

Turkish Nationalism in 2025: Negotiating Islamism and Secularism in a Polarized Society

Galu Putri Fiere^{1*} & Surwandono²

^{1,2}International Relations, Fisipol, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Email: ¹galu.putri.isip22@mail.umy.ac.id, ²surwandono@umy.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines Turkish nationalism in 2025, focusing on its role as a stabilizing force amid ideological polarization between Islamism and secularism. Despite significant economic pressures and political differences, Turkish society has not experienced large-scale social unrest, suggesting the persistence of a shared national identity. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review, institutional reports, and discourse analysis, this study explores how nationalism operates as a unifying framework across ideological divisions. The analysis is supported by quantitative data indicating continued public trust in state institutions, reflecting a collective commitment to national cohesion. Drawing on Ernest Renan's concept of the nation as a "daily plebiscite," the findings show that Turkish nationalism is continuously reproduced through social and political practices that enable coexistence between competing ideologies. However, the study also highlights limitations in its inclusivity, as minority groups such as Kurds and Alevis experience a more complex relationship with the dominant national narrative. This study contributes to the understanding of nationalism as a dynamic and negotiated process, functioning both as a mechanism of stability and a site of contestation in contemporary Turkey.

Penelitian ini mengkaji nasionalisme Turki pada tahun 2025, dengan fokus pada perannya sebagai kekuatan penstabil di tengah polarisasi ideologis antara Islamisme dan sekularisme. Meskipun menghadapi tekanan ekonomi yang signifikan dan perbedaan politik, masyarakat Turki belum mengalami kerusuhan sosial berskala besar, yang menunjukkan ketahanan identitas nasional yang bersama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan tinjauan literatur, laporan institusional, dan analisis wacana, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana nasionalisme beroperasi sebagai kerangka kerja pemersatu melintasi pembagian ideologis. Analisis ini didukung oleh data kuantitatif yang menunjukkan kepercayaan publik yang berkelanjutan terhadap institusi negara, yang mencerminkan komitmen kolektif terhadap kohesi nasional. Mengacu pada konsep Ernest Renan tentang bangsa sebagai "plebisit harian," temuan menunjukkan bahwa nasionalisme Turki terus direproduksi

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*Corresponding Author: Galu Putri Fiere



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melalui praktik-praktik sosial dan politik yang memfasilitasi koeksistensi antara ideologi-ideologi yang bersaing. Namun, studi ini juga menyoroti batasan dalam inklusivitasnya, karena kelompok minoritas seperti Kurdi dan Alevi mengalami hubungan yang lebih kompleks dengan narasi nasional dominan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang nasionalisme sebagai proses yang dinamis dan dinegosiasikan, yang berfungsi baik sebagai mekanisme stabilitas maupun sebagai arena perselisihan di Turki kontemporer.

Keywords: Turkey pluralized; Nationalism; Islamism; Secularism

Introduction

Economic crises are often the main triggers for disintegration and political tensions in various countries. However, the phenomenon that will occur in Turkey in 2025 shows something different. Amid high inflation and a difficult economic situation, Turkey has not experienced a major political crisis or conflict that threatens national unity. In fact, the division of society between Islamist and secular groups has often been considered a potential source of conflict. Uniquely, this division has actually been managed productively by the government to strengthen the unity of the nation ¹. Based on initial observations, it can be seen how Turkish nationalism appears as an adhesive force, with state symbols such as the national flag being flown in various private and public spaces as a form of shared pride.

As we all know, Turkey has a very complex ideological history given its political and social journey full of dynamics and great changes. After the collapse of the last Islamic Caliphate and the great Ottoman Islamic empire, Turkey underwent a significant transformation under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who proclaimed the Republic of Turkey in 1924. Atatürk advocated secularism as the foundation of the new state, which separated religious affairs from government and encouraged massive Western-style modernization. This policy not only marked the end of the era of the caliphate, but also brought about major changes in Turkey's social and political structure, ² laying the foundations for a strong secular nationalism and a new state identity .

However, Turkey's ideological history does not stop at secularism alone. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of a wave of revival groups that

¹ Adib Khairil Musthafa and Hanik Purwati, "Sejarah Dan Transformasi Politik Turki: Pergulatan Sekularisme Dan Islamisme," *Jurnal Tamaddun : Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 10, no. 1 (2022).

² Musthafa and Purwati, "Sejarah Dan Transformasi Politik Turki: Pergulatan Sekularisme Dan Islamisme."

bring Islamic ideology into the political realm, led by figures such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who is often referred to as "Neo-Ottoman." This resurgence reflects the ongoing tension between secular nationalism and religious nationalism that characterizes contemporary Turkish politics. The conflict and interaction between these two ideological groups suggests that Turkey's national identity is constantly contested and evolving, making Turkey an important case study for understanding how modern nationalism can be realized through complex and multidimensional historical struggles³.

Since the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey has entered a new chapter in the formation of its national identity based on the principles of secularism and modernization. Atatürk changed the structure of government from an Islamic-based sultanate to a republic that emphasized the separation of religion from state affairs. The policies that were systematically enacted removed Islamic symbols and institutions from the public sphere and changed the political and cultural orientation of the country towards the West. This transformation did not come suddenly, but rather was the culmination of various reform movements that had taken place since the end of the Ottoman Empire, but Atatürk became a central figure who decisively formalized Turkey's new direction as a modern and secular state⁴.

Although historically tensions between these two ideologies have often been a source of social and political conflict, especially when the economic situation deteriorates, the phenomenon that emerges in 2025 points in the opposite direction. Based on the observations by the researchers, in the midst of inflationary pressures and declining purchasing power, Turkish society is not divided into an open conflict between secular supporters of Kemalism and Islamist groups. On the contrary, the economic crisis that has the potential to trigger instability is instead a momentum for the state to reduce potential friction, by embracing symbols of nationalism that are able to cross ideological boundaries. State symbols, such as national flags, religious ritual activities, and modern public spaces, exist side by side as a channel of expression of shared identity.

This condition indicates that Turkey is undergoing a significant transformation, especially under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and

³ Musthafa and Purwati, "Sejarah Dan Tranformasi Politik Turki: Pergulatan Sekularisme Dan Islamisme."

⁴ Susanti and Rahman, "Modernisme Dan Sekularisme Daulah Turki Utsmani Sebelum Era Mustafa Kemal Attaturk 1,2," *Integrative Perspectives of Social and Science Journal (IPSSJ)* 2, no. 1 (2025): 18–28.

the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Erdoğan has succeeded in bringing political Islamism to the center of the state stage, presenting a new face in the management of the state that was previously heavily tied to the secular principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's legacy. Erdoğan's approach does not necessarily reject secularism, but rather attempts to concoct Islamic values within the framework of the modern state, emphasizing morality, religious symbols, and Islamic identity in public life. This creates a new narrative that blurs the boundaries between religion and state, making Islam not only a personal guideline, but also a source of political legitimacy⁵.

Entering 2025, the socio-political context in Turkey shows the importance of re-evaluating the forms of nationalism that are developing in society. Tensions between secular and religious values continue to be an arena for identity contestation, especially after a series of geopolitical changes in the Middle East region and increasing domestic polarization. The Turkish government, through its control of the media and education, increasingly emphasizes a narrative of national identity that is integrated with Islam, which indirectly opposes the dominance of historical secularism. This transformation opens up space for the redefinition of Turkish nationalism—no longer just a pride in the heritage of a secular republic, but also as a cultural and religious revival in forming collective solidarity in the midst of global change⁶.

There are several articles that examine how Turkish nationalism has undergone a transformation both theoretically and politically. The first article by Sezen Ravanoğlu Yılmaz (2025) traces a paradigm shift in the study of Turkish nationalism, from a modernized approach to a focus on the role of the individual in everyday life.⁷ The second article by Ali Fuad Selvi (2023) discusses nation branding efforts by renaming "Turkey" to "Türkiye", as a populist and nationalist strategy to strengthen the country's image and President Erdoğan's political power⁸. Meanwhile, the third article by Enver Gülseven (2021) highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic was used by Turkey's political

⁵ Lutfi Rosyad Alfikri, Ahmad Sahide, and Kajian Timur Tengan, "Post Islamisme : Telaah Politik Turki Modern Era Erdogan," *Jurnal Ilmu Politik dan Komunikasi* XII, no. 1 (2022): 49–60.

⁶ Rosyad Alfikri, Sahide, and Timur Tengan, "Post Islamisme : Telaah Politik Turki Modern Era Erdogan."

⁷ Sezen Ravanoğlu Yılmaz, "Paradigm Shifts in the Literature on Turkish Nationalism: The Emergence of the Agency," *Alternatif Politika* 7, no. 1 (2025).

⁸ Ali Fuad Selvi, "'Türkiye,' Not 'Turkey': Nation Branding in the Age of Populism and Nationalism," *Journal of Language and Politics* 23 (November 2023).

elite to construct nationalist narratives in order to defend the country's ontological identity and security⁹.

Unlike the previous three studies that examined political symbols, nation branding, or shifting theories, this study tries to see how Turkish nationalism was formed in the midst of an economic crisis through the real convergence of secular values and Islamism. Nationalism comes from the word nation, which refers to a group of people who share common origins, culture, language, and the collective will to live together under one government¹⁰. Ernest Renan defines the nation as a daily plebiscite, meaning that a nation is continuously reproduced through the collective will of its people to remain united. This concept can be observed in the Turkish context in 2025, where both secular and Islamist groups—despite their ideological differences—continue to demonstrate a shared commitment to national unity¹¹.

This is reflected in the widespread use of national symbols such as the Turkish flag, as well as the tendency of both groups to avoid large-scale conflict amid economic crisis. In this sense, Turkish nationalism is not a fixed or homogeneous identity, but rather a negotiated social contract that is maintained through collective agreement across ideological lines.

Furthermore, Herder's concept of *Volksgeist* can be seen in how cultural and religious elements coexist within Turkish society. Secular-modern lifestyles and Islamic practices both function as expressions of national identity, indicating that Turkish nationalism incorporates multiple cultural layers rather than a single dominant narrative¹².

Meanwhile, the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, as discussed by Kant, is reflected in Turkey's position between Western-oriented secularism and the resurgence of Islamic identity. This dynamic shows that Turkish nationalism is shaped not only by internal cultural factors, but also by broader global influences. In contrast, cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Kant and Nussbaum, highlights openness and global solidarity beyond cultural or

⁹ Enver Gülseven, "Identity, Nationalism and the Response of Turkey to COVID-19 Pandemic," *Chinese Political Science Review* 6, no. 1 (2021): 40–62.

¹⁰ Kusnadi, "Menumbuhkan Sikap Nasionalisme Santri Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Musthafawiyah Di Megamendung Bogor" 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–14.

¹¹ Darsono Darsono, "Pembangunan Nasionalisme Indonesia Di Tengah Kekuatan Keragaman Budaya: Kasus Menguatnya Nasionalisme Papua Dalam Perspektif Multikulturalisme," *JURNAL ILMU SOSIAL dan ILMU POLITIK* 2, no. 1 (2022): 56.

¹² Darsono, "Pembangunan Nasionalisme Indonesia Di Tengah Kekuatan Keragaman Budaya: Kasus Menguatnya Nasionalisme Papua Dalam Perspektif Multikulturalisme."

national boundaries¹³. These perspectives often interact and challenge each other in contemporary discourse.

Based on initial observations, despite the difficult economic situation, mosques in big cities remain bustling with religious activities, while European-style nightlife centers also continue to live and become part of the life of urban people. This phenomenon shows the face of a new nationalism, where the division of values is managed as social capital to strengthen national unity. So this study seeks to focus on the relative absence of large-scale political unrest in 2025, despite economic pressure and ideological polarization, as an entry point to understand how nationalism functions as a stabilizing force.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach which aims to understand the meaning and dynamics of a phenomenon¹⁴, in this study is the nationalism of citizens in Turkey in 2025 in depth. The qualitative method was chosen because it is able to describe social phenomena in their natural context, by presenting rich descriptions through words, based on direct views from various sources of information.

The data based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews conducted in Turkey with selected informants, while secondary data were collected from international media (BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters), reports from institutions such as Freedom House and Pew Research Center, academic journals, and official government documents published between 2024 and 2025.

The analytical process was carried out in several systematic steps:

1. The researcher collected and organized relevant data from the selected sources.
2. The researcher read and reviewed the data to identify recurring themes related to nationalism, Islamism, and secularism.
3. The researcher compared narratives across different sources, such as media reports, institutional data, and interview results, to examine similarities, differences, and dominant patterns.

Furthermore, the findings from interviews were used to complement and validate the secondary data, particularly in understanding how nationalism is perceived at the societal level. Through this process, the study aims to provide a

¹³ Darsono, "Pembangunan Nasionalisme Indonesia Di Tengah Kekuatan Keragaman Budaya: Kasus Menguatnya Nasionalisme Papua Dalam Perspektif Multikulturalisme."

¹⁴ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2016).

comprehensive understanding of how Turkish nationalism is constructed and negotiated in public discourse amid economic crisis conditions.

Result and Discussion

Turkish Nationalism 2025

Turkish nationalism in 2025 reflects a dynamic process of negotiation between secular and Islamist ideologies. Rather than being a fixed or uniform identity, nationalism in Turkey emerges as a shared framework that accommodates ideological differences within society. On the one hand, civic nationalism rooted in Kemalist secularism remains influential, particularly among urban populations. On the other hand, the growing role of political Islam under the AKP introduces a religious dimension into national identity.

However, rather than resulting in open conflict, these two ideological orientations interact and coexist within a broader framework of nationalism. This suggests that Turkish nationalism functions as a space of negotiation, where different ideological groups maintain their differences while still sharing a common attachment to the nation. Citizens show their love for the country through respect for national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem, and the figure of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This view emphasizes the unity of the nation within the framework of the secular and modern nation-state, as inherited by the founder of the Republic of Turkey.

However, a major transformation occurred due to the increasing influence of political Islam in the life of the nation. Under the influence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), nationalism was increasingly associated with Islamic identity and nostalgia for the Ottoman caliphate. This form of nationalism no longer simply emphasizes loyalty to the state, but also to the religious and cultural values that are considered the authentic identity of the Turkish nation. This is evident in educational policies, media, and political narratives that link Turkey's glory to its Islamic heritage¹⁵.

In addition, this is also reflected in the attitude of Turkish citizens who are very close to the figure of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. Many people, especially nationalists and secularists, still consider Ataturk to be the main hero who brought Turkey into the modern era. These differences reflect the diversity of political and ideological views in Turkish

¹⁵ Nurul Fauziah et al., "Perkembangan Dinasti Utsmani/Ottoman: Kebangkitan Neo-Ottomanisme, Apakah Turki Menghidupkan Kembali Warisan Ottoman?," *JIIIC: Jurnal Intelektual Insan Cendekia* 2, no. 5 (2025): 8713–8728.

society today, which can also be seen in the way citizens interpret and use the National flag.

For some, the Turkish flag is a secular symbol and Atatürk's legacy that must be preserved, while for others, it also reflects the glory of Islam's past and the nation's religious identity. Even though they are different, both still make the flag a symbol of pride and love for the homeland¹⁶. Respect for the Turkish flag does not come by chance. The government has strictly regulated how flags can be used and maintained. This rule was made so that people do not use flags carelessly, such as making them inappropriate decorations or allowing them to touch the ground. Turkish citizens highly value this symbol of their country, and violations of the rules for the use of the flag can be subject to legal sanctions¹⁷. This was conveyed by a resource person, that:

"If there is abuse or insult to the national flag or symbol will be sanctioned by the government, the sanctions given can be in the form of imprisonment, fines or other regulations according to applicable regulations." (Informan 1).

The widespread use of national symbols such as the Turkish flag demonstrates their role as shared markers of identity across ideological groups. For secular groups, the flag represents the legacy of the modern republic, while for Islamist-oriented groups, it may also reflect historical and religious continuity.

This indicates that national symbols function as a unifying medium, enabling different interpretations while maintaining a shared sense of belonging. Despite the differences of opinion between Atatürk's and Erdogan's supporters, the spirit of Turkish nationalism remains high. Both those who are pro-secular and those who support Islamic values love their homeland alike. The Turkish flag remains a symbol of unity, and the love for the country continues to be passed on to the younger generation. The debate between Atatürk's modern values and Erdogan's religious approach may continue, but one thing is for sure that the Turkish people are proud to be part of their nation's rich, struggle-filled, and ever-growing history amid differences¹⁸.

These differences also show the diversity of political and ideological views in Turkish society today, which is also evident in the way citizens interpret and use the national flag. For some, especially those who support Atatürk's secular

¹⁶ Akhmad Fauzi, "Turkey Flag Sejarah, Simbolisme, Dan Penggunaannya – Jangkar Global Groups," 2025.

¹⁷ Fauzi, "Turkey Flag Sejarah, Simbolisme, Dan Penggunaannya – Jangkar Global Groups."

¹⁸ Akhmad Rizqon Khamami, "Kelompok Islam Nurcu Dan Negara: Penerimaan Muslim Atas Sekularisme," *Jurnal Dinamika Penelitian: Media Komunikasi Sosial Keagamaan* 23, no. 01 (2022): 1–14.

values and legacy, the Turkish flag is a symbol of pride over a modern national identity and separate from religion. Meanwhile, for more religious or conservative groups, the flag is also considered to represent the glory of Islam's past and the revival of Turkey's role in the Islamic world. Although its meanings vary, the flag remains a unifying symbol, as almost all Turkish citizens, regardless of their political background, uphold this symbol as a form of love for the homeland and national pride. Which is in line with the explanation of one of the speakers, that:

"For us, whether we are secular or Islamist supporters, the flag is still the symbol of Turkey. We may have different views, but our love for our homeland is the same." (Informan 2).

This is reinforced by Hoshino's article (2023) published on *Vivoglobal.id* explaining that Turkish nationalism has been an important factor since the time of the Ottoman Empire and has continued to develop into the official ideology of the state since the era of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Nationalism not only influenced politics and economics, but also shaped modern Turkish culture, including the reform of the language and lifestyle of the people. Despite its controversial side, nationalism remains the main force that maintains the integrity and identity of the Turkish nation to this day¹⁹.

According to the theory developed by Renan, the nation was formed not only because of racial or linguistic similarity, but because of a common desire to live together as a political community. Meanwhile, Anderson emphasized that the nation is an "imagined community" (*imagined community*), where people who don't even know each other directly still feel that they have the same collective identity²⁰. The widespread use of Turkish national symbols such as the flag and the homage to the nation's founding figures such as Mustafa Kemal Ataturk or President Erdogan reflect the formation of a strong imaginary community, which transcends ideological differences.

Ihsan's research (2024) shows that nationalism in Turkey is not just a passive spirit of nationalism, but has been the ideology of the state since the era of Ataturk. Nationalism in Turkey has even become an important instrument in the formation of modern state identity, which is rooted in language reform, secularization of public institutions, to people's lifestyles. In practice, Turkish nationalism developed dynamically, sometimes as inclusive as in the early days of the Republic, and at other times more exclusive or politicized, as seen in the

¹⁹ Pin Hoshino, "Nasionalisme Turki_ Sejarah, Perkembangan, Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Turki Modern - Vivoglobal," 2023.

²⁰ Darsono, "Pembangunan Nasionalisme Indonesia Di Tengah Kekuatan Keragaman Budaya: Kasus Menguatnya Nasionalisme Papua Dalam Perspektif Multikulturalisme."

Erdogan era with the strengthening of religious elements in state policies. However, both still make nationalism the axis of the country's identity and legitimacy²¹.

So this proves that nationalism is not singular, but can accommodate various ideological spectrums, both secular and religious. Despite the differences between Ataturk's and Erdogan's supporters, they remain within the same framework of nationalism, which is to love the homeland and respect state symbols such as flags and national leaders. In other words, Turkish nationalism exhibits a flexible and multivocal nature, capable of combining civic and ethno-religious elements in a single space of collective identity.

Identity Tensions and Social Negotiation

The tension between Islamism and secularism in Turkey is a long legacy of the country's political and social historical dynamics. Since the founding of the Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923, secularism has been used as the basis of the state's ideology to replace the Islamic-based Ottoman caliphate system. Ataturk carried out various major reforms such as the abolition of sharia law, the replacement of the Arabic script with Latin, and the closure of formal religious institutions. However, a strong Islamic identity among the community has never completely disappeared. Over time, especially since the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP Party to power, Islamic identity has been strengthened again in public life, creating an identity dualism that creates tensions between Islamist and secular groups²².

This tension not only arises at the ideological level, but also penetrates the spaces of the daily lives of Turkish citizens. Based on initial observations on the atmosphere of the city of Istanbul, it can be seen that the dynamics of the meeting of secular and Islamic values are very visible in the life of big cities in Turkey. On the one hand, mosques look crowded with worship activities, especially at prayer times. But on the other hand, European-style nightlife centers are also rife and become part of modern urban life. This phenomenon shows that Turkish citizens are able to combine religious and modern values in one social space, creating a new face of nationalism that is not only tied to a single ideology, but embraces diversity as part of the national identity

²¹ M Abdillah Ihsan, "Beyond the Arap Spring: Flakes of Prenation States Historical Heritage of the Arbs," *Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan, Pendidikan dan Kemasyarakatab* 15, no. 1 (2024): 1–23.

²² Luqman Al Hakim Ibnu Suud, Muhammad Munzir Azyumardi, and Muhammad Lutfi, "Upaya Sultan ABdul Hamid II Dalam Meminimalisir Sekularisme Turki Usmani," *Khaṣānah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2022): 1–14.

Later than that, many Turks had to engage in social negotiations to balance religious identity and the demands of secular-modernity. For example, women who wear the hijab can now access higher education and jobs in the public sector, something that was once prohibited under strict secular policies²³. On the other hand, secular groups feel that their freedom is threatened by the increasingly massive use of religious symbols and rhetoric in government and public spaces²⁴.

Based on observations, it can be seen that many women wear their hijab to enter campuses or work in the formal sector in government offices. This is quite interesting, considering that the use of the hijab during Kemal Ataturk's time was banned. This indicates that the Turkish people are carrying out a negotiation process to coexist in the midst of the tug-of-war between two different poles of value.

In Turkey, the government strategically uses mass media as an instrument to build national homogeneity to dampen social turmoil amid a prolonged economic crisis. By emphasizing a narrative of religious nationalism and anti-Western sentiments, authorities sought to distract the public from crucial issues such as skyrocketing inflation and declining living standards. This attempt to construct a uniform identity aims to artificially create a sense of "co-existence", where economic hardship is no longer seen as a failure of domestic policy, but is refracted as a form of collective sacrifice in order to defend the nation's sovereignty from external pressures.

This strategy is carried out by strengthening the dominance of partisan media that serves as a mouthpiece of government propaganda, while systematically narrowing the space for critical media to move through strict regulation and economic pressure. Pro-government media have consistently produced narratives blaming "foreign conspiracies" for Turkey's economic instability, effectively silencing criticism through national security rhetoric. In this unequal information ecosystem, the role of critical media that voices transparency and accountability is increasingly marginalized, so that the public loses access to alternative perspectives that can challenge the single narrative of the rulers.

Mass media and social media play a central role in shaping the perception of nationalism and citizen identity. Pro-government media often emphasize the

²³ Nurfadillah et al., "Pemikiran Modern Dalam Konteks Islam Global," *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 10 (2025).

²⁴ Luqman Al Hakim Ibnu Suud, Azyumardi, and Lutfi, "Upaya Sultan ABdul Hamid II Dalam Meminimalisir Sekularisme Turki Usmani."

narrative of religious nationalism, linking Islam to national pride and the struggle against "foreign intervention". On the other hand, independent or secular media have highlighted the importance of pluralism, individual rights, and the legacy of Ataturk's reforms as the foundation of the modern state. This contestation not only shapes public opinion, but also creates polarization, especially among the younger generation who actively consume information from various sources²⁵.

Education is also an important arena in the process of negotiating national identity. The curriculum under Erdogan's government has undergone revisions, incorporating more religious content and emphasizing the importance of Islamic moral values. For some circles, this is seen as an effort to strengthen the nation's character. But for others, this is seen as a form of "Islamization" of the education system that can erode the secular and scientific spirit that characterized post-Ataturk Turkish education. This tension has given rise to a wide debate in society about the future direction of the nation: whether to move towards a religious modern state, or to maintain secularism as the main identity of the state²⁶.

Based on the Pew Research Center Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey, Turkey demonstrates a complex dynamic in the relationship between education, national values, and public perceptions of state institutions. In early 2024, the Turkish Ministry of Education introduced a revised national curriculum emphasizing "Turkish values" and religious-based moral education, aimed at shaping a more religious and nationally committed generation²⁷.

This development reflects not merely an educational policy shift, but a broader effort by the state to actively construct national identity through the education system as a primary institutional medium. In this context, education functions as a strategic mechanism for transmitting national values that integrate elements of secularism and religiosity.

Quantitative data indicate that a majority of Turkish citizens continue to hold positive views toward key state institutions, with 78% expressing favorable perceptions of the police and 62% of the military²⁸. These institutions are often associated with national stability and collective identity. Additionally, variations emerge across educational levels, where individuals with lower levels of

²⁵ Khamami, "Kelompok Islam Nurcu Dan Negara: Penerimaan Muslim Atas Sekularisme."

²⁶ Weni Nuraeni, Alfiatus Sangadah, and Muhammad Fakhri Zaman, "Islam Politik Di Turki : Kebangkitan Partai Keadilan Dan Pembangunan (AKP)" (2025): 801–810.

²⁷ Laura Clancy, Jacob Poushter, and Sofia Ramones, "How People in Turkey View International Affairs" (Pew Research Center, 2024).

²⁸ Clancy, Poushter, and Ramones, "How People in Turkey View International Affairs."

education tend to show stronger support for government-led value formation compared to those with higher education backgrounds.

These findings can be interpreted through Ernest Renan's concept of the nation as a "daily plebiscite," referring to the continuous collective agreement among citizens to remain part of a unified political community. In the Turkish case, this agreement is not only expressed through symbolic or political discourse, but is systematically reproduced through the education system, which shapes how younger generations understand and internalize national identity.

Therefore, Turkish nationalism in 2025 can be understood as a form of institutional construction, where the education system plays a central role in mediating and negotiating between secular and Islamist values. Education thus functions not only as a tool of value transmission, but also as a space of ideological negotiation that is reflected in continued public support for state institutions and the persistence of national identity.

In the midst of these tensions, the majority of Turkish citizens actually show attractive identity flexibility. Although differences of opinion remain, the society has demonstrated the ability to nurture an inclusive nationalism, which is not only based on a particular religion or ideology, but on a sense of pride as a nation with a long history, rich culture, and a spirit of independence. The Turkish flag, the figure of Atatürk, as well as respect for tradition and religion, all coexist in Turkish social space. This process of social negotiation is not without challenges, but it is proof that Turkish nationalism is shaped not by a single ideology, but by the dynamics of dialogue and tension that continue to exist between groups in society²⁹.

Turkish Nationalism in Economic Crisis

Turkey's economic condition in recent years has been under severe pressure due to high inflation and currency weakness. In theory, this situation often triggers political tensions or waves of public protests that can threaten the stability of the country³⁰. However, the phenomenon that occurred in Turkey actually shows a different pattern: in the midst of difficult economic conditions, society is not divided, but instead strengthens the sense of togetherness within the framework of Turkish nationalism. This resilience is a marker of how nationalism functions as a social glue in times of crisis. According to

²⁹ Nuraeni, Sangadah, and Zaman, "Islam Politik Di Turki : Kebangkitan Partai Keadilan Dan Pembangunan (AKP)."

³⁰ Natasha Amani, "Meski Inflasi Tinggi Tapi Kekayaan Orang Turki Justru Naik, Kok Bisa?" (Jakarta: Liputan 6, 2024).

information provided by an informan, people's sense of nationalism is also a sign that they trust the government:

"Not all people always agree, but they avoid it by not taking the risk of protesting, because currently protests by the community are closely monitored by the government. However, the government still cares about the people because along with the large inflation that occurred, the government has also raised the minimum wage which used to be only 5,000,000 rupiahs, now it has reached 12,000,000 – 15,000,000 in a period of 2 years from 2023."(Informan 1).

This is in line with data by Trading Economics (2025) that the monthly gross minimum wage in Turkey rose from TRY 20,002.50 to TRY 26,005.50 in December 2025, or an increase of about 30% in a year. This increase was also seen in the manufacturing sector and government spending on workers which also increased significantly. This fact shows that the government is trying to maintain people's purchasing power in the midst of high inflation so that social stability is maintained ³¹.

Large demonstrations are rare in Turkey despite political polarization and discontent among some citizens. The significant increase in the minimum wage, even more than doubling in just the last two years, has created a sense of security among workers and the middle class. The public considers that the government is still present to maintain basic welfare, so they choose stability over the risk of open conflict.

In the end, the public also chose to continue to trust the government because of the government's pro-community policies. People also still choose to continue to pay taxes, work or appreciate state symbols without any mutual suspicion between the people and the government itself. The belief that the state is still present through the minimum wage policy has made some people refrain from large protests, even though the pressure on the price of goods continues to rise. Therefore, the economic crisis that should trigger tension is responded to with a good attitude in the community. Nationalism has become a common space for both secular and religious citizens to feel that they have the same home: Turkey. This is what makes the crisis not divide them, but instead strengthens the sense of togetherness in the midst of Turkey's economic crisis.

Conclusion

This study finds that Turkish nationalism in 2025 functions as a stabilizing social mechanism amid ideological polarization between Islamist and secular

³¹ Tradingeconomics, "Upah Minimum Bruto Bulanan Turki _ 1990-2025 Data _ 2026-2027 Perkiraan" (Trading Economics, 2025).

groups. Despite significant economic pressures and political differences, Turkish society has not experienced large-scale unrest, indicating a sustained collective commitment to national identity. This condition reflects Ernest Renan's concept of the nation as a "daily plebiscite," where the continuity of the nation depends on the ongoing willingness of its people to remain united. However, the findings also reveal that Turkish nationalism is not fully inclusive, as minority groups such as Kurds and Alevis experience a more complex and often marginalized relationship with the dominant national identity.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that future research adopt a more focused approach by examining specific cases or mediums, such as media discourse or state policies, to deepen the analysis of nationalism. It is also important to incorporate minority perspectives more systematically to ensure a more inclusive and balanced understanding. Additionally, future studies should strengthen methodological rigor by integrating broader quantitative data.

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