

# The Status of Social Values in Turkey and Perspectives on Regional Cooperation

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In Turkey, as in other countries going through a process of transformation, modernity does not necessarily mean a shift away from spirituality and religion. Cengiz Günay explores the development of the Turkish identity over the last three decades. This new identity finds itself somewhere between traditional and secular values, heavily influenced by the emergence of new social actors and demands. Building on the most recent Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll findings, the author also explores the potential impact of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on Turkey.

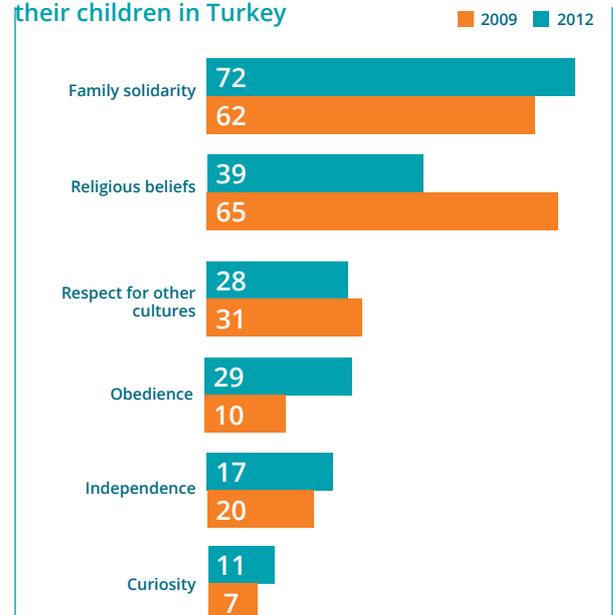
While theorists from Marx to Nietzsche predicted that religion would decline parallel to modernisation, religion and spiritual beliefs have not faded (Inglehardt and Baker, 2000). Instead, in many societies there can be observed a return of religion and spirituality. Quite often this does not mean however a departure from, but rather an adaptation to modernity. In Turkey, transition to a post-industrial age, induced by the shift to liberal market economy in the 1980s, triggered a revival of spirituality. Rapid urbanisation, unbridled capitalism, unequal socio economic transformation, corruption, and the influx of new lifestyle-images in the course of globalisation have been factors which enhanced the feeling of many Turkish citizens that moral and values are in erosion. There emerged a call for the restitution of the moral order of an idealised past which seemed more protected and less complex. Two surveys conducted in 2006 and 2007 revealed that the most important demand for change among the Turkish population was a return to a revered moral past (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). Since Turkish secularism had failed to produce a secular moral and ethical code, in times of crisis, the demand for values fell back on tradition and Islamic conceptions.

## Key values in perspective

The Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll on Intercultural Trends of 2012 reveals that a huge majority of the Turkish interviewees (72%) regard family solidarity as the most important value when it comes to bringing up children (Chart 15.1). While 39 % of the participants highlighted 'religious beliefs' as the second most important value this was followed by 29% mentioning obedience and 28% emphasising respect for other cultures. 17% highlighted independence whereas only 11% stated curiosity. Although there are differences between the poll made in 2012 and that made in 2009, as there is a rather radical decrease of people who mentioned 'religious beliefs' as an important value for bringing up children (from 65% in 2009 to 39% in 2012), there is a rather clear emphasis on 'conservative' values.

Chart 15.1

Key values to parents when bringing up their children in Turkey



**Survey Question:** Assuming that we limit ourselves to six values only, I'd like to know which one of these six would you say is most important when raising children? And the second most important? **Base:** % of all respondents, % of the sum of 'Most important' and 'Second most important' answers are shown (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

The emphasis on 'the family' or the 'religious community' as key values should be seen against the background of a conscious shift in the social and cultural policies of the Turkish state. Guided by the ideas and concepts of rightist intellectuals the generals of the military coup of 1980 had been determined to recalibrate Kemalism. They had regarded the political polarisation in the 1970s as a consequence of the corruption of Turkish moral and values by 'divisive foreign' ideologies (Atasoy, 2009). Starting out from the analysis that the Kemalist Revolution had failed to transmit religious values they set about conciliating Turkish nationalism with social conservatism. According to the so-called Turkish-Islamic Synthesis the nation was redefined following the concept

of the community of believers (cemaat). The state used its very own secular institutions to 're-traditionalise' political society, according to the new Republican state ideology.

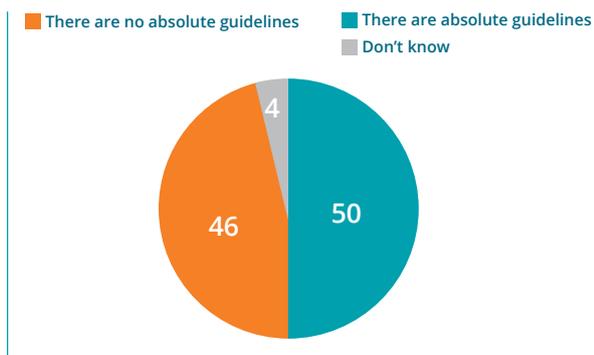
### A renewed sense of Muslimhood

One of the characteristics of the post-1980 era was the multiplication of identity positions and their struggle for inclusion in the public sphere (Baban, 2005). Religious and ethnic origins began to gain notoriety in the public discourse as well as in the rhetoric of politicians (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). Competing discourses on ethnic and religious identities, replaced economic struggle as the defining factor in political organisations and protest movements (White, 2002). From the 1980s on, the programmes of political parties have increasingly emphasised identity issues and characteristics of an imagined Turkishness, Islamicness or Secularism.

The fact that the wars in the Balkans had the taste of the clash of Islam, Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism gave rise to a feeling of growing solidarity with the Muslim brethren in ex-Yugoslavia. Anti-Islamic discourses and discriminations against Muslims in the wake of 9/11, the US-led Iraq War and the negative discourses emanating from Europe against Turkish membership caused an erosion of trust in the 'West'. The culturalist arguments against Turkish membership revived deeply entrenched fears and suspicions of Western conspiracies aimed at partitioning Turkey (Günay, 2007).

The re-definition of the West as the 'other' strengthened a feeling of Muslim solidarity. A new sense of Muslimhood does not refer to an increase in religious practice or religious spirituality, but rather to the feeling of belonging to a common Muslim sphere of culture. These politics of identity were also reflected in the evolving consumer culture. Objects and practices associated with an Islamic identity have come to be dislodged from their religious moorings and become available via the marketplace and media, also to those who would not primarily identify themselves as religious, but who are interested in demonstrating that they are Muslim (White, 2005). In that sense, Muslimhood has been open to secular as well as non-secular parts of society. Growing sensitization for the situation of Muslims abroad and particularly for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its perception through culturalist eyes has been one of the results of the increasing importance of a revived Islamic identity. While the feeling of belonging to an imagined Islamic cultural identity provided outward differentiation, the question which role religion should play in the public sphere has been domestically highly disputed. Secularists and Islamists have battled over the role religion should play in public life. This battle has also embodied elements of a competition over economic and cultural dominance (Günay, 2007). Both sides have claimed that their own

**Chart 15.2**  
Belief in absolute guidelines in Turkey



**Survey Question:** Some people believe that there are absolute guidelines to what is good and bad, and what is truth. Others say, that there are no absolute guidelines, things are relative and what we consider to be good or bad depends on the circumstances. Which view is closer to yours? **Base:** % of all respondents (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

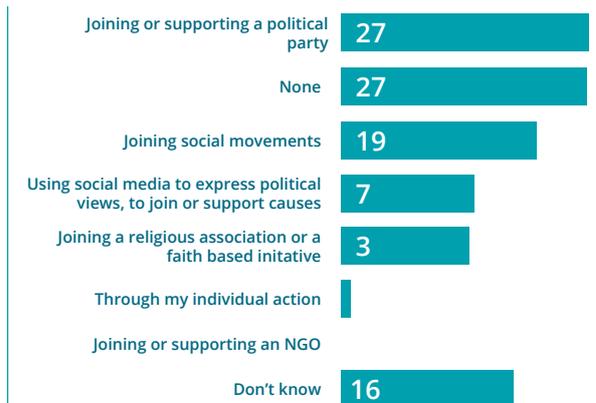
nostalgic interpretation of the past should determine the nature of legitimate politics in contemporary Turkey (Özyürek, 2006).

The Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll's question on the perceptions about the existence of absolute guidelines aimed at detecting whether there is a strong belief in something such as absolute truth, referring to religious beliefs that are guiding people's value judgements. The increase of people who declared thinking that there are absolute guidelines defining good and bad from 27% in 2010 to 50% in 2012 can hardly be explained by the extreme rise of Islamic conservatism over the last two years, but rather by the wording of the Turkish text, (Chart 15.2). As the Turkish translation of the question refers to absolute principles and rules defining what is truth, good or bad, the results rather point out that while 50% of the interviewees believe that there are absolute principles, 46% think that what is good or what is bad may vary according to the circumstances. In the context of high political polarisation, the results can be interpreted as an indication for strong political alignments along political parties, rather the entrenchment of conservatism and religiosity.

### Belief in institutions and social participation

Turkish society has been deeply divided along identity questions. Whereas for many years center-periphery tensions, representing the dichotomy between secular culture and Islamic tradition, dominated Turkish politics, these patterns are not suffice to explain the dynamics of a more diverse and more pluralist post-industrial, mainly urban society. Not only the Islamist movement, but also other ethnic and confessional identities such as Kurds, Alevis and Roma have increasingly challenged the corset of a unitarian understanding of Turkish nationalism.

**Chart 15.3** — Most efficient ways of solving problems in Turkey



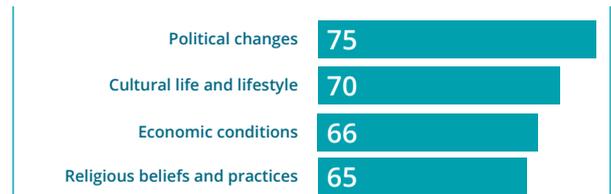
**Survey Question:** How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** % of all respondents (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

Moreover, also other social, sexual, environmental or local identities have become openly displayed and found representation in civil society.

The Gezi-protest movement which unfolded in June 2013 revealed that, under the surface of constant economic growth, there had also grown discontent among representatives of the urban middle class. Although, the protest movement that emerged was all but homogeneous, there are some lessons to be taken from these developments. The mass rallies unearthed that Turkish politics cannot be simply seen through the lenses of polarisation between secularists and Islamists. The protests carried by young people, principally with a university background, also displayed, that the young generation often blamed to be apolitical, was actually highly politicised. At the same time, however, their slogans and demands were less ideological, rather libertarian. Secular in spirit, their messages were not directed against conservatism or Islam, but against authoritarianism and paternalism.

According to the insights gained from the Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012, 27% of the interviewees think that joining a political party is the most efficient way to contribute to solving problems in society. This is much higher than the average in European countries (12%) and in SEM countries (15%). While another 19% believe that joining social movements would contribute to solving problems in society, only 1% think that they could change something through individual action and 0% believe that joining or supporting an NGO would change things. These results can be interpreted in a way that despite dissatisfaction with the current situation, there is still a clear majority of people who tend to believe that political parties are the most efficient way to solving problems in the country (Chart 15.3).

**Chart 15.4** — Interest in news and information from Europe in Turkey



**Survey Question:** Thinking about the European countries, how much interest would you say you personally have in news and information about their ...? **Base:** % of all respondents, % of the sum of 'Very interested' and 'Somewhat interested' answers are shown (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

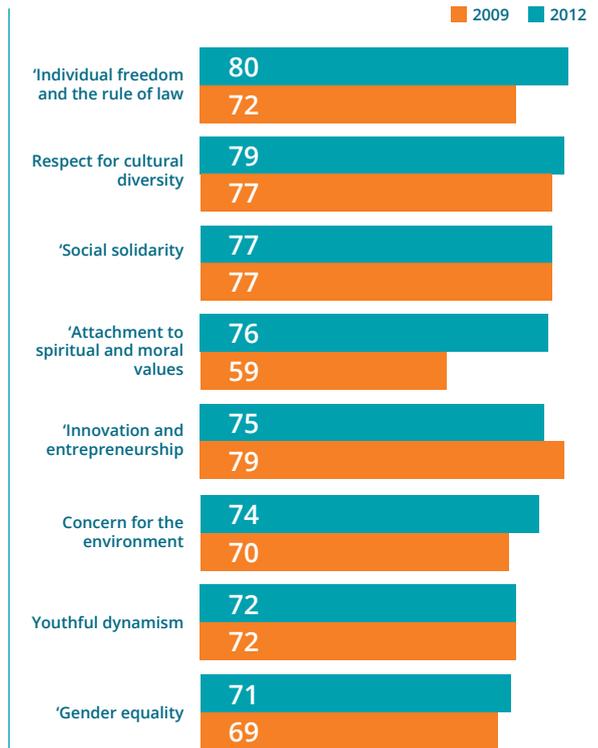
### Limited interest but trust in cooperation

The Poll also highlights the doubts of Turkish citizens about the relevance of political and economic changes in European countries. While 66% declare that they are interested in economic developments and 75% state that they are interested in political changes in the Mediterranean region, a closer look at the results reveals that in both cases only 12% of those who stated that they are very interested, whereas 54% are somewhat interested in economic developments and 63% are somewhat interested in political changes (Chart 15.4). In this regard, Turkey is bottom placed among all countries taking part in the Poll. The fact that the number of those who are somewhat interested is relatively high can be interpreted in the way that there is an increased interest in the developments in Europe, but that only a few – those who are very interested – think that these developments have relevance for Turkey and their own lives.

Due to high political polarisation in the country, Turkish media has a particularly strong domestic focus. Foreign policy issues are all too often presented as projections of inner-Turkish dynamics and tensions. This is particularly true for developments in the Middle East. Similarly, while - compared with the 2009 Anna Lindh/Gallup Survey - a larger number of people (80%) think that Turkish society could gain from cooperation within the 'Union for the Mediterranean' in regard to individual freedom and the rule of law, as well as in regard to respect for cultural diversity (79%), concern for the environment (74%) or gender equality (71%), again a closer look reveals that the number of those who strongly believe so is the lowest among all countries, whereas the number of those who think it might affect is the highest. If we set the number of those who think it would 'definitely affect' equal with those who think it is relevant, this enables an easier interpretation of the results, (reference to Chart 15.5).

Chart 15.5

What would Turkey gain from the UfM



**Survey Question:** Which of these aspects do you think your society can gain from such a shared project? **Base:** % of all respondents, % of the sum of 'Strongly characterize' and 'Somewhat characterize' answers are shown (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

Due to high political polarisation in the country, Turkish media have a strong domestic focus. Foreign policy issues are all too often presented as projections of inner-Turkish dynamics and tensions. This is particularly true for developments in the Middle East area. For example, when asked, what they could gain from cooperation within the 'Union for the Mediterranean', Turkish respondents in 2012 are generally positive: (80%) of people think that Turkish society could gain from this cooperation project, in regard to individual freedom and the rule of law, as well as in regard to respect for cultural diversity (79 %), concern for the environment (74%) or gender equality (71%). In comparison with the 2009 Anna Lindh/Gallup Survey, the number of respondents who consider joining the Union for the Mediterranean beneficial is larger, yet a closer look reveals that the number of those who strongly believe in these benefits is the lowest among all the countries polled.

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