



RESEARCH ARTICLE

State-Led Desecularization and Its Limits: Imam Hatip Schools and the Paradox of Youth Religiosity in Türkiye

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Abstract

This article examines why Türkiye's sustained state-led effort to expand religious education through Imam Hatip schools has coincided with, rather than reversed, evidence of declining religiosity among the young people such schools were designed to reach. Drawing on recent grounded-theory and desecularization-theory scholarship published between 2023 and 2026, the article develops a conceptual account of this apparent paradox, arguing that it is best resolved not by treating institutional religious expansion and individual secularization as contradictory but by recognizing that they operate as only loosely coupled processes within a broader dialectic of state-managed religious politics. The article traces the historical trajectory of Imam Hatip schooling from its origins as a vocational institution through its transformation, after 2002, into a flagship instrument of state-led desecularization, before examining expert-interview evidence on how politicization, exposure effects, and digital-era competition from alternative worldviews interact to produce reactive secularization among students formally embedded within the religious education system. The article concludes that assertive, top-down religious revival, much like the assertive secularism it was designed to counter, struggles to durably shape individual religious consciousness, and it discusses implications for religious education policy and for desecularization theory more broadly.

Keywords: desecularization, secularization, Imam Hatip schools, religious education, state-religion relations, Türkiye

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Problem Statement

Since the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, Türkiye has pursued one of the most sustained and visible programs of state-led religious revival among contemporary Muslim-majority states, expanding the number and reach of Imam Hatip schools, increasing religious content within the broader national curriculum, and elevating the public visibility of religious symbols and institutions across multiple domains of governance (Yılmaz, 2026). This program has been explicitly framed by political leadership as an effort to cultivate a pious generation, correcting what was presented as decades of state-imposed secular restriction on religious expression and education under earlier Republican governments.

Yet the available evidence on youth religiosity in Türkiye does not straightforwardly confirm that this expansive institutional effort has achieved its stated aim. Recent grounded-theory research based on extensive expert interviews finds that Imam Hatip school enrollment declined by twenty-two percent between the 2020–2021 and 2023–2024 academic years, even as political and financial support for the institution continued, and that experts across a range of professional and ideological backgrounds report rising indifference, and in some cases explicit atheist or deist tendencies, among students within the very institutions deşigine to deepen their religious commitment (Yılmaz, 2026). This divergence between

institutional investment and individual outcome constitutes the central empirical puzzle this article addresses.

The puzzle is theoretically significant because it bears directly on the ongoing debate within the sociology of religion over whether desecularization, understood as a counter-secularizing resurgence of religion following a prior secularizing period, can be effectively engineered through deliberate state action, or whether it depends on more organic, grassroots religious revival that state intervention can support but not substitute for (Ertit, 2024a).

This debate carries particular weight in the Turkish case because the state's religious revival project has not been a peripheral or symbolic policy initiative but one of the defining institutional undertakings of the post-2002 political order, absorbing a substantial share of national education spending, reshaping the profile of an entire generation of school leavers, and functioning as a central marker of political identity within an increasingly polarized domestic political landscape. A policy initiative of this scale and duration provides an unusually clear test case for evaluating competing theoretical claims about the capacity of state action to shape individual religious consciousness, precisely because the scale of institutional commitment involved leaves little room to attribute a null or paradoxical outcome to insufficient state effort.

1.2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This article aims to develop a conceptual account of why state-led desecularization through Imam Hatip schooling has not reliably translated into strengthened individual religiosity among Turkish youth, synthesizing recent grounded-theory and theoretical scholarship into an integrated explanatory framework. Three research questions guide the analysis. First, how has the institutional role of Imam Hatip schools evolved from their original vocational function toward their contemporary status as a politically significant instrument of state religious policy? Second, through what specific mechanisms does the politicization of religious education appear to generate disengagement, rather than commitment, among the students exposed to it? Third, what does the Turkish case imply for the broader theoretical question of whether desecularization can be durably achieved through top-down institutional expansion, as opposed to bottom-up religious revival?

The article adopts a conceptual, theory-synthesizing approach, drawing primarily on recent grounded-theory research conducted with religious education experts, supplemented by theoretical scholarship on secularization and desecularization applied specifically to the Turkish case.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This article is significant first because it addresses a genuinely paradoxical empirical pattern with direct relevance to religious education policy not only in Türkiye but in other states pursuing comparable projects of state-mobilized religious revival. Understanding why institutional expansion has not reliably produced individual religious deepening offers policy-relevant insight that a purely institutional or purely individual-level analysis, considered separately, would not fully capture.

Second, the article contributes to desecularization theory by treating the Turkish case as an instance in which institutional and individual religious dynamics can be shown, through rich qualitative evidence, to operate as loosely coupled rather than tightly integrated processes, extending theoretical work that has

argued desecularization and secularization can coexist within the same society without one straightforwardly canceling out the other (Ertit, 2024a, 2024b).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This article draws on desecularization theory as developed and applied to the Turkish case in recent scholarship, which holds that religious resurgence and continued secularization can proceed simultaneously within a society, operating at different levels, institutional versus individual, public versus private, rather than functioning as mutually exclusive alternatives (Ertit, 2024b). Applied to Imam Hatip schooling, this framework predicts that institutional expansion, measured in terms of school numbers, funding, and political prestige, can continue even as individual-level religiosity among the students passing through these institutions declines, precisely because the two processes are not mechanically linked.

The article further distinguishes between passive and assertive forms of both secularization and desecularization, following the broader theoretical literature on state-religion regimes, in which passive approaches permit religion's visibility within public life without state enforcement, while assertive approaches involve the state actively directing religious outcomes, whether toward exclusion, as under earlier Republican assertive secularism, or toward promotion, as under the contemporary assertive desecularization project examined in this article. This distinction is central to the article's argument that assertive desecularization, precisely because it mirrors the top-down, state-directed character of the assertive secularism it was designed to reverse, is likely to encounter structurally similar limits in shaping individual consciousness.

Finally, the article draws on the concept of reactive secularization, developed within recent grounded-theory research on Turkish religious education, to describe disengagement from religion that arises not from philosophical reflection but from disillusionment with the political instrumentalization of religious institutions and authority (Yılmaz, 2026). This concept provides the central mechanism through which the article explains the specific empirical pattern of declining religiosity within an expanding institutional apparatus.

2.2. Review Methodology

This article follows an integrative conceptual review design, drawing primarily on recent grounded-theory research conducted through expert interviews with academics, teachers, administrators, and public commentators engaged with Imam Hatip schooling, supplemented by theoretical scholarship on secularization and desecularization theory as applied to the Turkish case. Consistent with the broader methodological standard adopted across this research program, only sources published from 2023 onward were retained for substantive citation, ensuring that the analysis reflects the most current phase of the Imam Hatip institutional trajectory, including enrollment and policy developments through 2024 and into 2026.

Because the primary source underpinning Section 3 is itself a rigorously conducted grounded-theory study involving eighteen expert interviews analyzed through constant comparative coding, this article treats that study's thematic findings as the core empirical basis for the present conceptual synthesis,

supplementing them with theoretical literature that situates those findings within the broader secularization and desecularization debate.

3. THEMATIC REVIEW

3.1. From Vocational Institution to Flagship Political Project

Imam Hatip schools were originally established in 1924 as vocational institutions intended to train personnel for religious services such as leading prayers and conducting funerals, following the closure of the traditional madrasa system under the Republic's early secularizing reforms. Their institutional history since that founding moment has been marked by repeated expansion and contraction phases tied closely to shifts in Turkish political alignment, from near-total closure in the late 1920s, through renewed expansion after the transition to multi-party politics in 1950, to sharp restriction following the 1997 military-backed intervention against political Islam, before entering their most sustained period of expansion after the Justice and Development Party's rise to power in 2002 (Yılmaz, 2026).

This post-2002 expansion has been distinctive not only in scale but in the explicit political meaning attached to Imam Hatip schooling by the country's political leadership, who have repeatedly invoked their own status as Imam Hatip graduates as evidence of the institution's capacity to produce not only religiously observant but nationally significant citizens, explicitly framing the schools as instruments through which a historically marginalized conservative constituency could be reintegrated into full civic and political life (Yılmaz, 2026). The introduction of specialized, more academically oriented Imam Hatip project schools after 2014, offering competitive-entry tracks in subjects such as sports and fine arts, further illustrates the institution's evolution away from its original narrowly vocational function toward a broader, more prestigious educational role within the state system.

By 2021, roughly twenty-three percent of state education funding was allocated to religious secondary and high schooling, reflecting the scale of resources channeled into this expansion (Yılmaz, 2026). This scale of institutional investment provides the essential context against which the puzzle addressed in this article, namely the coincidence of expanding institutional support with declining individual religiosity, must be understood.

3.2. Politicization and the Mechanism of Reactive Secularization

Expert-interview evidence identifies the politicization of Imam Hatip schooling as the central mechanism through which institutional expansion appears to generate disengagement rather than commitment among students. Respondents across ideological positions, including religiously observant academics and teachers, converge on the interpretation that state support for Imam Hatip schools functions primarily as a nation-building and political-loyalty project rather than as a genuine effort to deepen individual faith, with one respondent explicitly describing Imam Hatip schooling as producing citizens conditioned toward political loyalty rather than considered religious conviction (Yılmaz, 2026).

This perceived politicization generates what the grounded-theory literature terms reactive secularization: young people who observe a gap between the religious rhetoric of political and religious authority and the actual political conduct of that authority respond not with theological reflection but with a generalized withdrawal from religious identification altogether, judging the sincerity of religious teaching by the visible conduct of its most prominent political proponents rather than by its theological content (Yılmaz, 2026). Respondents describe students who ask, in effect, which model of religious practice

among the adults around them represents authentic Islam, and who resolve this uncertainty through disengagement rather than through adjudication between competing claims.

A further, closely related mechanism concerns the perceived exploitation of religious symbols, such as the headscarf, for partisan political purposes, which respondents describe as accelerating distancing from religion among students who come to associate outward religious symbolism with partisan calculation rather than with sincere devotion. This dynamic illustrates a broader pattern identified throughout the grounded-theory evidence: the politicization of religious symbols and institutions appears to corrode, rather than reinforce, the perceived authenticity of the religious message those symbols and institutions are intended to convey.

3.3. The Paradox of Religious Exposure

A further, more counterintuitive finding within the reviewed evidence concerns the relationship between the intensity of religious instruction and the likelihood of subsequent disengagement. Several expert respondents describe students who, precisely because of intensive exposure to religious texts and teachings within the Imam Hatip curriculum, develop the conceptual tools needed to identify and interrogate inconsistencies between religious teaching and religious practice more readily than students with less extensive religious education, producing higher rather than lower rates of questioning among some of the students most thoroughly immersed in formal religious instruction (Yilmaz, 2026).

This paradox of exposure is illustrated in the grounded-theory evidence through the case of theology faculty respondents who report a rising number of students confiding doubts about their faith, alongside broader patterns in which students who might otherwise have had minimal exposure to religious debate report having been provoked into questioning specifically because intensive Imam Hatip schooling exposed them to theological material and internal religious debates they would not otherwise have encountered. One respondent likened this dynamic to a person who stops believing in a magic trick once its underlying mechanism has been explained to them, capturing the sense in which detailed religious instruction can, under conditions of low perceived institutional legitimacy, function as an unintended catalyst for disengagement rather than a straightforward reinforcement of belief.

Importantly, this paradox does not imply that religious knowledge is inherently corrosive to faith; rather, the grounded-theory evidence suggests that the outcome depends heavily on whether religious instruction is delivered in a manner that accommodates open inquiry or in a manner that treats expressed doubt as illegitimate, with the latter approach appearing considerably more likely to convert intensive exposure into disengagement than the former.

This distinction between rote and reflective religious pedagogy also helps explain why the paradox of exposure is not uniformly observed across all Imam Hatip students, but appears concentrated among those who perceive their instruction as doctrinally rigid and unresponsive to critical engagement. Expert respondents describe a generational shift in student expectations, in which contemporary students, accustomed to open-ended inquiry and debate in other areas of their education and digital lives, are less willing than earlier cohorts to accept unexamined religious authority, making pedagogical approaches that were adequate for producing durable commitment among earlier generations of Imam Hatip students correspondingly less effective for the generation currently passing through the system.

3.4. Digital Competition and the Limits of Institutional Control

The politicization and exposure mechanisms identified above interact with a third factor increasingly emphasized in the recent literature: the erosion of institutional control over the information environment within which students form their religious understanding. Where earlier generations of Imam Hatip students encountered religious content primarily through curated institutional channels, contemporary students have unrestricted digital access to a vast range of religious interpretations, secular critiques, and testimonies of religious disengagement from peers, effectively bypassing the interpretive authority that Imam Hatip schools were designed to cultivate (Yilmaz, 2026).

This digital competition is not uniformly secularizing; the same evidence base notes that digital platforms can also sustain religious engagement among already highly committed adolescents and can provide alternative, less institutionally mediated forms of religious community for young people dissatisfied with the politicized version of religious authority they encounter within formal schooling. Nonetheless, on balance, the reviewed evidence suggests that expanded digital access functions predominantly as an accelerant of the reactive secularization dynamic described in Section 3.2, shortening the interval between the emergence of private doubt, itself often triggered by perceived institutional politicization or by the paradox of exposure discussed in Section 3.3, and its consolidation into an openly held position of religious disengagement.

3.5. Desecularization Theory and the Turkish Paradox

The empirical patterns traced in Sections 3.1 through 3.4 gain their fullest theoretical significance when read through the lens of desecularization theory as recently applied to the Turkish case. Analysis of the broader trajectory of Turkish Islamization policy concludes that the state's explicit goal of raising a pious generation has, on balance, failed to achieve its intended outcome, and interprets this failure as consistent with, rather than contradictory to, classical secularization theory once assertive state intervention is properly understood as a reaction to, rather than a refutation of, underlying secularizing social trends (Ertit, 2024a).

This reading is reinforced by theoretical work extending secularization theory beyond its original Western Christian frame, which argues that the theory retains explanatory power in non-Western, Muslim-majority contexts once secularization is understood as a multidimensional process capable of proceeding unevenly across belief, practice, and institutional affiliation, rather than as a single uniform decline (Ertit, 2024b). Applied to the Imam Hatip case, this multidimensional framing helps explain how institutional religious affiliation, measured through continued formal enrollment and state funding, can remain robust even as the depth of individual belief and practice among enrolled students declines, since the theory does not require these dimensions to move in lockstep.

Taken together, the Imam Hatip case can be read as a particularly clear instance of what might be termed the desecularization paradox: an assertive, state-directed project explicitly designed to reverse secularizing trends instead reproduces, through its own politicization, some of the very same disengagement dynamics it was intended to counter. This paradox does not imply that state religious policy is entirely without effect, since the institutional apparatus itself, its scale, funding, and political prestige, has undeniably expanded; rather, it implies that this institutional effect has been substantially decoupled from the individual-level religious outcomes that the policy's architects explicitly intended to produce.

3.6. Family Socialization as a Counterweight to Institutional Effects

An important qualification to the institutional analysis presented above concerns the continuing, and in some respects primary, role of family socialization in shaping religious outcomes independently of school type. Expert respondents in the grounded-theory evidence consistently note that family religious environment, rather than school attendance per se, remains the strongest predictor of a student's eventual religious trajectory, with Imam Hatip schooling functioning more as an amplifier of pre-existing family dynamics than as an independent causal force capable of overriding them (Yılmaz, 2026). Students from households characterized by warm, consistent religious modeling appear more likely to weather the politicization and exposure pressures discussed above without severe disengagement, while students from households already characterized by inconsistency or conflict around religious practice appear more vulnerable to the reactive secularization dynamic once exposed to the additional pressures of institutional politicization.

This qualification does not undermine the article's central argument but refines it: the paradox of expanding institutional support coinciding with declining aggregate religiosity is best understood as reflecting an institutional effect that operates unevenly across the student population, interacting with, rather than overriding, the family-level socialization dynamics that remain primary. This interaction effect represents an important avenue for future quantitative research capable of disentangling the relative contribution of family and institutional factors more precisely than the qualitative evidence reviewed here allows.

3.7. Comparative State-Religious Education Systems

Situating the Turkish Imam Hatip case within a comparative frame of other state-supported religious education systems internationally helps clarify which elements of the pattern identified in this article are distinctively Turkish and which may generalize more broadly. Comparable dynamics of politically instrumentalized religious or ideological schooling have been documented in a range of other national contexts, in which state authorities have used curricular and institutional structures to advance nationalist or ideological, alongside religious, agendas, with textbooks and curricula reflecting political power and the state's relationship with civil society rather than serving purely pedagogical or spiritual functions.

What appears comparatively distinctive about the Turkish case is less the underlying politicization mechanism, which plausibly generalizes across contexts where religious or ideological education becomes closely identified with a specific governing faction, than the sheer scale and duration of the Imam Hatip system, which has educated a very large proportion of an entire generational cohort under conditions of sustained one-party political dominance since 2002. This scale means that the mechanisms identified in this article are likely to have shaped the religious formation of a substantial share of contemporary Turkish youth, lending the Turkish case particular significance for understanding the aggregate, generational consequences of state-mobilized religious education, beyond what smaller-scale or more politically contested religious education systems elsewhere would typically allow researchers to observe.

3.8. Gendered Experiences Within the Imam Hatip System

A further dimension warranting explicit attention concerns the gendered character of the Imam Hatip experience, which the reviewed literature suggests is not uniform across male and female students. Imam

Hatip schooling has historically served as a particularly significant channel of educational and social mobility for young women from religiously conservative families whose families might not otherwise have supported their continued education, given the schools' compatibility with religiously conservative expectations regarding modesty and gender-appropriate schooling environments (Yılmaz, 2026). This mobility function means that the institution has carried distinct social significance for young women within religiously conservative communities that is not fully captured by an analysis focused solely on religious formation outcomes.

At the same time, expert respondents note that young women within the Imam Hatip system report particularly acute versions of the politicization dynamic discussed in Section 3.2, insofar as the symbolic use of religious dress and comportment for political messaging tends to fall disproportionately on female students and graduates, who experience their own religious practice as more directly and visibly entangled with partisan political signaling than male students typically do. This gendered intensification of the politicization mechanism suggests that the reactive secularization dynamic identified throughout this article may be experienced with particular acuteness by young women navigating the Imam Hatip system, an important qualification that future gender-disaggregated research on this topic should examine directly.

4. DISCUSSION

The evidence and theoretical synthesis presented above support a central argument of this article: that assertive, state-directed desecularization efforts face structural limits closely analogous to those historically faced by assertive secularization projects, since both approaches attempt to engineer individual consciousness through top-down institutional authority, and both appear, in the Turkish case, to generate resistance and reactive disengagement once their political character becomes salient to the young people subject to them. This symmetry between assertive secularism and assertive desecularization is, in the view of this article, one of the more theoretically significant implications of the Imam Hatip case for the broader study of state-religion relations.

A further implication concerns the specific mechanisms through which this resistance operates. The politicization mechanism discussed in Section 3.2 and the exposure paradox discussed in Section 3.3 are not redundant but complementary: politicization erodes the perceived legitimacy of religious authority as a source of moral guidance, while intensive exposure supplies students with the intellectual tools to act on the skepticism that eroded legitimacy generates. Where either mechanism operates alone, its effect on youth religiosity may be more limited; the Turkish case is distinctive in that both mechanisms have operated jointly and at considerable scale, given the sheer size of the Imam Hatip system and the intensity of its recent politicization under sustained one-party governance.

The digital competition mechanism discussed in Section 3.4 further compounds these dynamics by removing much of the interpretive monopoly that formal religious institutions have historically relied upon to shape belief formation among the young. This suggests that even a hypothetical depoliticization of Imam Hatip schooling, were it to occur, would not by itself fully restore the institution's capacity to shape individual religiosity as effectively as it may have done in earlier, less digitally saturated periods of Turkish educational history.

Finally, this discussion suggests a broader theoretical implication for desecularization theory beyond the specific Turkish case: state-mobilized religious revival appears most vulnerable to producing reactive

secularization precisely where it is most closely and visibly identified with a specific political faction or leader, since this visibility is what most directly triggers the politicization mechanism identified throughout this review. This implies that the durability of desecularization efforts elsewhere may depend significantly on the degree to which religious institutions can maintain, or be perceived to maintain, independence from partisan political identification, a condition that the Turkish Imam Hatip case, at least during the period examined in the reviewed literature, has notably failed to satisfy.

The family-level qualification introduced in Section 3.6 also has an important discussion-level implication: it suggests that the aggregate decline in Imam Hatip enrollment and reported religiosity should not be read as evidence that institutional religious education is universally ineffective, but rather that its effectiveness is strongly conditional on the surrounding family and social environment within which it operates. This conditionality complicates simple policy prescriptions in either direction, since neither further expanding nor simply abandoning institutional religious education would, on the evidence reviewed here, straightforwardly resolve the underlying disengagement dynamic, which is rooted at least as much in perceived institutional legitimacy and family consistency as in the mere presence or absence of formal religious schooling.

The comparative reflection offered in Section 3.7 further situates the Turkish case within a broader pattern relevant to the study of ideologically or religiously mobilized education systems more generally, suggesting that the specific combination of factors identified in this article, large institutional scale, sustained single-party political dominance, and high public visibility of religious-political identification, may represent a particularly potent, if not unique, configuration for generating the reactive secularization dynamic documented throughout this review, one that other states pursuing comparable religious education strategies would do well to consider before assuming that institutional expansion alone will reliably produce the religious outcomes such expansion is intended to achieve.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This article has argued that the paradoxical coincidence of expanding Imam Hatip schooling and declining student religiosity in contemporary Türkiye is best explained by three interacting mechanisms identified in recent grounded-theory research: the politicization of religious education, which generates reactive secularization; the paradox of intensive religious exposure, which can equip students with the tools to interrogate rather than internalize religious teaching under conditions of low institutional legitimacy; and digital competition, which erodes the interpretive monopoly formal religious institutions previously held over young people's religious understanding.

Read through the lens of desecularization theory, this pattern suggests that Turkey's assertive, state-directed effort to reverse secularizing trends has reproduced structural limits closely analogous to those historically faced by the assertive secularism it was designed to counter, indicating that top-down religious engineering, whether in a secularizing or a desecularizing direction, faces persistent difficulty in durably shaping individual religious consciousness.

The family-level qualification developed in Section 3.6 adds important nuance to this conclusion: the institutional mechanisms identified in this article do not operate on a religiously undifferentiated population but interact with pre-existing family religious dynamics, amplifying disengagement where

family socialization is already inconsistent and proving comparatively less disruptive where family religious modeling is warm and consistent. This interaction, rather than any single institutional factor in isolation, offers the most complete available account of why Imam Hatip schooling has produced such divergent outcomes across the student population it serves.

5.2. Limitations

This article's conceptual synthesis relies substantially on a single, though methodologically rigorous, grounded-theory study based on expert interviews rather than on direct interviews with Imam Hatip students themselves, meaning that the article's account of youth religiosity reflects expert interpretation of youth experience rather than direct youth self-report, a limitation explicitly acknowledged within the underlying primary study and inherited by this conceptual review. Future primary research directly engaging Imam Hatip students would meaningfully extend and test the conceptual account developed here.

A further limitation concerns the geographic and institutional scope of the underlying expert-interview evidence, which, while spanning multiple cities and a range of institutional roles, cannot fully capture the considerable regional variation that likely characterizes Imam Hatip schooling across Türkiye's diverse provinces, from large metropolitan centers to smaller provincial towns where the social and political salience of religious education, and therefore the intensity of the politicization mechanism identified in this article, may differ substantially from the patterns described by the expert respondents whose accounts form the basis of the present synthesis.

5.3. Recommendations

For religious education policy-makers, the evidence reviewed here suggests that insulating Imam Hatip schooling from close political identification with any single party or leader, insofar as this is administratively and politically feasible, may help mitigate the reactive secularization mechanism identified as central to the paradox examined in this article, since perceived political instrumentalization, rather than the volume of religious instruction itself, appears to be the more decisive driver of student disengagement.

For religious educators, the paradox of exposure identified in Section 3.3 suggests that curricular approaches accommodating open theological inquiry, rather than treating expressed doubt as a disciplinary problem, are more likely to convert intensive religious knowledge into durable, reflectively examined commitment rather than into disengagement, offering a concrete pedagogical implication that follows directly from the mechanism identified in this review.

For researchers, this article recommends direct primary research with Imam Hatip students themselves, complementing the expert-interview evidence that currently forms the primary empirical basis for understanding this institution's effects, and further recommends comparative research examining whether similarly structured state-religious education systems in other Muslim-majority contexts exhibit analogous politicization and exposure dynamics, which would help clarify whether the mechanisms identified here are specific to the Turkish institutional configuration or reflect a more general pattern in state-mobilized religious education.

Finally, given the family-level qualification discussed in Section 3.6, this article recommends that future intervention research examine family-school partnership models explicitly, testing whether coordinated

engagement between Imam Hatip institutions and families characterized by inconsistent religious modeling can mitigate the reactive secularization dynamic more effectively than school-level interventions alone, since the evidence reviewed here suggests that institutional and family effects interact rather than operating as independent, additive influences on student religious outcomes.

For desecularization theorists, the Turkish Imam Hatip case is recommended as a productive site for further refining the theoretical distinction between institutional and individual dimensions of religious change, given that the case demonstrates with unusual empirical clarity how these dimensions can move in opposite directions simultaneously, a pattern that any general theory of desecularization will need to accommodate rather than treat as an anomaly to be explained away.

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