of violence, extremism, fundamentalism, and terrorism. We explored the connections between radicalization and economic disparities, feelings of discrimination, spatial deprivation, nostalgic deprivation, cultural alienation, and various individual and social-psychological factors. Extending this framework to regional literature beyond Europe, we expect that our research, in tandem with the Social Movements Theory,<sup>3</sup> can be enriching for the readers to understand the root causes of radicalization among various ethno-cultural, religious, and social groups in Turkey. While the present article does not aim to make a data-centric analysis of the empirical questions at hand, it builds on a series of previous research that addressed the empirical data through the glance of Social Movements Theory (Kaya, 2019b; Lüküslü, 2013; Neyzi, 2001; Oğuz, 2017; Tezcür, 2020; Uysal, 2017).

### **The dynamics of co-radicalization**

The concept of “co-radicalization” refers to the belief that hostility between different groups can lead to or worsen conflicts due to extremist ideologies (Pyszczynski et al., 2008). According to psychological studies, intergroup co-radicalization cycles are produced by violent extremism and are caused by processes related to social identity and the human need to belong to a particular community based on shared sentiments and social identity (Verkuyten, 2018), in addition to existential motivations that are sparked by threat-regulation processes at the individual level. Understanding co-radicalization requires an exploration of the interplay between collective identity dynamics and individual psychological factors. The formation and reinforcement of social identity within distinct groups, along with the tendency to categorize others as part of an outgroup, contributes to the development of intergroup conflicts. At the individual level, the experience of threats to one’s well-being, values, or group identity may trigger a radicalization process by activating existential concerns.

Within the scope of this article, we acknowledge several alternative definitions of the concept of radicalization. The most widely accepted way to define the concept is to focus on the likelihood of violence stemming from individuals. The prefix “co-” in this context means that some conflicting groups and their tendency towards violent political actions might be connected. Even if the two opposing factions do not interact with each other, the situation can still escalate if they both feel threatened by each other. Our framework includes different types of conflicts and processes that occur at different levels between groups (Decety et al., 2018). To that effect, we propose that the term co-radicalization may provide researchers with a scientific lens to analyze the different forms of radicalization in Turkey, ranging from religious, ethnic, and societal forms of radicalism. While co-radicalization has not been

tested as such in Turkey or other Muslim-majority contexts, the concept of radicalization itself has been explored only through the lens of moderation versus radicalization.

The alternative definition of radicalization is non-violent, emphasizing the transformative power of political ideologies in favor of social and political change. This approach fits into the schools of thought that aim to decouple “radicalism” from “extremism” and “terrorism.” Even when its proponents do not make a solid demarcation between these concepts, they point out that a radicalization process is not necessarily towards exerting physical violence or forming opinions in favor of violence (Koca, 2022). Despite denoting a transformation like the previous definition, this process involves the development of new ideas, perspectives, and values, as well as the mobilization of individuals and groups in line with an ideology. This definition does not ignore co-radicalization in the form of intergroup conflicts, given that individuals radicalize using very different and often clashing ideologies. In other words, co-radicalization can be understood as the simultaneous development and mobilization of multiple, often conflicting, ideologies within distinct groups. This concept of co-radicalization acknowledges that the process is not inherently violent; rather, it can lead to intergroup conflicts and tensions due to contrasting objectives and methods.

Through cycles of reciprocal threat, intergroup conflicts often continue to exist (Kunst et al., 2016).<sup>4</sup> In the context of our research, one key example was the string of incidents that erupted in France after the killing of a school teacher in October 2020 (BBC News, 2020). Many other case studies suggest that one can research such dynamics of co-radicalization occurring amongst social groups by taking into account the factors surrounding threat perceptions and hostilities leading to violent extremism (Vallacher et al., 2013). For instance, such endeavors lead researchers to notice that young people who identify as natives may turn to right-wing extremism as a response to economic difficulties. Meanwhile, the same process may further fuel the already attractive Islamist youth extremism in marginalized areas, leading to anti-native sentiments as a form of compensation.

As a final illustration, the usage of this dynamic theory is growing in social psychology, and it has recently been incorporated into agent-based models to forecast intergroup sentiments in the face of terrorist threats (Huet et al., 2019). This type of co-radicalization between the two groups is an instance of co-emergence and can occur in both an interactional and a correlative configuration. As a result, the processes of co-radicalization can be seen on a material and symbolic level. Such co-radicalization processes, for instance, can occur in online forums. A study of interactions in Dutch online forums, Marokko.NL, used predominantly by Moroccans, and NL.politiek, used predominantly by ethnic Dutch people, is conducted by Bert Klandermans (Klandermans, 2014). Figure I correlates the two forum participation with identity-related incidents between late 2003 and mid-2006, the study period. The number of words in the posts about immigration and integration serves as a proxy for the level of involvement in both forums. Theo van Gogh’s murder in 2004, the Madrid train bombings in 2004, and the London bombings in 2005 all sparked significant online discussion during this time (Kaya & Adam-Troian, 2021).

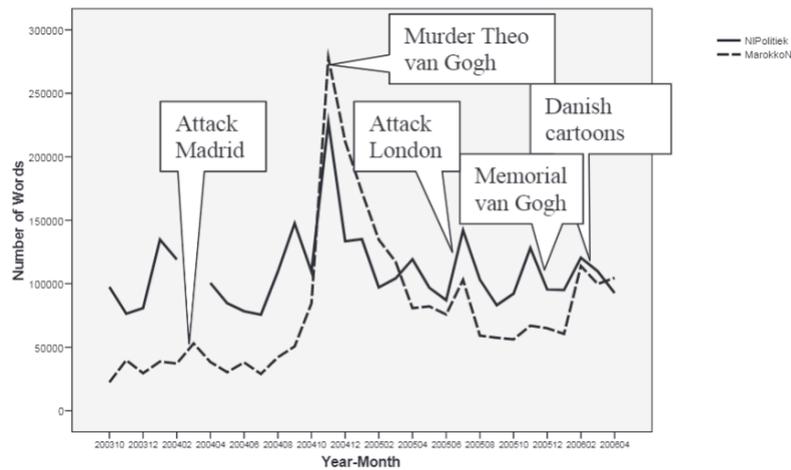


Figure 1. Comparison of the discussions about immigration and integration on two different online forums with opposing viewpoints (Klandermans, 2014).

Intractable confrontations may result from such cycles which explain the concurrent emergence of adversarial factions. The processes of “intergroup co-radicalization” are unpredictable and dynamic (Decety et al., 2018). They are potentially systemically destructive due to their highly particular characteristics, which may induce gradual polarization and societal structure disintegration if left unchecked. Following September 11, such escalation cycles have been predicted in both the US and Europe.

### Exploring the nexus between social movements, political polarization, and radicalization in Turkey

There is no substantial scholarship developed in Turkey to inquire about the links between social movements and radicalization processes. This article is an attempt to fill in this gap by trying to establish a link between our ongoing PRIME Youth research on youth radicalization in Europe and different forms of radicalization in Turkey. From a historical point of view, we shall start by underlining that Turkey has experienced different strands of youth radicalization since the 1960s. The mass mobilizations of the 1970s were assertive in the sense that they were the manifestations of the quest for liberty, equality, and justice expressed by working-class groups and leftist university students. These social movements could be viewed as demands for active citizenship. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, university students, employees, police, instructors, and administrators experienced political tension and violence, which prompted a military intervention in 1980. All types of nonprofit organizations, groups, and foundations were subject to severe regulation by the military council and succeeding governments in the 1980s, notably the leftist ones that had been quite engaged in politics before the coup. Turkey began tolerating NGOs with diverse cultural and ideological alignments in the late 1980s (Şimşek, 2004).

Several studies have conducted an in-depth examination of political protests during the 1990s and 2000s (Uysal, 2017). Despite the many continuities these studies identify, one example of change is youth mobilization during the 1999 Marmara earthquake and 2013 Gezi protests, which differed from that of the 1970s when public protests were also highly salient. The most remarkable difference is probably that the protests in 1999 and 2013 were mainly initiated by the young, post-1980-coup generations who were raised with a synthesis of Turkish nationalist and Islamist ideologies and stigmatized by older generations as “apolitical youth.” The insertion of Islamist rhetoric and symbols into the Turkish national identity and everyday politics partly became pervasive after the 1980 military coup, which aimed to weaken the working-class and left-wing youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Kaya, 2020). The political system established after the 1980 military coup ensured the weakening of

the working-class movements and left-wing political rhetoric in Turkey in a way that led to the rise of identity-based politics among pious Muslims, Islamists, Kurds, Alevi, Circassians, non-Muslim minorities, and other ethnocultural communities (Erdoğan & Üstüner, 2004). Hence, the latest waves of youth movements in Turkey are more in line with new social movements, as they are not necessarily driven by class-based conflicts but rather by ecological, environmental, cultural, urban, and identity-related conflicts.

Since the Gezi protests in 2013, Turkey has been exposed to societal and political forms of polarization as a consequence of the right-wing populist political style employed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) (Kaya, 2019a). In the meantime, Turkey has become the leading country in the world with the highest number of refugees, especially since 2015 (Kaya et al., 2021). Turkey was also exposed to ethno-cultural disputes in the 2010s when the so-called Kurdish peace process failed (Özbudun, 2014).

At least in terms of identity, the Turkish state and society have also become more Islamized since the presidential election in 2007. Reactionary Islamist forces have become more prevalent since then under the AKP rule, leading to the growing prominence of Islam in all spheres of life, ranging from education to state bureaucracy and the fashion industry (Kaya, 2015). In this period, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) became more instrumental in the formation of pious religious generations through imams, mosques, clerical schools, and Friday sermons. The Gezi protests, in a way, symbolized the rejection of intolerant acts by then Prime Minister Erdoğan who pursued an increasingly populist political style based on Islamic references and a social engineering project aiming to raise a religious generation. He requested that mothers have three children if not five, offered criticisms of the content of Turkish soap operas, ordered the banning of alcohol on university campuses, and pursued the building of mosques at Taksim Square and Çamlıca Hill (Kaya, 2015). However, these government priorities created a counter-reaction from pious Muslim youth, mostly educated in Imam Hatip Schools. Deism and atheism have become more visible among the students of Imam Hatip schools (Kardaş, 2023).

Urban spaces were also exposed to different forms of radicalization over the last two decades under the AKP rule. Metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Adana, Bursa, Mersin, and Gaziantep have been endangered by growing tensions resulting from exclusion, alienation, humiliation, and discrimination of young citizens as well as the others residing in the outskirts of such cities. Rap, graffiti, and different forms of aestheticized radicalism became prevalent in these places as the voices of subaltern populations expressed their socio-economic, spatial, and political forms of deprivation (Uysal, 2017).

Borrowing from the findings of our empirical research on youth radicalization in Europe, we want to offer a scientific lens to the scholarship in Turkey to inquire about the processes of (a) socio-economic co-radicalization between the native and migrant people in the underdeveloped parts of cities; (b) religious co-radicalization between the Diyanet's religious governance and the rise of "Deism" and atheism; and (c) a variety of non-violent radical expressions feeding each other in music, art, and satire through social media. While these case studies are not exhaustive, they are exemplary of fields where the co-radicalization framework can be applied. In conclusion, the study aims to provide a conceptual perspective on the complex dynamics in Turkey, exploring the interplay of these various factors and their impact on society. The use of this scientific lens could also be extended to the Middle East to analyze the root causes and trajectories of ethno-cultural, religious and spatial forms of radicalization.

### **Socio-economic co-radicalization between the native and migrant people in the underdeveloped parts of cities**

The first and most crucial aspect of co-radicalization is the native population's reaction to the migrants due to economic hardships, whereas the migrants/refugees react against the host country for being

treated as cheap labor. Although they have not yet been scrutinized on the same ground, some studies explored the two sides of the coin. According to a series of interviews Özden (2013) conducted with the Syrian migrants in Turkey, there is a widespread feeling among Syrians that the farm and factory owners take advantage of their vulnerable situation. One of the factory owners verifies it by saying, “Thanks to Bashar al Asad, we now have cheap labor” (Özden, 2013).

On the other hand, hosting the displaced Syrians has put pressure on the economy of all receiving countries (Ozcurumez, 2021). A panel data analysis on 26 regions in Turkey demonstrated that Syrian refugees increased unemployment (Esen & Oğuş Binatlı, 2017). Ceritoğlu et al. found that the employment outcomes of natives, especially those informally employed and, more so the disadvantaged groups, including women, younger and unqualified workers, have been negatively affected by the inflows (Ceritoglu et al., 2017). Welfare chauvinism is an area that has yet to be studied in depth in the Turkish context (Svallfors, 2020). Although various forms of welfare have been recognized in the EU, such as aid for the elderly and sick instead of unemployment assistance and support for means-based programs rather than universal assistance (Goldschmidt, 2015), the nativist views of welfare in Turkey have been influenced by the increasing inflation rate and diminishing purchasing power. In summary, various sources suggest that many natives view migrants as competition for jobs and resources, leading to feelings of resentment and frustration. On the other hand, migrants and refugees may react against the host country for being treated as cheap labor. This creates a tense dynamic between the two groups.

In the context of Turkey, the concept of “turn-by-turn poverty” (nöbetleşe yoksulluk) holds relevance and sheds light on the dynamics at play. Pınarcıoğlu & Işık discuss this concept, referring to how urban poor populations develop strategies to survive, often at the expense of those who come after them (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). The cycle of poverty continues as these newcomers inherit the poverty of previous generations. When a shantytown manages to transfer its poverty to a newcomer, some semblance of upward mobility can be experienced.

In the case of newcomers from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the toll of this process is evident. These individuals, already grappling with the challenges of displacement and vulnerability, are further affected by the burden of inherited poverty. Moreover, this continuous cycle of poverty alters perceptions and attitudes towards people experiencing poverty. They are no longer seen as individuals to empathize with but rather as objects of fear and securitization.

The migrant populations lack the cultural and economic capital to mobilize in the labor unions. Alongside several international organizations, some local civil society organizations, especially those relying on a religious vocabulary (e.g., ÖZGÜRDER), form protests on their behalf as the “Ansar” (Rottmann & Kaya, 2021) (i.e., people from Medina who helped immigrant Muslims who came from Mecca together with Prophet Mohammad) (Ulusal Kanal, 2019). Situating the migrants as such in the public debate renders them a part of the already tense ideological polarization within Turkey. For instance, amid the heat of the debates over young Afghan and Pakistani men entering Turkey, several social media accounts in Urdu, Punjabi, and Pashtun became the center of attention with their anti-secularist claims directed explicitly against Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey and its laic political regime.<sup>5</sup>

A stream of research examined local communities’ radicalization as an effect of exposure to the so-called Refugee Crisis. In this stream that focuses mainly on Europe, one research that is closest to Turkey is Hangartner et al., conducted in the Greek islands (Dinas et al., 2019). This study found that, in the islands close to the Turkish coast, direct exposure to refugee arrivals induced an increase in native populations’ hostility toward refugees and immigrants, with negative repercussions also on the image of local Muslim minorities. What appears as anti-Muslim radicalization in Greece turns out to be a particularist religious nationalist claim in the Turkish context. For example, a study conducted in a poor province of Istanbul,

Esenler, suggested that the natives regarded Syrian women as inadequately Muslim and nationalist—i.e., a series of themes revolving around honesty, acting as a decent wife, undertaking domestic tasks, and defending one’s homeland (Metin Aer & Enelli Guler, 2018).

Meanwhile, the relatively deprived neighborhoods of metropolitan cities witness high tension between the local population and refugees/migrants. Recently, footage from Istanbul Bacılar included a Syrian shop owner putting a chair in the middle of the road and cursing the passers-by. According to news coverage, the Syrian person threatened the citizens in the presence of the police by saying, “Come here and let us see who the man is.” (Habertrk, 2022). Contrary to this narrative, his neighbors in the neighborhood called him a respectable shopkeeper with a peaceful family. Accordingly, the man lost his calm and became aggressive in reaction to some people who swore at him, his family, and his Syrian identity. The case is a micro-level illustration of co-radicalization.

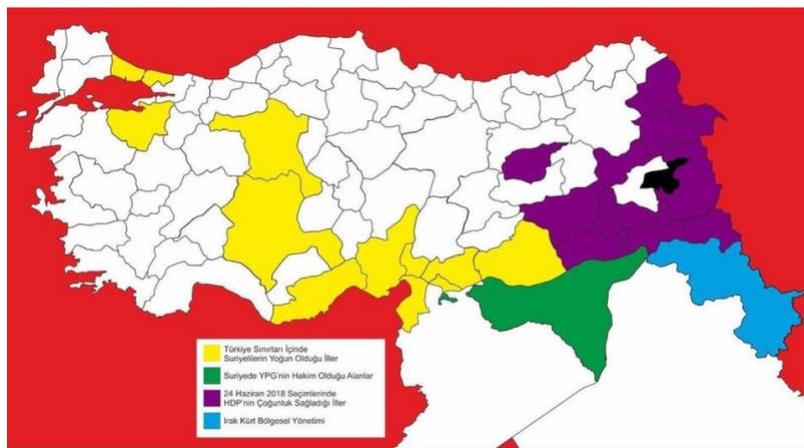


Figure 2 According to anti-migration campaigner mit zdaė, Syrians have begun to dominate the areas colored yellow

One of the critical arguments of the anti-migration campaign in Turkey is that Syrian migrants turned out to be the majority of southern cities, starting from Őanlıurfa and extending towards Mersin (see Figure 2). In these cities, campaigners address the local population, as well as the state authorities, against the perils of demographic change. The cities, such as Hatay, where Arabs and Turks have lived together for decades, have become the center of attention in these arguments. The recent earthquakes in Southeast Turkey further exacerbated the tensions between native populations and Syrian migrants in southern cities. Following the earthquake, which resulted in the displacement of thousands of people, including both Turkish and Syrian residents, there were reports of discrimination and hostility revolving around petty crime (Tamga Trk, 2023). Particularly in the context of the Refugee Crisis, radicalization can be attributed to a combination of factors, including economic hardships, religious nationalism, political ideologies, and the absence of effective communication.

### Religious co-radicalization: the attempts of moderation led by Diyanet and the rise of “Deism” and atheism in response

The High Board of Religious Affairs and Imam Hatip schools are the instruments of the government to define “piety” and manage the public sphere accordingly. Coming from predominantly working-class backgrounds, many parents reportedly argue that their children have limited options other than opting for the Imam Hatip schools in their neighborhoods (Hrriyet Daily News, 2012). If families cannot afford private schooling and their children did not pass the high school entrance exam, the neighborhood Imam Hatip school is often the most viable option. The number of religious schools increased especially in the mid-2010s, with relative gain compared to the other schools in the education system, due to the conversion of a group of secular middle and high schools. Concurrently, the number of students at such

schools has soared from about one hundred thousand in 2008 to more than a million in 2020 (Karaman, 2022).

However, many adolescents do not embrace the religion that they see in these schools. Instead, they are reportedly interested in “deist” or “atheist” philosophical views;<sup>6</sup> they listen to Korean pop idols who push beyond traditionalist gender norms and use social media to engage with others who share their tastes and views. Professors of Islamic philosophy, such as İhsan Fazlıoğlu, Islamist politicians such as Erbakan, and seasoned Islamist thinkers such as Abdurrahman Dilipak claimed that in their consultations, even headscarved students and Imam Hatip students may confide that they consider themselves “atheists” or “deists”. Ali Erbaş, the President of the High Board of Religious Affairs, aimed to launch a campaign as follows: “Deism is a very interesting trap. If you have friends who are at the point of falling into this trap, warn them.” (Yılmaz, 2018). Though the broader trend does not necessarily imply a rejection of Islamic values or traditions, many individuals choose to interpret their heritage in relatively personal and individualistic ways.

A concomitant process is that the dormitories run by religious communities especially attract students who migrate to urban centers and large provinces with the hope of a better education. Given that many of them do not have the economic means to find a comfortable place, the well-organized Muslim communities step in to offer those students affordable accommodation in their dormitories. In line with the consideration of parents who want their children to stay not only in safe but also in conservative and disciplined environments, those children spend their years by the rules of a religious community. Those rules often include dress codes, travel bans, and compulsory attendance at conferences where Islamic community values are presented as normative. As a result, while many students become pious religious citizens, many others end up being explicitly disillusioned. The conditions that push them to meet these communities’ expectations also encourage them to question the power structures in their society.

Thirdly, young women who recently decided to remove their headscarves or veils represent the new phase of secularization. A group of these women have recently started a social media campaign, called *Yalnız Yürümeyeceksin* (en. “You will not walk alone”), to support others who try to follow the same path. In their common struggle against family and neighborhood pressure, however, these women do not necessarily rely on modernist arguments based on “the backwardness of religion”. Instead, they want respect for women’s personal stories concerning the religion as they construe it. While opposing the politics of piety led by the government, they have discovered the possibility that religious women might also share their concerns in an Islamic program of ethical self-cultivation (Koca, 2023, p. 137). Therefore, as opposed to the rationalization of the previous head-covering ban in certain public buildings, such as universities, they do not expect other women to remove their veils. However, many of them now embrace non-religious ethics more staunchly than their predecessors did in the feminist movement, reflecting a co-radicalization occurring alongside the state-led politics of piety. These women may become the ideology makers of a new Turkish Secularism (Koca, 2023).

### **The variety of non-violent radical expressions feeding each other: music, art, and satire through social media**

Meanwhile, conflicting expressions of non-violent radicalism developed in Turkey. First and foremost, laughing and resisting have become a key theme in the shrinking free political field. Back in 2013, the homegrown humor employed during the Gezi Park Protests became a starting point for the expression of many radical ideas through satire - e.g., the criticism of the AKP rule and its media censorship with a penguin (Kaptan, 2016). The Gezi satire (re)shaped a whole range of cultural fields, including cartoon magazines, Twitter channels, and the walls (graffiti).

As the Gezi movement triggered a mass debate over “cultural hegemony,” the pro-government circles responded to it—and imitated its satirical techniques while doing so—with their satire. For example, representing the pro-AKP social classes and themselves in it as the periphery and the cultural others, the popular humor magazine *Misvak* was founded (Nas, 2018). Such initiatives not only put into question the oppositional nature of the humor discourse but also spread the message to the in-group that having the government does not suffice to govern a country. The use of satire by pro-government groups suggests that they recognize the need to address and engage with the concerns and criticisms raised by the opposition. By adopting and adapting the opposition’s satirical techniques, pro-government groups demonstrate that they understand the power of humor as a means of political communication and persuasion.

A noteworthy repercussion of the Gezi satire was that it brought together the youths with different ideological backgrounds together against the government authority (Kaya, 2017). Not necessarily standing on the left or right of the political spectrum, their mutuality was to open up a space for a new imaginary of systemic change. Some were the social reformers of established parties, whereas others were the grassroots members of social movements or radical revolutionaries with an activist orientation. Although the process did not lead to a clear-cut direction for the political, social, and economic spheres, this spirit of collaboration for a systemic change, which emerged during the Gezi protests, continues to inspire and drive the efforts of young activists in Turkey.

Another offshoot of this co-radicalization trend is the rise of non-violent but offensive satire, which includes attacking political correctness, and, while doing so, ignoring the red lines of courtesy against racism, Islamophobia, or somewhat untouchable personal historical figures with retrospective legitimacy. This trend coincides with the increasing popularity of the alt-right digital culture and the accompanying “memetic warfare” (Merrin, 2019). While offensive satire can contribute to openness and diversity, crossing the lines of courtesy often leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes, reinforces the perceived boundaries, and, hence, fuels co-radicalization. As such, it often turns against the already marginalized communities, particularly those who belong to the minority. Moreover, it is relatively difficult for members of a minority group to use offensive satire as a tool for social commentary without risking their security.

Beyond satire, the recent manifestations of popular, arabesque, rap, or metal music serve as a nostalgic commodity, subversive politics, revolutionary chants, or a protest against the perceived discrimination and urban decay in the inner cities. Under the influence of neoliberal consumer culture, even the most protest genres have been mainstreamed, and hence, lost their previous signification of deep discontent for specific groups. Interestingly, however, the post-Gezi medium of subversive politics has suggested that even popular music can articulate subversive politics—i.e., within arguable limits (Way, 2016). The power of music videos is being harnessed by activists to challenge popular stereotypes. By using “mash-up techniques,” they offer an alternative perspective that promotes solidarity and resistance against what they consider the “dominant political discourse” (Jenzen et al., 2019).

Rap music provides an alternative political communication platform in Turkey, among other divided societies. Including Rapzan Belagat, Norm Ender, and Sagopa Kajmer, a group of rappers problematize the national public debates on human rights and social inequalities by going beyond the traditional fault lines (Buhari-Gülmez, 2017). Also in the Middle East and North Africa, rap music appears as a subversive political expression. For instance, in Morocco, rappers like El Haqed and Don Bigg have used their music to address issues such as political corruption (Salime, 2015). In Tunisia, El Général, Balti, and Phenix have played a crucial role in representing the 2011 Tunisian Revolution (Ovshieva, 2013). In Egypt, Asphalt and Arabian Knightz criticized police brutality and government suppression during the Arab Uprising (Williams, 2010). By incorporating these themes into their music, they bring attention to pressing social issues and take a stance against the status quo.

Focusing on rap music as a medium for political expression would also lead to communication between Middle Eastern studies and that of other regional contexts. In France, rappers like Médine, Kery James, and IAM have used their music to explore similar themes related to immigration, racism, and national identity (Dotson-Renta, 2015). In the United States, rappers like Kendrick Lamar and Childish Gambino have addressed issues such as police brutality and racial injustice (Bonnette, 2015). In Latin America, artists like Residente, Ana Tijoux, and Calle 13 have instrumentalized their music to address issues of social inequality and political corruption (Pinchot, 2020).

## Conclusion

The notion of co-radicalization has become an explanatory term since it helps social scientists understand the dynamics of current forms of radicalization among young groups who are mostly clustered in civilizational, ethno-cultural, and religious terms by the neoliberal forms of governance models. The term is explanatory because it demonstrates that individuals who are exposed to similar forms of socio-economic, political, spatial, and psychological deprivation tend to mutually radicalize each other with an emphasis on their ethno-cultural and religious differences. This kind of co-radicalization results from the lack of communication and dialogue among these young populations as they are clustered into distinct ethno-cultural and religious compartments, or communities, by neoliberal states that are no longer interested in reassembling the social.

Turkey has also been going through a similar kind of neoliberalism under the AKP rule, which is politically and socially polarizing society and fragmenting it into ethno-cultural and religious communities without communication and dialogue through the use of a populist political style. While the study offers preliminary insights into the issue, certain areas require further focus for a more in-depth analysis. “Nativist versus migrant”, “Turkish versus Syrian”, “Islamist versus nationalist”, and “Kemalist versus Islamist” are just some of the societal divides that we have tried to analyze in the article using the notion of co-radicalization. The article employs the concept of co-radicalization to understand youth movements, political mobilization, and unconventional forms of political participation in Turkey and beyond.

While our framework represents an attempt to bring a concept to a new regional context, we acknowledge that the article would benefit from further focus on certain areas. One such area is the identification of a wide array of actors involved in co-radicalization, which requires different units of analysis to be employed simultaneously. In addition, our aim was not to provide comprehensive evidence and analysis in each section, but rather introductory discussions with a broad focus. With this objective at the onset, future research on co-radicalization in Turkey shall develop a structured analysis of the three areas we introduced.

We contend that the framework of co-radicalization can also be useful in the broader Middle East, a melting pot of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious communities, and particularly susceptible to the forces that have contributed to the fragmentation observed in Turkey. Among these forces are neoliberal governmentality, colonialism, the state monopoly over religion, and the legacy of authoritarianism. That being said, it is crucial to distinguish the study of co-radicalization from the scapegoating and labeling of entire populations as radical. We aim to better understand the complex dynamics that lead to societal divisions, not to perpetuate the stigmatizing stereotypes. By doing so, we can develop more effective and inclusive policies to promote social cohesion and harmony in an alarmingly polarized world.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion on these issues in the European context see (Aeschbach, 2017; Cas, 2014; Kaya, 2019a; Maskaliūnaitė, 2015; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For the official website of the research, see the Istanbul Bilgi University PRIME Youth Website <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/>

<sup>3</sup> Due to the lack of space, this article could not delve into a detailed depiction of Social Movements Theory that sheds light on the root causes of youth radicalization. Scholars like Charles Tilly, Craig Calhoun and Donatella della Porta underlined the relational aspects of radicalization, claiming that social groups that are excluded from legitimate political grounds are likely to become radicalized over time as a response to their perceived political, socio-economic, and cultural exclusion. Social Movement Theory draws our attention to the changes occurring in encounters between social movements and authorities in a series of reciprocal adjustments. For further details, see (Calhoun, 2011; Della Porta, 2014; Tilly, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> See in the context of racial attitudes between Whites and Blacks, (Stephan et al., 2002). See in the context of the mutual hostilities between Americans and Russians, (Landry et al., 2022).

<sup>5</sup> The virtual spaces—e.g., social media, television, and online platforms—play a role in amplifying the fear of crime associated with foreigners in general, and migrants in particular. The media channels that amplify such fear often enter virtual clashes with the channels that migrant populations rely on. See (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For a more nuanced discussion on this issue, see (Nişancı, 2023). The survey reveals that deism is higher in younger and more educated populations in Turkey (pp. 197-198).

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