

## Modernization and Secularization: The Case of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University

### Modernleşme ve Sekülerleşme: Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi Örneği

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**Abstract:** Modernization is the process of social change that begins with industrialization and this process is an important movement that affects many aspects of daily life. Modernization is not only limited to economic or technological changes, but also leads to radical transformations in socio-cultural areas. Therefore, it is necessary to consider modernity in a comprehensive framework that includes all the changes that occur in a society with the introduction of industrial technology. In analyzing this situation, secularization also emerges as an important element and is a key concept in the sociology of religion, which generally refers to the declining influence of religion in the modern world.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this research was conducted in the sample of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü

1 Peter Fischer-Nielsen, "Religious Online Developments in a Secular Context", *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 6/1 (2012), 49-62.

İmam University students in order to examine the effects of modernization and secularization processes on individuals in depth. Conducted in Kahramanmaraş, which has an important place in Turkey's socio-cultural diversity, this research aims to understand how young individuals perceive the concepts of modernization and secularization and how these concepts interact with their daily life, belief and worship practices. In the research, the survey technique was used as a quantitative data collection method; the data obtained in this way were analyzed with the SPSS program. The questions addressed to the participants were compiled in detail under headings such as perception of modernity, secular life tendencies, levels of religious belief and worship, and daily life practices. In this context, both modernity and secularity scales were used and the views of the participants were systematically analyzed. Correlation analyses conducted on the data obtained from a total of 343 students revealed that there were significant relationships between these four variables. According to the findings, a positive and significant relationship was observed between modernity and secularization ( $r = 0.273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, statistically significant relationships were found between modernity and daily life practices ( $r = 0.261$ ) and levels of faith and worship ( $r = 0.238$ ). One of the most striking results is the presence of very strong positive correlations between secularization and daily life ( $r = 0.922$ ) and faith-worship ( $r = 0.911$ ). This shows that secularization is not experienced in the classical sense of opposition to or distancing from religion, but rather as a transformation in individual practices and lifestyles. It has been observed that the participants are generally both open to modern values and able to maintain their religious beliefs and practices. The research shows that secularization can be considered not as a one-way religious dissolution in society, but rather as the emergence of individual interpretations and alternative lifestyles. Another striking result of the research is the high correlation between secularization and religious practices. This can be interpreted as a tendency towards individualization of religious life rather than disappearance of religious values in the Turkish context. Moreover, modernity was found to be more weakly correlated with other variables. This finding suggests that modern values operate relatively independently of religious life. The fact that the majority of the participants come from low-educated families and inequalities in income distribution is an important finding that reveals the intersection of modernization and secularization processes with socioeconomic factors. The fact that health sciences and vocational schools are predominantly included in the sample constitutes a limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings. In conclusion, this study points to a process of social transformation in which modernization and secularization can coexist in the context of university youth in Turkey. The research reveals the need to rethink the sociological concepts of modernization and secularization and the importance of addressing these processes together with local cultural dynamics.

**Keywords:** Sociology of Religion, Modernization, Secularization, Faith, Worship

**Öz:** Modernleşme, sanayileşme ile başlayan toplumsal değişim sürecidir ve bu süreç, gündelik hayatın birçok yönünü etkileyen önemli bir harekettir. Modernleşme, yalnızca ekonomik veya teknolojik değişimlerle sınırlı kalmayıp, sosyo-kültürel alanlarda da köklü dönüşümler yaşanmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu nedenle, moderniteyi, endüstriyel teknolojinin kullanılmaya başlanmasıyla bir toplumda meydana gelen tüm değişiklikleri

İçeren kapsamlı bir çerçevede değerlendirmek gerekmektedir. Bu durumu analiz ederken, sekülerleşme de önemli bir unsur olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Sekülerleşme, genel olarak modern dünyada dinin azalan etkisine atıfta bulunan din sosyolojisinde anahtar bir kavramdır. Dolayısıyla, bu araştırma, modernleşme ve sekülerleşme süreçlerinin bireyler üzerindeki etkilerini derinlemesine incelemek amacıyla Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi öğrencileri örnekleminde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Türkiye'nin sosyo-kültürel çeşitliliği içerisinde önemli bir yere sahip olan Kahramanmaraş özelinde yürütülen bu araştırma, genç bireylerin modernleşme ve sekülerleşme kavramlarını nasıl algıladıklarını ve bu kavramların gündelik yaşam, inanç ve ibadet pratikleri ile nasıl etkileşimde bulunduğunu anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada, nicel veri toplama yöntemi olarak anket tekniği kullanılmıştır; bu sayede elde edilen veriler SPSS programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Katılımcılara yöneltilen sorular, modernite algısı, seküler yaşam eğilimleri, dini inanç ve ibadet düzeyleri ile gündelik yaşam pratikleri gibi başlıklar altında detaylıca toplanmıştır. Bu bağlamda hem modernite hem de sekülerlik ölçekleri kullanılarak, katılımcıların görüşleri sistematik bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Toplam 343 öğrenciden elde edilen veriler üzerinden yapılan korelasyon analizleri, bu dört değişken arasında anlamlı ilişkiler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, modernite ile sekülerleşme arasında pozitif ve anlamlı bir ilişki gözlemlenmiştir ( $r = 0.273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Benzer şekilde, modernite ile gündelik yaşam pratikleri ( $r = 0.261$ ) ve inanç-ibadet düzeyleri ( $r = 0.238$ ) arasında da istatistiksel olarak anlamlı ilişkiler bulunmuştur. En dikkat çekici sonuçlardan biri ise sekülerleşme ile gündelik yaşam ( $r = 0.922$ ) ve inanç-ibadet ( $r = 0.911$ ) arasında çok güçlü pozitif korelasyonların varlığıdır. Bu durum, sekülerleşmenin klasik anlamda din karşıtlığı ya da dinden uzaklaşma biçiminde değil; daha çok bireysel pratiklerde ve yaşam tarzında dönüşüm olarak yaşandığını göstermektedir. Katılımcıların genel olarak hem modern değerlere açık oldukları hem de dini inanç ve ibadetlerini sürdürdükleri gözlemlenmiştir. Bu durum, Türkiye'deki genç kuşakların modernleşme sürecini dini değerlerle çatışmadan birlikte sürdürdüklerine işaret etmektedir. Araştırma, sekülerleşmenin toplumda tek yönlü bir dini çözülme değil, daha çok bireysel yorumların ve alternatif yaşam biçimlerinin ortaya çıkması olarak değerlendirilebileceğini göstermektedir. Araştırmanın bir diğer dikkat çekici sonucu ise sekülerleşme ile dini pratikler arasındaki yüksek korelasyondur. Bu durum, Türkiye bağlamında sekülerleşmenin 'dini değerlerin yok olması' şeklinde değil, 'dini yaşamın bireyselleşmesi' eğilimi olarak yorumlanabilir. Ayrıca, modernitenin diğer değişkenlerle daha zayıf ilişkili olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu bulgu, modern değerlerin dini yaşamdan nispeten bağımsız işlediğini düşündürmektedir. Katılımcıların çoğunluğunun düşük eğitimli ailelerden gelmesi ve gelir dağılımındaki eşitsizlikler, modernleşme ve sekülerleşme süreçlerinin sosyoekonomik faktörlerle kesiştiğini ortaya koyan önemli bir bulgudur. Özellikle sağlık bilimleri ve meslek yüksekokullarının örnekleme ağırlıklı olarak yer alması, bulguların genellenebilirliği açısından sınırlılık oluşturmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Türkiye'de üniversite gençliği bağlamında modernleşme ve sekülerleşmenin birlikte var olabileceği bir toplumsal dönüşüm sürecine işaret etmektedir. Araştırma, sosyolojik anlamda modernleşme ve sekülerleşme kavramlarının yeniden düşünülmesi gerektiğini ve bu süreçlerin yerel kültürel dinamiklerle birlikte ele alınmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Sosyolojisi, Modernleşme, Sekülerleşme, İnanç, İbadet

## Introduction

Modernization and secularization are two fundamental concepts of key importance in understanding the transformation processes of contemporary societies. In today's world, where globalization has accelerated, these processes have profound effects on individuals' value judgments, lifestyles, and religious practices.<sup>2</sup> In societies like Turkey, where traditional values are strongly preserved while modernization dynamics are intensely experienced, understanding the intersections of these two phenomena holds particular significance.

The processes of modernization and secularization, shaped by social, economic, and political dynamics, have gained significant momentum worldwide, particularly since the 19th century. As traditional societal structures gave way to modern, industrialized, and urbanized ones, these processes deeply influenced the relationship between individuals and society. Modernization encompasses not only economic and technological advancements but also broader changes in individuals' ways of thinking, identities, and societal values.<sup>3</sup> In this context, its impact on social norms and belief systems has led to the reinterpretation and reshaping of traditional structures, resulting in significant changes in individuals' daily lives.

Secularization, on the other hand, pertains to the declining influence of religion in social life and the redefinition of the relationship between religion and the state. Since this process has developed in tandem with modernization, it has also shaped individuals' spiritual and belief orientations. Alongside traditional authorities, the role of religion in social life began to be questioned, and the psychological and social pressures on individuals' religious beliefs gradually diminished. Consequently, greater dynamism and diversity have emerged among individuals. The concurrent progression of modernization and secularization has accelerated processes of societal transformation and change, reshaping the ways individuals express themselves.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, the interaction between modernization and secularization has left deep marks not only in economic and political changes but also in the cultural sphere.<sup>5</sup> The shift in societies from traditional beliefs toward individual values can be observed through these processes. This study aims to reveal how modernization and secularization manifest specifically among university youth by examining how these processes mutually reinforce and transform each other, their effects on individual and societal dynamics, and subsequent contempo-

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2 Şerif Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji* (Ankara: İletişim Yayınları, 2008).

3 Ali Bayer, *Sekülerleşme ve Din* (Ankara: İKSAD Publishing House, 2022).

4 Cemal Özel, "Sekülerleşme Teorileri: İki Yüzyıllık Serüvenin Kısa Bir Öyküsü", *Jass Studies-The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 16/95 (2023), 505–526.

5 Celaleddin Çelik, "Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni", *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 28/3 (2017), 209–223.

rary developments. Conducted with a sample of students from Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, this research seeks to explore how young people in a city that holds an important place within Turkey's sociocultural mosaic—where both traditional values and modern lifestyles coexist—experience these processes.

In the literature, modernization and secularization are often treated as either sequential or opposing processes. However, studies conducted specifically in Turkey indicate that these two processes can intertwine in unexpected ways.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the study's primary research question is how university youth perceive modernization and secularization processes and how these perceptions relate to their daily life practices and religious tendencies.

The relationship between modernization and secularization has been extensively addressed in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, political science, and religious studies. How modernization processes transform the social role of religion is discussed within the framework of secularization theories. The literature on the relationship between modernization and secularization is moving toward a common view that religion will not disappear completely in modern societies, but will undergo transformation. In particular, post-secularism debates focus on the redefinition of religion in the public sphere. In societies such as Turkey, which are secular but have a religious population, this process follows a more complex course. The relationship between modernization and secularization in Turkey has been addressed in a wide range of literature in the context of state-led reforms, social transformations, and religion-state relations in the period from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic.

In the context of the classical secularization thesis, Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>7</sup>, examines the relationship between modern capitalism and rationalism with Protestant ethics. He defines secularization as the 'disenchantment of the World' and argues that modernization has reduced the social influence of religion. Emile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*<sup>8</sup>, argues that the social functions of religion have diminished in modern societies, but have not disappeared entirely. He suggests that secular values have replaced religion with modernization. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in *On Religion*<sup>9</sup>, argue that religion is 'the opium of the people' and legitimize exploitation in modern capitalist societies. They predict that secular ideologies will replace religion in the process of modernization.

Bruce, one of the pioneers of this theory originating in Western geography, systematically defends the classical secularization thesis in his work *Seculariza-*

6 Talip Küçükcan, "Modernleşme ve Sekülerleşme Kuramları Bağlamında Din, Toplumsal Değişme ve İslâm Dünyası", *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 13 (2005), 109–128.

7 Max Weber, *Protestan Ahlakı ve Kapitalizmin Ruhu* (Ankara: Bilgesu Yayıncılık, 2011).

8 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

9 Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (Dover Publications, 2008).

tion: *In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory*<sup>10</sup>; he relates the dynamics of modernization, such as industrialization, urbanization, education, and individualization, to the decline of the institutional and individual influence of religion. Karel Dobbelaere, on the other hand, in his work *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels*<sup>11</sup>, distinguishes secularization at the social, institutional, and individual levels and reads the effects of modernization in a multi-layered way. Peter Berger defends the classical secularization thesis while softening it with observations of global religious revival and emphasizes that secularization is not linear or universal.

In *Public Religions in the Modern World*<sup>12</sup>, José Casanova demonstrates that modernization does not automatically and inevitably lead to secularization; religion can reappear in the public sphere in different forms of modernity, as exemplified by Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States. Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*<sup>13</sup>, conceptualizes the impact of modernization not so much in terms of religion's social power but rather as a shift in our cultural experience toward an 'immanent frame' arguing that 'faith has become a choice.' In their work *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*<sup>14</sup>, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart use data from the World Values Survey to show that existential security increases, religious participation decreases; while the decline is pronounced in developed democracies, the absolute number of religious people has increased globally.

In *Modern Mahrem*, Nilüfer Göle demonstrates how modernization has reshaped Islamic practices in terms of gender, public/private spheres, and visibility, contributing to the idea of non-Western modernity. In her work *Islam and Secularity: The Future of Europe's Public Sphere*<sup>15</sup>, Göle examines how Islamic identities have been transformed in the process of modernization, using examples such as the headscarf debate. She argues that secularization did not progress in a linear fashion as it did in the West, but was shaped by local dynamics. Şerif Mardin puts forward the Center-Periphery approach by presenting a framework that explains the central secularization projects in Turkish modernization and the religious-social responses of the periphery. In his work *Religion and Ideology*<sup>16</sup>, Mardin argues that secularization in Turkey was imposed from above through a 'Jacobin' model of modernization. He asserts that the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere led to social reactions and deepened the 'center-periphery' conflict.

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10 Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

11 Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (Germany: European Interuniversity Press, 2005).

12 Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2024).

13 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2018).

14 Pippa Norris - Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

15 Nilüfer Göle, *Islam and Secularity: The Future of Europe's Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2015).

16 Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji*.

In *Modernization in Turkey*<sup>17</sup>, Niyazi Berkes examines the process of secularization from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic from a historical perspective. He argues that secularism developed as a natural result of Westernization movements. Ahmet T. Kuru's *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*<sup>18</sup> uses a comparison between the US, France, and Turkey to show how state-religion regulations (passive vs. interventionist secularism) differentiated the public visibility of religion in modernization processes.

Additionally, the doctoral thesis titled *Religious Individualization Among University Youth*<sup>19</sup>, prepared by Siddık Ağçoban in 2020 with the aim of theoretically identifying the phenomenon of individualization in İslam, is also a highly significant source. This study focuses on the intellectual and practical conditions of İslamic societies and attempts to conceptualize the individualization of religion within these conditions. This study, which also questions whether formal religious education has an effect on this individualization, clearly reveals the transformation of the phenomenon of religion, especially in the post-modern era.

In the context of current debates and new trends, Berna Turam, in the book, of which she is both an author and editor on the other hand, examines religion-based tensions between the state and society in Turkey using ethnographic methods in her work *Secular State and Religious Society*<sup>20</sup>.

## **1. Methodology of the Study**

### **1.1. Type of Study**

This study is based on an online survey administered in April and May 2025 to measure the modernization and secularization tendencies of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University students.

### **1.2. The Population and Sample of the Study**

The questionnaire was sent to all Turkish and foreign students registered in the system of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Student Affairs Department. The number of students who completed the survey was 343. Variables such as gender, age, and faculty were not taken into consideration.

### **1.3. Data Collection**

The data were collected between April 2025 and May 2025. Questionnaire application, which is one of the quantitative data methods, was used in the re-

17 Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002).

18 Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

19 Siddık Ağçoban, *Üniversite Gençliğinde Dini Bireyselleşme* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2020).

20 Berna Turam, *Secular State and Religious Society: Two Forces in Play in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



search. In addition to demographic questions, a modernity scale consisting of 8 questions and a secularity scale consisting of 25 questions were used. Participants took a maximum of 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

#### **1.4. Data Collection Tools**

##### **1.4.1. Descriptive Characteristics Questionnaire**

This form is composed of a total of 8 questions, including descriptive characteristics of elderly individuals (age, gender, income level, faculty and department studied in, place of residence, and parents' education level).

##### **1.4.2. Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual boundaries separating modernity, modernization, and modernism remain ambiguous. Confusion over terms used to distinguish them persists in scholarly literature. Modernity, an indeterminate historical period since the early modern era of the sixteenth century, entails a cumulative but unequal process of transformation termed modernization—an historically specific phenomenon usually related to economic growth after about the mid-eighteenth century. The term modernism primarily describes an extensive cultural and intellectual dynamic, crystallizing in aesthetic, literary, and philosophical movements from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The terms modernity, modernization, and modernism constitute a interdependent conceptual triad for analyzing the profound transformations of the post-feudal Western world and their global repercussions. They refer, respectively, to a socio-historical condition, a material and institutional process, and a cultural and aesthetic response. Their relationship is dialectical: modernization generates the conditions of modernity, which in turn provoke the varied reactions of modernism.<sup>21</sup>

###### **1.4.2.1. Modernity**

Modernity is the state or quality of being modern. It is the lived experience—the subjective, social, political, and philosophical reality—produced by the dissolution of traditional, hierarchical, and religiously sanctioned orders. It is characterized by a new consciousness of time as linear, progressive, and future-oriented.<sup>22</sup> Max Weber identified the rationalization of worldviews and the retreat of religious cosmologies as central to modernity in the context of secularization and disenchantment. The world becomes an object of instrumental calculation, not magical or sacred meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Mariwan Nasradeen Hasan Barzinji, 'Modernism, Modernity and Modernisation', *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3/12 (2013), 43–52.

22 Paul Blokker, *Modernity and Its Varities: A Historical Sociological Analysis of the Romanian Modern Experience*. (Florence: European University Institute, PhD, 2004).

23 Steven Grosby, 'Max Weber, Religion, and the Disenchantment of the World', *Society* 3/50 (2013), 301–310.



As social restructuring and ambivalence-crisis, emergence of the nation-state, bureaucratic administration, capitalist markets, and new social classes like bourgeoisie and proletariat occur in modernity. The individual is freed from traditional bonds but also becomes atomized and alienated. Modernity is inherently paradoxical, promising emancipation through reason and progress while simultaneously generating alienation, anomie, and existential uncertainty.<sup>24</sup>

#### 1.4.2.2. Modernization

Modernization refers to the ensemble of material, technological, and institutional processes that drive the transition from “traditional” to modern societies. It is the objective, often quantifiable, engine that creates the conditions of modernity. Industrialization: The shift from agrarian to factory-based production, powered by fossil fuels and mechanization.<sup>25</sup>

Mass migration to cities, creating new forms of social density and anonymity, is interpreted as urbanization, while the application of bureaucratic and scientific principles to all areas of life (government, law, business) is evaluated within the scope of rationalization. Weber’s analysis of bureaucracy is key here.<sup>26</sup>

The separation of societal spheres (economy, polity, family, religion) into autonomous domains with their own logics means social differentiation.<sup>27</sup>

#### 1.4.2.3. Modernism

Modernism is the wide spectrum of self-conscious cultural movements and aesthetic practices that arise in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to the conditions of modernity and the processes of modernization. It is characterized by a reflexive preoccupation with the means of representation itself. Aesthetic Self-Reflexivity: Art turns inward to question its own medium, conventions, and *raison d’être* (e.g., meta-fiction in literature, abstraction in painting, atonality in music).<sup>28</sup>

The rejection of realism and traditional forms, and instead the adoption of developments such as fragmentation, collage, stream of consciousness, montage, and non-linear forms, have gained meaning within the scope of modernism through formal experimentation. An embrace of the urban, the mechanical, and the velocity of modern life (Futurism), often coupled with a profound sense of loss, alienation, and critique and found meaning with the concept of the “shock of the new”.<sup>29</sup>

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24 Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (California: AK Press, 2022).

25 Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

26 Stanley Udy, ‘Bureaucracy and Rationality in Weber’s Organization Theory: An Empirical Study’, *American Sociological Review* 24/6 (1959), 791–795.

27 Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

28 Joel Dinerstein, ‘Modernism’, *A Companion to American Cultural History* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 476.

29 Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and The Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991).

#### 1.4.2.4. Secularization

The concept of secularization, which initially served as the prevailing framework within the sociology of religion, has experienced significant re-evaluation. This shift entails a departure from the traditional teleological model that forecasts the unavoidable decline of religion in modern societies, transitioning instead to postmodern interpretations that highlight the resilience, evolution, and privatization of religious beliefs. This redefinition of secularization signifies not merely a rectification of empirical misjudgments, but rather a foundational epistemological shift—from a grand narrative suggesting linear progress to an acknowledgment of complexity, contingency, and the simultaneous presence of secular and sacred elements in late modernity. Although classical theory continues to function as an essential heuristic for comprehending structural differentiation, postmodern adaptations provide a more nuanced analytical framework for examining the contemporary religious landscape, which is characterized by detraditionalization, subjective belief systems, and the seemingly paradoxical resurgence of religion within the public domain.

Secularization is generally understood as the diminishing influence of religious authority within societal contexts. The concept of secularization emerged during the Enlightenment but can also be traced back to the Axial Age. Scholarly discourse surrounding the secularization thesis gained considerable momentum during the 1950s and 1960s and remains a topic of ongoing scholarly debate. Empirical manifestations of secularization typically denote a persistent reduction in religious engagement, as evidenced by increased pluralism and a decline in church attendance. The secularization thesis is often interpreted as a diminishing of institutional religion, particularly Christianity, while critics engage with the topic more substantively. Secularization addresses the notion of religion as a diminishing construct within society; however, it does not adequately account for the role of religion in postmodernity, wherein it is widely posited that religious practice should have ceased rather than experienced a resurgence.<sup>30</sup>

As scholars grappled with the emerging postmodern condition, various distinct paths became prominent, notably secular pluralism<sup>31</sup> and the privatization thesis.<sup>32</sup> Secular pluralist frameworks acknowledged the ongoing process of secularization while predicting alternative consequences, such as a diverse array of religious options or dynamic belief systems, rather than the anticipated evolution into an entirely secular society. The privatization thesis, which remains a subject of considerable debate, scrutinized the timeline of modernity's different religious phases. A notable republican variant of this perspective established

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30 Donald Surrency, *The Proliferating Sacred: Secularization and Postmodernity* (Florida: University of South Florida, MA, 2007).

31 J. Milton Yinger, 'Pluralism, Religion, and Secularism', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6/1 (1967), 17–28.

32 Inger Furseth, 'Secularization and the Role of Religion in State Institutions', *Social Compass* 50/2 (2003), 191–202.

a concept of public religion that associated state, governance, and democracy throughout the transition to late modernity, challenging traditional predictions regarding church-state dynamics, religious dormancy, and public engagement. Empirical research further clarified the primary national trajectories of secularization, democratization, and modernization as separate yet interconnected historical phenomena, revealing contradictions—such as persistent religious affiliations in highly modernized democracies—that called into question the model's universal applicability, even within its ostensibly secularized framework.

In the contemporary postmodern context, the theory of secularization has experienced a significant epistemological transformation, transitioning from a traditional overarching narrative predicting the inevitable decline of religion to a more nuanced and variable understanding of the interplay between religious and secular domains. The postmodern critique, influenced by philosophers such as Lyotard—who expressed skepticism toward grand narratives—has effectively undermined the teleological perspective that equates modernization with a universal process of rationalization, differentiation, and societalization culminating in the privatization and diminishing influence of religious belief.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, the enduring presence of public religion, illustrated by phenomena ranging from the Islamic Revolution in Iran to the prominence of the Christian Right in the United States, presents a compelling counter-narrative, indicating that religion can not merely persist but can also assertively re-engage with the political realm. This observable reality has compelled scholars to dissect secularization into its foundational elements, particularly following José Casanova's critical distinction, which posits that while structural differentiation—the segregation of institutional spheres—is empirically substantiated, it does not logically necessitate the privatization of religion or its overall decline.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the postmodern viewpoint reconceptualizes secularization as a multifaceted and asynchronous array of changes that manifest distinctively across varied cultural and political landscapes.

This deconstruction gave rise to new conceptual frameworks that capture the paradoxical and hybrid nature of religiosity in late modernity. Charles Taylor's seminal work, *A Secular Age*<sup>35</sup>, epitomizes this shift by moving the debate beyond mere metrics of church attendance or institutional authority to an analysis of the changing conditions of belief. Taylor argues that Western societies now inhabit an immanent frame, a social imaginary where belief in God becomes one option among many, and often a fragile one. This creates a landscape characterized not by simple disbelief but by a nova effect of spiritual possibilities, where subjective,

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33 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

34 Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

35 Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

detraditionalized believing without belonging<sup>36</sup> flourishes alongside both militant secularism and resurgent fundamentalisms. The postmodern condition thus generates a pluralistic and subjective marketplace of meaning, where religion is often disembedded from traditional institutions and re-embedded into personalized, syncretic spiritualities. This phenomenon underscores that secularization in the postmodern era is less about disappearance and more about mutation—a transformation in the forms, authority, and loci of religious expression, frequently coexisting with heightened individual and public religiosity.

Ultimately, the postmodern engagement with secularization theory has culminated in the influential concept of the post-secular, a term that encapsulates the reflexive awareness of religion's enduring presence within secular modernity. As articulated by Jürgen Habermas, the post-secular society acknowledges that secularization is not a self-fulfilling prophecy and requires secular reason to engage constructively with religious contributions in the public sphere through processes of translation. This framework rejects the zero-sum logic of classical theory, instead emphasizing coexistence, mutual interrogation, and the permeability of the secular/religious binary. Furthermore, comparative research into multiple secularities<sup>37</sup> highlights how distinct historical pathways—such as French laïcité, American pluralist secularism, and Indian secularism—produce varied arrangements between state, society, and religion. Therefore, in the postmodern era, secularization theory no longer provides a universal predictive law but serves as a sensitizing framework for analyzing the dynamic, often contradictory, and context-specific negotiations between the sacred and the secular in a globally interconnected world.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.4.3. Theoretical Framework

In this study, two scales were used within the scope of the theory: secularity and modernity scales.

#### 1.4.3.1. Modernity Scale

The Modernity Scale (A Measure of Individual Modernity)<sup>39</sup>, developed by Harrison G. Gough, is a questionnaire designed to assess individuals' attitudes toward modernity. The items in the scale cover themes such as traditionalism, future orientation, openness to change, global awareness, and faith in science and technology. The scale addresses thematic topics including traditionalism and resistance to change, present-time orientation, global awareness and openness to foreign cultures, intergenerational relationships and social harmony, and belief in change and progress.

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36 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging (Making Contemporary Britain)* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

37 Marian Burchardt et al., *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age* (Vienna: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

38 Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

39 Harrison G. Gough, "A Measure of Individual Modernity", *Journal of Personality Assessment* 1 (1976), 3–9.

#### 1.4.3.2. Secularity Scale

The methodological framework of the research is based on quantitative data collection techniques. Data gathered through surveys administered to a total of 343 students were analyzed across four key dimensions: perceptions of modernity, tendencies toward secular lifestyles, levels of religious belief and worship, and daily life practices. The scales used in the study were developed to understand how these concepts manifest in the local context. The Secularity Scale<sup>40</sup>, developed by Volkan Ertit, aims to measure the extent to which individuals adapt to secular (worldly) life or the influence of religious values on their daily practices and beliefs. The scale consists of two main dimensions: Daily Life (15 items) and Belief and Worship (10 items). The Daily Life dimension examines the influence of religion on social life, consumption habits, clothing, and friendship choices, while the Belief and Worship dimension measures the extent to which individuals practice their religious beliefs and their metaphysical thoughts.

#### 1.4.4. Data Analysis

In the study, the significance was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ . In data analysis, SPSS packaged software was used. In the study, descriptive statistics were used in the calculation of the mean scores of the scale and in the examination of the group characteristics of the elderly individuals. An 8-question modernity scale was used to measure the participants' modernization tendencies and a 25-question secularity scale was used to measure their secularization tendencies. Since the secularity scale has been used for foreign students before, there is no reliability problem. Reliability analysis was used to calculate the Cronbach's alpha values of the scales.

#### 1.5. Research Method

This research employs a quantitative research methodology to investigate the correlation between modernization and secularization within a cohort of university students. The study was carried out at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University during the period of April to May 2025, utilizing an online survey distributed to 343 participants. The survey comprised a Descriptive Characteristics Form, Harrison G. Gough's Modernity Scale, consisting of 8 items, and Volkan Ertit's Secularity Scale, encompassing 25 items. This framework facilitated the systematic evaluation of perceptions related to modernity, tendencies toward a secular lifestyle, religious beliefs and practices, as well as daily life activities.

The data collection process was conducted solely utilizing self-administered online questionnaires. The tools utilized have been extensively employed and validated in earlier empirical studies, and the Secularity Scale was administered with the explicit consent of its author. Ethical approval was granted by the Insti-

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40 Volkan Ertit, "Development and Validation of Secularity Scale for Muslims", *Open Theology* 9/1 (2023), 20220236.

tute of Social Sciences at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, and all participants were duly informed about the study's objectives and their right to withdraw from participation at any point.

The dataset underwent analysis utilizing SPSS, incorporating descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, reliability assessments (with Cronbach's alpha values varying between .95 and .97), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and hierarchical regression models. The fit indices derived from the CFA (RMSEA = .066; CFI approximately .94–.95) adhered to acceptable standards, thereby affirming the structural validity of the employed scales. A significance threshold of  $p < 0.05$  was established for all statistical examinations.

### 1.6. Originality of the Study

This research presents several unique contributions that distinguish it within the discourse on modernization and secularization. Firstly, it investigates these phenomena in Kahramanmaraş, a setting characterized by the interplay of robust traditional values and progressive modernizing forces. While a considerable portion of the existing literature emphasizes Türkiye's larger metropolitan areas, this study delivers empirical insights from a mid-sized Anatolian city, thereby enriching the understanding of how modernization manifests beyond major urban contexts.

Secondly, the concurrent application of the Modernity Scale and the Secularity Scale facilitates a comprehensive assessment of the interaction between modernity, daily life practices, and religious beliefs. There are limited studies in Türkiye that integrate these two tools, rendering this research methodologically pioneering.

Thirdly, the research generates empirical evidence that contests the traditional secularization thesis, especially the premise that modernization inevitably results in a decrease in religious belief or engagement. The notably high correlations identified between secularization, daily practices, and faith-based worship ( $r = .922$ ;  $r = .911$ ) illustrate a model of secularization that does not signify religious disengagement. Instead, it reflects a transformation and privatization of religious life. This observation is consistent with current discourses on post-secularism and individualized religiosity, suggesting that Turkish youth may be forming hybrid identities where modern and religious values harmoniously coexist.

Ultimately, by highlighting the dynamics of local cultures and the intrapersonal aspects of belief systems, the research presents a novel analytical framework that diverges from Western-centric approaches to secularization, thereby aiding in the advancement of sociological theories that are tailored to specific contexts.

### 1.7. Contribution to the Literature

This study makes several substantive contributions to the fields of sociology of religion, modernization studies, and Turkish social change. Initially, the study enhances the current understanding of the relationship between modernization and secularization by illustrating that these processes do not inevitably progress along a linear path marked by a decline in religious adherence. Rather, the results reveal a pattern of coexistence and reciprocal adaptation, wherein university students exhibit receptiveness to contemporary values while simultaneously maintaining their religious beliefs and practices. This challenges traditional secularization theories and endorses more contemporary frameworks that highlight religious transformation as opposed to mere elimination.

Secondly, the research provides empirical evidence from a geographical area that has been inadequately explored, thus filling a notable gap in the existing literature. By focusing on youth in Kahramanmaraş, it enriches the discourse, which is frequently influenced by metropolitan case studies, and demonstrates that the process of secularization within Anatolian contexts may manifest in distinct and culturally rooted ways.

Thirdly, the research endorses a multifaceted and culturally attuned comprehension of secularization. The significant correlations identified between secularization and both quotidian experiences and faith-based practices indicate that, in Türkiye, secularization predominantly manifests through the reconfiguration, individualization, and privatization of religious life, rather than through a process of religious disengagement. These results align with the perspectives of José Casanova, Charles Taylor, and Nilüfer Göle, all of whom advocate for an analysis of secularization within its distinct cultural and historical context.

Fourth, the study offers a methodological contribution by utilizing confirmatory factor analysis and hierarchical regression within a Turkish sample. This approach enhances the psychometric evidence for the relevance of modernity and secularity scales across various cultural contexts. In summary, the research contributes significantly to sociological discussions by demonstrating that the processes of modernization and secularization in Türkiye are hybrid, contextually reliant, and intricately interconnected. This renders the study an invaluable asset for academics investigating religion, youth culture, and social transformation in modern societies.

### 1.8. Ethical Principles of the Study

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Institute of Social Sciences in order to conduct the study. In the first part of the questionnaire form, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and it was stated that they had the right to withdraw from the



study at any time. Reference is made for the scales used. For the Secularity Scale, the permission of Volkan Ertit, who prepared the scale, was obtained.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to debates on modernization and secularization through the dynamics of a university (Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University-KSÜ) located in Kahramanmaraş, an Anatolian city in Turkey. Unlike studies conducted in major cities, this research examines the experiences of youth in a context where traditional values remain strong and modernization processes unfold in unique ways. Additionally, it is important in demonstrating how secularization is experienced not as a classical departure from religion but as a process of individualization and reinterpretation of religious practices.

The study's hypothesis is that modernization and secularization processes do not entirely eliminate individuals' religious beliefs and worship practices but rather transform them into a more individualized and personalized form. Among students at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, as the level of modernization increases, so does the tendency toward secularization, though this does not lead to the complete abandonment of religious beliefs. In this context, this study has 3 hypotheses.

H1: Modernization positively affects individuals' secularization tendencies.

H2: Modernization positively affects the daily life of individuals in the direction of secularization.

H3: Modernization positively affects individuals' perception of faith-worship in the direction of secularization.

Model 1. Modernization increases students' tendency towards secularization.

Modernization  Secularization

Model 2. Modernization affects everyday life and perceptions of faith and worship.

Modernization  Everyday Life

Modernization  Faith - Worship

The findings of the study reveal that there is a positive but relatively weak relationship between modernity and secularization, while there are quite strong links between secularization and daily life practices and religious inclinations. These results help us understand the unique nature of secularization in the Turkish context and provide important clues about how young people reinterpret their religious values in the modern world.

### 1.9. The Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted only among students from Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, which may not fully represent Turkey's diverse youth population. The participants mostly came from low-educated families, meaning the findings may not apply to students from more educated or urbanized backgrounds. The study relied solely on quantitative survey data analyzed via SPSS, which may overlook deeper subjective experiences. Qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups) could provide richer insights into how students perceive modernization and secularization. The use of predefined scales (modernity and secularity scales) may not capture local nuances of how these concepts are experienced in Turkey. The study is cross-sectional, meaning it captures attitudes at a single point in time. A longitudinal study could reveal how these perceptions change over time, especially given Turkey's rapidly shifting sociopolitical climate.

### 2. The Unfinished Project: Modernity's Broken Promises

Modernization is a process involving fundamental transformations in the economic, social, cultural, and political structures of individuals and societies. Historically, this concept took shape in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. Modernization represents the transition from traditional to modern societies, encompassing shifts in thought patterns, gender roles, institutional structures, and economic relations. It is also closely tied to the adoption of Western values, technology transfer, and new governance models. In this sense, modernization is not merely an end goal but rather a dynamic process driving societal change.<sup>41</sup>

A key component of modernization is rationalization, which refers to individuals and social institutions embracing logic and scientific reasoning while moving away from traditional beliefs and practices. This process fosters more systematic and organized societal structures while emphasizing individual freedom and agency. Modernization leads to radical changes in gender roles, family structures, and the role of religion in society, ultimately influencing living standards and inter-social relations.<sup>42</sup>

Secularization, often considered a later stage of modernization, describes the declining influence of religion in social and individual life, where religious references hold less sway in daily affairs.<sup>43</sup> Broadly, modernization enables individuals to redefine their identities and adopt new lifestyles. Taking Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University as an example, the institution's embrace of modern educational approaches can be seen as an effort to equip individuals with the tools

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41 Jean Baudrillard, "Modernity", *CTheory* 11/3 (1987), 63–72.

42 Bryan Wilson, *Rationality: Key Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Basil Blackwell, 1970).

43 Mehmet Ali Kirman, *Din Sosyolojisi Terimleri Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Rağbet, 2011).

needed for contemporary life. Here, the transformation of the education system, the integration of scientific knowledge, and innovative approaches to societal values reflect the manifestations of modernization at the university level.

The concept of modernization provides a fundamental framework for understanding societal transformation. It can be examined across various disciplines, spanning individuals to institutions. Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University serves as a concrete example of how modernization and secularization influence individuals and social structures, allowing us to assess their impact on daily life and education.

However, modernization is not just a developmental process—it is also a site of conflict.<sup>44</sup> The innovations brought by modernization often create tension with traditional structures and values, sometimes leading to social divisions and identity crises. Yet, the opportunities and dynamic changes offered by modernization also create avenues for societal progress. Therefore, understanding modernization requires examining it not only as a historical process but also as a social, political, and cultural transformation.

### 3. Secularization as A Multidimensional Process

Secularization refers to the decline in the prestige and influence of the supernatural realm—including religion, quasi-religious structures, folk beliefs, and other metaphysical doctrines—at both individual and societal levels over a specific period within a given society.<sup>45</sup> This process, wherein religion's impact on society gradually diminishes and becomes less determinative in private and public life, represents a complex phenomenon that significantly shapes the social, political, and cultural dynamics of nations. The primary drivers of secularization manifest in areas such as transformations in social structures, the proliferation of scientific thought, and the expansion of individual freedoms. Particularly during periods of rapid industrialization and urbanization, global trends have shown a marked decline in people's adherence to religious beliefs. As exemplified by Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, traces of secularization are evident in educational policies, legislative activities, and societal norms.

In this context, universities play a pivotal role in secularization processes. Educational institutions provide a critical platform for younger generations to embrace free thought and question religion's influence on social life.<sup>46</sup> Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, located in a region with a predominantly Muslim population, develops programs that promote secular values and academic freedom. Such approaches not only reshape educational paradigms but

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44 Aydın Yaka, *Sosyoloji Yazıları: Çatışma Kültüründen Uzlaşma Kültürüne* (İstanbul: Gündoğan Yayınları, 2018).

45 Volkan Ertit, *Sekülerleşme Teorisi* (Ankara: Liberte Yayınları, 2019).

46 Muammer C. Muşt, *Sekülerleşme Laiklik Demokrasi ve Eğitim* (Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, 1999).

also redefine how individuals express religious beliefs in societal contexts. The secularization of education broadens intellectual and cultural perspectives while reinforcing the principle of separating religious and state affairs.

One of the most significant factors determining the transformation of individuals' relationship with religion is the knowledge and worldview brought forth by modern science. Secularization tends to reduce religion's influence not only as a societal authority but also on individuals' spiritual lives.<sup>47</sup> This shift enables individuals to form their own value judgments and freely pursue existential questions. Concurrently, the ambiguity in political systems' relationship with religion has led to the emergence of secular orders and the decline of religion's role in the public sphere.

Definitions of secularization must account for the interplay between individual and institutional dimensions. Individuals' religious beliefs are often shaped by societal structures, education systems, and cultural norms. Institutional secularization, on the other hand, involves the clear separation of state and religion, the withdrawal of religious authorities from politics, and the secularization of education systems.<sup>48</sup> Thus, secularization is not merely a process of declining religious belief but a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing numerous facets of societal transformation. This process highlights the intricate tension between religion and modern life.

#### 4. The Relationship Between Modernization and Secularization

The relationship between modernization and secularization lies at the heart of sociological and political debates. Modernization refers to the process of transformation in economic, social, and cultural spheres within societies, while secularization denotes the gradual withdrawal of religion from public life and individual experiences. The interaction between these two concepts is complex and multifaceted, as modernization is often seen as a dynamic that fosters secularization by replacing traditional beliefs and practices with a more rational and scientific worldview. The influence of the Enlightenment played a crucial role in this transition, encouraging individuals to seek solutions to societal problems through reason and science.<sup>49</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, the connection between modernization and secularization has been examined by various thinkers. Bruno Latour argues that modernity is a myth, asserting that religion and science do not exist as alternatives but rather as mutually shaping forces.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Max Weber's conceptual framework on secularization offers insights into how industrializa-

47 Peter Harrison, 'Science and Secularization', *Intellectual History Review* 1/27 (2017), 47–70.

48 Inger Furseth, 'Secularization and the Role of Religion in State Institutions', *Social Compass* 50/2 (2003), 191–202.

49 Immanuel Kant, *Aydınlanma Nedir?* çev. A. Cevizci (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2008).

50 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

tion and bureaucratization influence religion. Weber highlights that this process occurs as traditional religious authorities are replaced by rational reasoning and scientific thought in individuals' lives.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the social changes brought about by modernization have accelerated the redefinition of individuals' relationships with religion. Increasingly, people view religious beliefs as less determinative and construct their personal and social identities around secular values.

In practical terms, the effects of modernization on secularization manifest differently across regions. In Western societies, education systems, laws, and social norms have adopted a secular approach aimed at reducing religion's influence.<sup>52</sup> However, modernization has also led to the resurgence of religious and traditional elements in some societies. This phenomenon has given rise to the politicization of religious identity and, at times, religious revival movements that contradict modernization dynamics.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, modernization and secularization remain complex, interrelated phenomena that continue to shape the dynamics of contemporary societies.

### **5. Cultural Interactions in Modernization and Secularization Processes**

Cultural interactions play a significant role in shaping societal dynamics within modernization and secularization processes. Since its establishment, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University has become a hub for such interactions, creating an academic and social platform where diverse cultural elements converge. The university fosters a multicultural environment, encouraging cultural exchange at both local and international levels through symposiums, workshops, and cultural events.

With 1,850 international students from 64 different countries—538 in associate degree programs, 1,282 in undergraduate programs, and 30 in graduate programs—international students constitute approximately 4.9% of the total student population. As of 2023, the university has established academic partnerships with 49 universities under the Mevlana Program, 80 universities through Erasmus+, and 168 departments/programs, along with 26 bilateral cooperation agreements with institutions worldwide. Notably, interactions between local communities and university students have contributed to the modernization of Kahramanmaraş's cultural identity.

Moreover, the university examines how global cultural trends are adopted and reshaped at the local level through research projects and academic prac-

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51 Michael W. Hughey, "The Idea of Secularization in the Works of Max Weber: A Theoretical Outline", *Qualitative Sociology* 2 (1979), 85–111.

52 Sascha Becker et al., "Education Promoted Secularization", *Institute for the Study of Labor IZA Discussion Papers* 8016 (2014).

53 Jan A. Ali, "Modernity, Its Crisis and Islamic Revivalism", *Religions* 14/1 (2022), 15.

tices. Its educational programs provide students with international perspectives across disciplines, helping them understand the dynamics of cultural exchange. Multidisciplinary research conducted in various departments highlights the balance between local cultural elements and global trends. These interactions stimulate intriguing processes in individual and collective identity development while preserving cultural richness.

The significance of cultural interactions in contemporary societies extends to social cohesion and integration. Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University facilitates cultural dialogues at local and international levels, bringing diverse communities together and strengthening social bonds. Such exchanges are indispensable for navigating the challenges of modernization and adapting to changes brought by secularization. In conclusion, cultural interactions serve as a critical tool for individuals and societies in redefining their identities amid transformative social processes.

## **6. Modernization-Secularization and Religious Values**

Modernization is a transformative process that brings profound changes to the social, economic, and cultural structures of societies. This process creates an environment where traditional values and norms are questioned and restructured. While religious values serve as important reference points shaping relationships between individuals and communities, modernization enables these values to become more firmly established while fostering respect and tolerance toward other belief systems. Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University serves as an exemplary case for observing this interaction through its multicultural environment. The university's educational programs, research initiatives, and community contributions are crucial for understanding the place of religious identity and values within modern social structures. Higher education expands individuals' intellectual horizons, allowing them to critically examine traditional beliefs while recognizing the existence of diverse cultural faiths.

The transformation of traditional values in Kahramanmaraş as part of modernization is particularly noteworthy. In this context, the efforts of younger generations to access modern knowledge while maintaining harmony with traditional beliefs during their education are especially significant. The integration of religious education with modern scientific instruction enables individuals to uphold moral-religious values while remaining open to contemporary thought. The university's educational strategies encourage the reinterpretation and development of principles and values within a modern framework. Thus, the institution not only provides academic knowledge but also empowers students to play an active role in societal transformation.

However, the opportunities and challenges presented by modernization prompt individuals to re-examine their identities and value systems. Within this

dynamic, preserving and strengthening moral-religious values becomes particularly important in the modernization process. The case of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University demonstrates the need to maintain a balance between modernization and moral-religious values, requiring continuous updates to educational policies and social norms in light of global developments. This balance will contribute to individuals' spiritual and intellectual growth while supporting social harmony and progress.

### **7. The Transformative Impact of Secularization on Societal Dynamics**

Secularization emerges as a process with profound effects on societal dynamics, influencing not only individuals' belief systems but also playing a decisive role in social structures, political dynamics, and cultural norms. As observed in the case of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, the secularization process has the potential to redefine education, public space, and individual freedoms. The secularization of the education system facilitates the prominence of diverse thought patterns and scientific methodologies, thereby fostering a pluralistic approach in academic studies. The university transforms into a space where different viewpoints can coexist while cultivating an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue among students.

Another significant impact of secularization lies in the transformation of social norms. The diminishing influence of religious authorities on individuals leads to more personal and rational approaches in determining moral and ethical values. This shift promotes greater acceptance of modern concepts such as gender equality, human rights, and democratic participation. Students and faculty members at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University actively participate in shaping these new social norms. This intellectual environment not only allows individuals to explore their identities but also creates a broader metamorphosis within society. However, these changes brought by secularization also raise concerns among some groups about preserving religious and cultural values, highlighting the existence of diverse perspectives within society.

Ultimately, the effects of secularization extend beyond the individual level, resonating within broader societal structures. The opportunities provided by Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University support people in acquiring knowledge through education and fostering intellectual development, while simultaneously creating a decisive platform for social transformation. In this context, the framework offered by secularization influences not only individuals but also the process of reshaping societal structures.



## 8. Findings

### 8.1. Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Variables

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	218	63.6	Village	46	13.4
Male	125	36.4	Town	5	1.5
Total	343	100.0	District	82	23.9
<b>Mother's Education Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	City	141	41.1
Primary School	197	57.4	Metropolitan Area	69	20.1
Middle School	48	14.0	Total	343	100.0
High School	59	17.2	<b>Faculties Collected Data</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
University	34	9.9	Faculty of Health Sciences	59	17.2
MA/Ph. D.	5	1.5	Faculty of Medicine	19	5.5
Total	343	100.0	Vocational Schools	88	25.7
<b>Father's Education Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	Faculty of Education	14	4.1
Primary School	116	33.8	Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences	29	8.5
Middle school	76	22.2	Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences	41	12.0
High School	83	24.2	Faculty of Theology	43	12.5
University	54	15.7	Faculty of Engineering and Architecture	19	5.5

Table 1. Continued

MA/Ph. D.	14	4.1	Other	31	9
Total	343	100.0	Total	343	100.0
Income					
Less than 30000	158	48.9			
30001-50000	83	25.7			
More than 50001	82	25.4			
Total	323	100.0			
Unanswered	20				

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of demographic and socio-economic characteristics in the study. The research sample shows that female participants outnumber males by approximately 2:1. The majority of respondents reside in provincial and district centers, while metropolitan and rural dwellers are underrepresented. Mothers' education levels are predominantly limited to primary schooling, with a notably low percentage having attained higher education. Fathers generally demonstrate higher educational attainment compared to mothers, though university-level education remains relatively uncommon in both groups. Approximately half of the participants belong to the low-income bracket, while middle and high-income groups show nearly equal distribution. In terms of faculty representation, Vocational Schools contributed the highest number of respondents, followed by significant participation from the Faculties of Theology and Economics/Administrative Sciences.

8.2. Correlation, Reliability, and Factor Loadings

Table 2. Correlation and Reliability Values

	$\overline{X}$	SS	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Modernity (1)	3.904	.707	(.51)			
Secularization (2)	3.735	.972	.273***	(.97)		
Everyday Life (3)	3.192	1.094	.261***	.922***	(.95)	
Faith - Worship (4)	4.277	1.027	.238***	.911***	.679***	(.97)

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001 Values in parentheses are reliability values.

Table 2 is a correlation matrix with mean scores, standard deviations, correlations and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) between four different

concepts (Modernity, Secularization, Everyday Life and Faith-Worship). The high mean score in the Faith-Worship dimension suggests that the sample shows a strong tendency in this regard. The high standard deviation in Everyday Life indicates that the participants have different experiences on this issue.

There is a very high correlation between Secularization, Everyday Life and Faith-Worship. This means that these variables are closely related to each other. The weak correlation of modernity with the other variables indicates that it may have an independent structure from the others. All scales show high reliability ( $\alpha > 0.90$ ), confirming that the measurements are consistent. The low standard deviation for modernity is interpreted in favor of consistency.

The very high correlation between Secularization, Everyday Life and Faith-Worship indicates that these concepts measure the same construct. This can be examined through factor analysis. Modernity is a dimension that differs from other variables. While Faith-Worship has the highest mean, Everyday Life has the lowest mean. This indicates that respondents attach more importance to faith practices, while their perceptions of daily life are more diverse. The high correlation between Secularization and Faith-Worship indicates that these two concepts do not contradict each other (and may even be parallel).

### 8.3. Consistency of Confirmatory Factor Structure

**Table 3.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results.

	$\Delta\chi^2$	DF	$\Delta\chi^2/sd$	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	GFI
<b>Modernity</b>	9.992	4	2.498 good fit	.066 Acceptable	.937 Acceptable	.941 Acceptable	.989 good fit
<b>Secularity</b>	669.023	270	2.478 good fit	.066 Acceptable	.950 good fit	.950 good fit	.855 Acceptable

Table 3 presents the results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted with the help of structural equation modeling (AMOS-SEM). The fit indices obtained meet the acceptable or good fit indices in the literature. It can be concluded that construct validity is achieved within the framework of the results obtained. Shi<sup>54</sup> et al. reviewed studies arguing that  $CFI \geq 0.90$  is sufficient. Kenny<sup>55</sup> et al. suggests that CFI may be misleading in some cases (e.g., in models with low degrees of freedom) and suggests looking at other indices. In line with these

54 Shuobo Shi, Youyun Liang, Ee Lui Ang & Huimin Zhao. "Delta Integration CRISPR-Cas (Di-CRISPR) in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*". *Methods in Molecular Biology* 1927 (2019), 73-91.

55 David A.Kenny, Burcu Kaniskan & D. Betsy McCoach "The Performance of RMSEA in Models with Small Degrees of Freedom". *Sociological Methods & Research*, 44/3 (2015), 486-507.

examples of flexibility in the literature, CFI=.937 for the Modernity model can be used as long as it is consistent with other indices and supported by RMSEA.<sup>56</sup>

8.4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Modernity’s Predictive Effects

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Analysis Table.

		B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p	F	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
1	(constant)	2.270	.284		7.989	.000	27.44***	.074	.072
	Modernity	.375	.072	.273	5.238	.000			
2	(constant)	1.612	.321		5.022	.000	25.02***	.068	.066
	Modernity	.405	.081	.261	5.003	.000			
3	(constant)	2.928	.303		9.658	.000	20.45***	.057	.054
	Modernity	.346	.076	.238	4.522	.000			

Dependent variable, model 1 Secularization, model 2 Everyday Life, model 3 Faith-Worship (\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001)

Table 4 shows the analysis of 3 different models developed for the study. In the 1st model, the independent variable (Modernity) has a significant and positive effect on the dependent variable (Secularization) (.273). Modernization positively affects individuals’ secularization tendencies. The sub-dimensions of secularization, namely everyday life (.261) and faith-worship (.238), were also evaluated within the scope of the research. In the 2nd model, the independent variable (Modernity) has a significant and positive effect on the dependent variable (everyday life) (.271). Modernization positively affects the daily life of individuals in the direction of secularization. In the 3rd model, the independent variable (Modernity) has a significant and positive effect on the dependent variable (faith-worship) (.238). Modernization positively affects individuals’ perception of faith-worship in the direction of secularization.

Conclusion

The processes of modernization and secularization have profoundly affected social dynamics, the intellectual and religious structure of individuals, and led to efforts to create a new social order through changing value systems. The results of these processes have had significant effects not only on the individual level but also on social, economic and political structures. It is noteworthy that secularization has brought benefits in terms of individual freedoms and social equality, as well as the weakening of traditional belief systems and social norms.

56 Li-tze Hu - Peter M. Bentler, “Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria versus New Alternatives”, *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 6/1 (2009), 1–55.

While this can strengthen social integration, it can also lead to negative effects such as identity crises and social conflicts.

Especially in the 20th century, when modernization accelerated, traditional structures in many societies underwent a major transformation. The transformation of social norms and values has reshaped individuals' worldview, lifestyle and social relations. To the extent that secularization has reduced the role of religion in social life, it has also increased the political and social participation of individuals and enabled them to have more say in their own lives. However, this process of transformation has had serious consequences, such as the collapse of social structures built on religious foundations, paving the way for the emergence of deep contradictions in the relations between the individual and society.

This study aims to understand how young individuals perceive the processes of modernization and secularization and the effects of these processes on their thoughts, values and life practices in Kahramanmaraş, which has an important position in the socio-cultural structure of Turkey. This research, which was conducted on the sample of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University students, provided important findings at both theoretical and empirical levels and enabled a sociological evaluation of the reflections of modernization and secularization phenomena on young generations in Turkey.

This study was conducted with the sample of Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University students in order to examine the effects of modernization and secularization processes on individuals' thoughts, values, and lifestyles. Conducted in Kahramanmaraş, which has an important place in Turkey's socio-cultural diversity, this study aims to understand how young individuals perceive the concepts of modernization and secularization and how these concepts relate to their daily life, beliefs, and worship practices. In the study, the survey technique was used as a quantitative data collection method, and the data obtained were analyzed with the SPSS program. The questions directed to the participants were categorized under the headings of perception of modernity, secular life tendencies, levels of religious belief and worship, and daily life practices. In this context, both modernity and secularity scales were used. Correlation analyses conducted on the data obtained from 343 students revealed that there were significant relationships between these four variables. According to the findings, a positive and significant relationship was observed between modernity and secularization ( $r = 0.273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, statistically significant relationships were found between modernity and daily life practices ( $r = 0.261$ ) and faith-worship ( $r = 0.238$ ). The most striking result is that there are very strong positive correlations between secularization and daily life ( $r = 0.922$ ) and faith-worship ( $r = 0.911$ ). This suggests that secularization is not experienced in the classical sense of opposition to or distancing from religion, but rather as a transformation in individual practices and lifestyles.

It was observed that the participants were generally both open to modern values and maintained their religious beliefs and practices. This situation indicates that the young generations in Turkey are able to sustain the modernization process together without conflicting with religious values. The research shows that secularization can be evaluated not as a one-way religious dissolution in society, but rather as the emergence of individual interpretations and alternative lifestyles. Another striking result of the research is the high correlation between secularization and religious practices. This can be interpreted as a tendency of “individualization of religious life” rather than “disappearance of religious values” in the Turkish context.

On the other hand, the weaker association of modernity with other variables suggests that modern values operate relatively independently of religious life. The fact that the participants come from low-educated families and inequalities in income distribution indicate that modernization and secularization processes intersect with socioeconomic factors. The predominance of health sciences and vocational schools in the sample constitutes a limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings. This study points to a social transformation process in which modernization and secularization can coexist in the context of university youth in Turkey. The study reveals the need to rethink the sociological concepts of modernization and secularization and the importance of addressing these processes together with local cultural dynamics. In this context, it is recommended that future studies should be supported by qualitative and quantitative data to conduct more in-depth analyses.

According to the main findings of the study, a positive and statistically significant relationship was found between modernity and secularization ( $r = 0.273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H1. This finding indicates that modernization fosters secular tendencies and as individuals turn towards modern values, they become more open to secular lifestyles. However, the relationship between modernity and daily life practices ( $r = 0.261$ ) and levels of faith and worship ( $r = 0.238$ ) was also found to be significant. This reveals that modernization affects not only the intellectual structures of individuals, but also their daily lives and religious practices. However, the strength of this relationship suggests that secularization does not necessarily entail a rejection of religion but rather manifests as a transformation in how individuals practice and interpret faith. This aligns with theories of “religious individualization,” where personal belief systems coexist with modern lifestyles.<sup>57</sup>

However, the most striking and unique finding of the study is the extremely high correlation levels observed between secularization and daily life ( $r = 0.922$ )

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57 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging (Making Contemporary Britain)* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994); Arthur Asa Berger, *Everyday Life in the Postmodern World: An Introduction to Cultural Studies* (Springer, 2022), 46.

and faith and worship ( $r = 0.911$ ). These findings support H2 and H3, indicating that secularization among Turkish youth does not lead to the abandonment of religion but rather to a reinterpretation of religious practices in a more personalized and flexible manner. This challenges the classical secularization thesis, which predicts the decline of religion in modern societies.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the data suggest a “post-secular” reality where religion adapts to modernity rather than disappearing.<sup>59</sup> While the Western-centered understanding of secularization is generally defined as the decline or disappearance of the influence of religion in social life, in this study, secularization is manifested in the form of redefining, interpreting, and transforming religious practices at the individual level rather than individuals completely abandoning religious life. In other words, the process of secularization here is not a process of religious exclusion, but a process of privatization and individualization of religious life.

Young people in Turkey do not face a conflict between modernization and their religious identities; rather, they are able to maintain these two processes concurrently and harmoniously, as evidenced by the participants’ openness to modern values while still upholding their religious beliefs and practices. Although this conclusion suggests that Turkish society is capable of cultural heterogeneity and social change, it also shows that secularization should be viewed as a rise in alternative lifestyles and personal interpretations rather than as a one-way breakdown of religion in society. Modernization’s independent influence on religious life is clear. The weaker associations between modernity and other variables (daily life:  $r = 0.261$ ; faith-worship:  $r = 0.238$ ) imply that modern values operate somewhat independently of religious life. This may indicate that while modernization introduces new social norms (e.g., individualism, technological engagement), it does not necessarily erode religious identity but may instead coexist with it in hybrid forms.<sup>60</sup>

Modern values function largely independently of religious life, as seen by the fact that modernity has a weaker correlation with variables other than secularization. This circumstance implies that people do not entirely give up their religious convictions during the modernization process; rather, they interpret both in various ways within their own personal contexts. According to this theory, modernity has not entirely broken with traditional religious systems, despite being linked to principles like individual freedom, reason, and critical thinking, particularly among young people.

This research demonstrates that modernization and secularization among Turkish university youth do not follow a linear path of religious decline but instead reflect a dynamic process of adaptation and reinterpretation. The findings

58 Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 89.

59 Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity”, trans. S. Ben-Habib, *New German Critique* 22 (1981), 3–14.

60 Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2019).



support the hypothesis that modernization leads to secularization in the form of individualized religiosity rather than outright rejection of faith. This calls for a re-evaluation of classical secularization theories, emphasizing the need to consider local cultural and socioeconomic contexts. In conclusion, this study points to a process of social transformation in which modernization and secularization can coexist in the context of university youth in Turkey. The research findings reveal that secularization is not only a move away from religious values but also a process of redefining and experiencing religious life at the individual level. In this context, the concepts of secularization and modernization need to be rethought in consideration of local cultural dynamics. As in the case of Turkey, it should be acknowledged that the secularization process may have a multidimensional, flexible, and locally specific structure.

This study has provided clear answers to the three main research questions at statistical, theoretical, and contextual levels: H1: Modernization increases secularization tendencies. H2: Modernization transforms daily life in a secular direction. H3: Modernization transforms the perception of faith and worship, but does not eliminate religion. All the hypotheses are confirmed. In this context, the study empirically demonstrates that secularization in Turkey is experienced not as a process of becoming irreligious, but rather as individualized religiosity.

In the context of the recommendations, the policies suggested for a healthier progression of the modernization and secularization processes vary. First of all, it is imperative to promote contemporary and critical thinking skills in the curriculum of the education system. Students should be provided with resources to help them make sense of the religious and cultural pluralism they encounter in society. In addition, the active participation of students and academic staff in these processes should be encouraged through seminars and workshops planned to be organized within the university. Furthermore, projects in collaboration with local communities have the potential to increase the university's impact on society. It is clear that all these efforts should support social transformation by building the university's educational policies on secular foundations and emphasizing scientific and ethical values in a way that reaches a wide audience. Future studies should explore these processes through interdisciplinary lenses, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to better capture the evolving relationship between modernity, secularity, and religion in Turkey and similar societies.

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