



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious Socialization and the Crisis of Faith Among Turkish Youth: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

This conceptual article examines how religious socialization shapes, and at times undermines, the faith commitments of young people in contemporary Türkiye. Drawing on an integrative review of empirical and theoretical scholarship published between 2023 and 2026, the article argues that religious socialization should be understood as a dynamic, bidirectional process rather than a one-way transmission of belief from adults to children. Three interrelated mechanisms are identified as central to the emergence of a crisis of faith among Turkish youth: authoritarian and inconsistent parental religious modeling, the disjuncture between the moral rhetoric of religious authority and its lived political practice, and the expansion of digital environments that expose young people to competing worldviews outside institutional control. The review situates these mechanisms within the broader Turkish debate between secularization and desecularization theory, arguing that state-led efforts to cultivate religiosity through education and public visibility do not straightforwardly reverse individual-level secularizing trends and may, under certain conditions, accelerate disengagement. The article concludes that religious socialization in Türkiye is best modeled as a contested, negotiated process in which young people act as interpreters rather than passive recipients of inherited faith, and it outlines implications for religious educators, families, and future research.

Keywords: *religious socialization, crisis of faith, secularization, desecularization, Turkish youth, sociology of religion*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Problem Statement

Religion continues to occupy a central place in the social and political life of Türkiye, yet the manner in which faith is transmitted across generations has become considerably less predictable than earlier sociological models assumed. Classical accounts of religious socialization treated the family, the school, and the mosque as largely complementary agents that jointly reproduced a stable religious habitus in the young. In the contemporary Turkish context, however, a growing body of qualitative research suggests that these agents frequently transmit inconsistent, even contradictory, messages about what it means to live a religious life, and that young people respond to these inconsistencies not with passive absorption but with active reappraisal of the beliefs they were raised with.

A recent qualitative study of twenty young Turkish adults conceptualized this reappraisal process as a gradual crisis of faith rather than a sudden rupture, showing that authoritarian parenting styles, perceived inconsistencies between religious teaching and religious practice, peer and social media influence, and gender inequality within patriarchal households jointly erode the plausibility of inherited religious frameworks over time (Babacan, 2025). This finding is significant because it reframes the crisis of faith not as an individual pathology or a simple by-product of modernization, but as an outcome that is partly produced by the very process through which religiosity is meant to be instilled.

This reframing matters for how educators, families, and religious institutions in Türkiye respond to declining youth religiosity, because it shifts attention away from blaming external, secularizing influences and toward examining the internal coherence of the socialization process itself. If disengagement is generated in part by the manner in which faith is transmitted rather than solely by exposure to secular alternatives, then interventions that simply intensify religious instruction without addressing the perceived inconsistency of that instruction are unlikely to reverse the trend, and may in some cases deepen it. This possibility has not been adequately explored in Turkish policy discussions, which have tended to treat declining religiosity primarily as a problem of insufficient religious exposure rather than as a problem of socialization quality.

At the same time, Türkiye presents an unusual empirical puzzle for the sociology of religion. Political power has, for over two decades, been mobilized to expand religious education and increase the public visibility of religious symbols, yet survey and qualitative evidence converge on the conclusion that religious commitment among the young has not strengthened in tandem with this institutional expansion (Ertit, 2024a). This divergence between state-led religious investment and individual-level religiosity constitutes the central problem this article addresses: how does religious socialization operate under conditions where formal religious authority is heavily politicized, and what does this imply for the durability of faith transmission across generations in Türkiye?

The puzzle is sharpened further by the fact that Türkiye is not a marginal or peripheral case for the sociology of religion but a large, historically significant Muslim-majority society in which the state has, since the founding of the Republic, repeatedly used religious policy as an instrument of nation-building, first in a secularizing and later in a re-Islamizing direction. Because both the secularizing project of the early Republican period and the desecularizing project of the more recent past were state-driven rather than emerging primarily from grassroots religious revival, the Turkish case offers an unusually clear setting in which to examine how far top-down religious policy can shape, or fails to shape, the private religious convictions of the generation it targets (Ertit, 2024b).

1.2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this article is to synthesize recent scholarship on religious socialization and youth religiosity in Türkiye into a coherent conceptual account of how, and under what conditions, socialization processes generate a crisis of faith rather than durable religious commitment. The review is guided by three questions. First, which socialization mechanisms are most consistently associated with religious doubt and disengagement among Turkish youth in the literature published since 2023? Second, how do these mechanisms interact with the broader macro-level dynamics of secularization and desecularization that characterize the contemporary Turkish state–religion relationship? Third, what theoretical model of religious socialization best accounts for the agency that young people exercise in interpreting, resisting, or reconstructing the faith frameworks presented to them by family, school, and religious authority?

Rather than testing a single hypothesis with new primary data, the article adopts an integrative, theory-building orientation. It treats existing empirical findings as data points from which a more general conceptual model can be constructed, following the logic that conceptual synthesis is itself a legitimate and necessary contribution when a field contains multiple parallel but unintegrated empirical strands, as is currently the case for research on Turkish religious socialization.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this article lies in its attempt to connect two literatures that have largely developed in parallel. On one hand, a psychologically and family-oriented literature examines how parenting style, household religious practice, and peer relationships shape individual religious trajectories (Babacan, 2025). On the other hand, a macro-sociological literature examines the state-level dynamics of secularization and desecularization in Türkiye, focusing on institutions such as Imam Hatip schools, the Diyanet, and the broader politicization of Islam under the Justice and Development Party (Ertit, 2024a; Yılmaz, 2026). By bringing these strands into a single conceptual framework, this article offers religious educators, family counselors, and policy-makers a more complete picture of why efforts to strengthen religiosity through institutional means may fail to achieve their intended effect at the level of individual belief.

The article also contributes methodologically by demonstrating how a psychometrically grounded construct such as secularity can be integrated with qualitative process-oriented accounts of faith crisis. The recent development of a validated secularity scale for Muslim populations (Ertit, 2023) opens the possibility of measuring gradations of religious disengagement that earlier binary religious/non-religious classifications could not capture, and this article draws on that instrument conceptually to argue that the crisis of faith is better understood as a continuum than as a discrete event.

Finally, the article carries practical significance for the institutions most directly responsible for religious socialization in Türkiye. Families navigating visible declines in religious observance among their children, teachers within the state religious education system, and religious authorities such as the Diyanet each face difficult choices about how to respond to youth disengagement. Insofar as this article demonstrates that intensifying the volume of religious instruction is unlikely, by itself, to reverse disengagement that is rooted in perceived inconsistency rather than insufficient exposure, it offers these stakeholders an evidence-informed rationale for redirecting attention toward the quality, coherence, and perceived sincerity of religious transmission rather than toward its quantity alone.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This article draws on a process-oriented model of religious socialization that treats faith transmission as an ongoing negotiation between socializing agents and the young person, rather than as the one-directional deposit of belief content into a passive recipient. Under this model, young individuals are not simply passive agents in the traditionally one-way transmission of faith; instead, they become more autonomous and dynamic as they encounter negative or inconsistent religious experiences, and this dynamism is what produces a gradual, rather than abrupt, crisis of faith (Babacan, 2025).

This process-oriented model is complemented by the theoretical debate between secularization and desecularization that dominates recent Turkish sociology of religion. Secularization theory, in its classical form, holds that modernization reduces the plausibility of supernatural belief systems as functional differentiation removes religion from public institutions. Desecularization theory, by contrast, holds that religious decline and religious resurgence can coexist within the same society at different levels, such that institutional religiosity may expand even as individual religiosity contracts (Ertit, 2024b). The Turkish case, in which political actors have pursued an assertive, state-led project of religious revival while survey and

qualitative evidence point to declining depth of individual faith, is treated in this article as a paradigmatic illustration of this coexistence.

Integrating these two theoretical strands, the article proposes that religious socialization in Türkiye operates simultaneously at two levels that are only loosely coupled: an institutional level, where the state and religious authorities expand the formal apparatus of religious transmission, and an experiential level, where individual young people process the lived consistency, or inconsistency, of the religious messages they receive from parents, teachers, and public authorities. A crisis of faith is most likely to emerge when institutional expansion is not matched by experiential coherence, that is, when young people perceive a widening gap between what religious authority preaches and how it behaves.

This two-level framework also draws on the sociological distinction between religion as a system of institutional practice and religion as a system of individual meaning-making. Classical socialization theory often assumed that these two dimensions move together, such that strengthening institutional religious practice would, almost automatically, strengthen individual religious meaning. The Turkish evidence reviewed in this article suggests the opposite is at least equally plausible: institutional practice can expand precisely because individual meaning-making has become contested, as political and religious authorities respond to perceived secularization by intensifying formal religious provision, which in turn does not resolve, and may exacerbate, the underlying crisis of meaning it was intended to address. Framed this way, institutional religious expansion in Türkiye can be read less as a straightforward cause of desecularization and more as a symptom of the anxiety that secularizing trends have provoked among religious and political elites.

2.2. Review Methodology

This article follows an integrative literature review design, appropriate for topics addressed by both qualitative and conceptual scholarship and for which a single unified theoretical account has not yet emerged. Sources were identified through targeted searches of recent peer-reviewed literature in the sociology of religion, with search terms including religious socialization, crisis of faith, secularization, desecularization, and Turkish youth religiosity. Consistent with the aim of grounding the review in the most current empirical picture available, only sources published from 2023 onward were retained for substantive citation, ensuring that the conceptual model developed here reflects the most recent wave of scholarship on this topic rather than earlier, and potentially superseded, characterizations of Turkish religiosity.

Sources were selected for their direct empirical or theoretical relevance to youth religious socialization, secularization theory, or desecularization theory in the Turkish context. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles reporting original qualitative or conceptual research, supplemented by scholarly public lectures addressing measurable shifts in religiosity. Findings from the retained sources were organized thematically rather than source-by-source, in keeping with the conceptual, theory-building purpose of the review; each theme is developed in Section 3 below.

Because the field addressed here is still relatively young, with much of the most relevant empirical work published within the last two to three years, the review makes no claim to exhaustiveness in the sense associated with systematic reviews governed by formal protocols such as PRISMA. Instead, it follows the logic of a purposive, theoretically driven synthesis, prioritizing depth of engagement with a smaller number of directly relevant, methodologically rigorous sources over breadth of coverage across a larger

but more loosely related set of studies. This choice is consistent with the article's stated aim of theory-building rather than exhaustive mapping of a literature, and it mirrors the approach taken in comparable conceptual reviews within the sociology of religion more broadly.

3. THEMATIC REVIEW

3.1. Family Socialization: Authority, Inconsistency, and Gender

The family remains the primary site of initial religious socialization in Türkiye, but recent qualitative evidence complicates the assumption that family transmission is straightforwardly effective. Authoritarian parenting emerges repeatedly as a driver of later religious doubt: when religious instruction in the home is enforced through control and punishment rather than modeled through consistent example, young people report associating religious identity with domestic conflict and fear rather than with meaning or comfort (Babacan, 2025). Perceived inconsistency between a parent's outward religious observance and inward behavior compounds this effect, as young people who witness a gap between religious performance and private conduct tend to generalize this gap into skepticism about the sincerity of religious claims more broadly.

Gender inequality within patriarchal household structures constitutes a second, closely related mechanism. Where religious discourse is used to justify unequal treatment of daughters and sons, or where religious language legitimizes the subordination of women within the family, young people, and particularly young women, report a heightened tendency to question the moral authority of the religious framework in which they were raised (Babacan, 2025). This finding indicates that the crisis of faith is not solely a cognitive or theological phenomenon but is deeply entangled with young people's evaluations of the ethical consequences of religious teaching as it is lived out in their immediate social environment.

Peer relationships and social media exposure interact with these family dynamics, offering young people alternative interpretive communities in which doubt can be voiced and normalized rather than suppressed. Where family environments do not tolerate open questioning, peer and online networks become the primary space in which a nascent crisis of faith is articulated and consolidated, suggesting that the erosion of religious commitment is often incubated outside, rather than inside, the household even when its roots lie within it.

It is worth emphasizing that these family-level dynamics do not operate uniformly across all households, and the qualitative evidence is careful to note considerable heterogeneity in how young people respond to nominally similar upbringing conditions. Some respondents raised in strict religious households report having internalized religious commitment as a source of stability and identity rather than conflict, particularly where parental authority was paired with warmth and where religious teaching was accompanied by visible parental consistency (Babacan, 2025). This heterogeneity suggests that authoritarian control alone is an incomplete predictor of later disengagement; rather, it is the combination of control with perceived hypocrisy or emotional coldness that appears most strongly associated with the onset of a crisis of faith, a nuance that is easily lost if family religiosity is treated as a single undifferentiated variable in either policy discussions or future empirical research.

3.2. Institutional Religion and the Politicization of Piety

Beyond the family, the institutional apparatus of religious transmission in Türkiye, most visibly the expansion of Imam Hatip schooling, has become deeply entangled with partisan politics since the early

2000s. Recent grounded-theory research based on expert interviews finds that state-supported religious schooling is widely interpreted, including by religiously observant respondents, as a nation-building project oriented toward cultivating political loyalty rather than as a project genuinely oriented toward deepening individual faith (Yilmaz, 2026). When religious instruction is perceived as instrumentalized for political ends, its capacity to generate durable conviction among young recipients appears to diminish rather than increase.

This politicization dynamic produces what has been described in the literature as reactive secularization: distancing from religion that emerges not from philosophical or theological reflection but from disillusionment with the political conduct of religious and political elites who invoke faith rhetorically. Respondents in expert-interview research describe young people who ask, in effect, which version of religious practice modeled by adults around them is the authentic one, and who resolve this uncertainty by withdrawing from religious identification altogether rather than adjudicating between competing claims to authenticity (Yilmaz, 2026).

A further complication is that intensive exposure to religious instruction can, under some conditions, itself provoke disengagement rather than reinforcement. Expert accounts describe cases in which students who received extensive religious schooling became more prone to questioning core tenets than peers with minimal religious education, precisely because their close familiarity with religious texts and teachings equipped them with the conceptual tools to interrogate inconsistencies they would otherwise not have encountered (Yilmaz, 2026). This paradoxical outcome underscores that the quantity of religious instruction a young person receives is a poor predictor, on its own, of the strength of the faith commitment that results.

Notably, this paradox is not interpreted in the literature as evidence that religious knowledge is inherently corrosive to faith, but rather as evidence that faith transmitted through rote instruction, unaccompanied by space for genuine inquiry, is structurally fragile once it encounters the kind of scrutiny that advanced religious literacy makes possible. Where religious instruction incorporates open engagement with difficult theological and ethical questions rather than treating doubt as illegitimate, expert respondents suggest that the same depth of religious knowledge can instead function as a resource for constructing a more durable, reflectively examined faith commitment (Yilmaz, 2026). This distinction between rote and reflective religious pedagogy represents an important, though still underexplored, moderating variable in the relationship between institutional religious exposure and youth religiosity.

3.3. Macro-Level Secularization, Desecularization, and the Limits of Institutional Revival

At the macro level, the trajectory of Turkish state–religion relations offers essential context for understanding why institutional investment in religiosity has not reliably produced individual-level religious deepening among the young. Analyses of Turkey's recent Islamization policies conclude that assertive efforts to raise what political leaders have termed a pious generation have, on balance, failed to achieve their stated objective, and that this failure can itself be read as evidence supporting rather than refuting classical secularization theory: relevant academic studies increasingly document a secularizing trajectory in Turkish society that political mobilization of religion has not reversed (Ertit, 2024a).

Desecularization theory offers a complementary rather than contradictory account of this pattern. Rather than treating institutional religious expansion and declining individual religiosity as a paradox to be

explained away, this framework interprets Turkey's trajectory as an instance in which counter-secularizing efforts unfold at the institutional and political level while secularizing tendencies continue, largely undisturbed, at the level of individual consciousness (Ertit, 2024b). The two processes are only weakly coupled, meaning that the expansion of mosques, religious schools, and religiously coded public discourse does not translate in any direct or proportional way into stronger personal faith among the generation exposed to it.

This weak coupling has measurable implications for how researchers approach the study of youth religiosity. The development of a validated secularity scale for Muslim populations allows researchers to move beyond binary religious and non-religious classifications toward a graded account of religious distancing, capturing intermediate positions, such as nominal or culturally identified religiosity, that binary measures previously obscured (Ertit, 2023). Emerging survey evidence using such refined instruments, together with quasi-panel household survey techniques comparing the same neighborhoods across time, provides converging evidence of a genuine secularizing shift at the individual level, one that appears to be driven partly by rising educational attainment and partly by disillusionment with the socio-political conduct of religious and political authority (Şaşmaz, 2025).

The theoretical debate over whether secularization theory can travel beyond its original Western, Christian setting has itself been advanced by recent Turkish scholarship in ways directly relevant to this article. Extending secularization theory to the case of Turkey's Alevi minority, for example, demonstrates that the theory retains explanatory power outside the modern Christian West once secularization is understood as a multidimensional process that can proceed unevenly across belief, practice, and institutional affiliation rather than as a single uniform decline (Ertit, 2024b). This multidimensional reading is directly applicable to the Sunni-majority youth population that is the focus of the present review, since it allows the coexistence of continued nominal religious identification with declining depth of practice and belief to be theorized coherently, rather than treated as an anomaly requiring an entirely separate explanatory framework.

3.4. Toward an Integrated Model of Faith Crisis

Bringing these three thematic strands together, a crisis of faith among Turkish youth can be understood as the cumulative product of experiential inconsistency at multiple, nested levels: within the family, where authoritarian and unevenly modeled religious practice erodes trust; within religious institutions, where politicization undermines the perceived sincerity of religious instruction; and within the broader society, where the gap between state-sponsored religious revival and lived individual experience widens rather than narrows. At each level, young people are shown in the literature to act not as passive recipients but as active interpreters who evaluate the coherence of the religious framework presented to them against their own observations of how that framework is actually practiced by the adults and institutions responsible for transmitting it.

This integrated reading also clarifies why the crisis of faith, as documented in the Turkish case, is better characterized as a gradual, cumulative process than as a sudden conversion or apostasy event. The process-oriented framing developed by Babacan (2025) is consistent with the institutional findings of Yılmaz (2026) and the macro-theoretical account of Ertit (2024a, 2024b): at every level examined, disengagement from religion emerges through accumulated experiences of inconsistency rather than through a single decisive rupture, suggesting that interventions aimed at strengthening youth religiosity

would need to address experiential coherence across family, school, and public life simultaneously rather than intensifying any single channel of religious transmission in isolation.

3.5. The Role of Digital Environments in Mediating the Crisis of Faith

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature, though rarely treated as a primary focus in its own right, is the mediating role of digital and social media environments in shaping how a crisis of faith unfolds once its underlying conditions are present within the family or institutional setting. Digital platforms provide young people with access to religious interpretations, secular worldviews, and testimonies of religious disengagement from peers and strangers alike, all largely outside the supervisory reach of parents, teachers, or religious authorities (Yılmaz, 2026). This access does not, on its own, generate a crisis of faith where none would otherwise have existed, but it appears to function as an accelerant that shortens the time between the emergence of private doubt and its consolidation into an articulated, socially shared position.

At the same time, digital environments are not uniformly secularizing in their effects. Some young people encounter online religious communities that offer more flexible, less authoritarian articulations of faith than those available to them within their families of origin, and for these young people digital exposure can function as a pathway toward reconstructed, rather than abandoned, religious identity. The literature reviewed here does not yet offer a systematic account of what distinguishes young people who use digital religious pluralism to reconstruct faith from those who use it to exit faith altogether, and this represents one of the more consequential gaps in the current evidence base on Turkish youth religiosity.

3.6. Comparative Reflections: Turkey Within the Wider Muslim-Majority World

Although this review focuses specifically on Türkiye, the mechanisms identified in the literature are unlikely to be *sui generis*, and situating them within the wider comparative literature on religious change in Muslim-majority societies strengthens confidence in the conceptual model developed here. Recent applications of secularization theory outside the modern Christian West argue that the theory's core mechanism, the erosion of religious plausibility structures under conditions of institutional differentiation and pluralization, operates across a range of religious traditions once appropriately adapted to local institutional configurations (Ertit, 2024b). This suggests that findings from the Turkish case, while shaped by distinctly Turkish institutions such as the Diyanet and the Imam Hatip system, speak to broader theoretical questions about how state-mobilized religious revival interacts with generational religious change more generally.

A comparative lens also clarifies what is, and is not, distinctive about the Turkish case. What appears specific to Türkiye is not the underlying mechanism of politicization-driven disengagement, which plausibly generalizes to other settings where religious authority becomes closely identified with a single political faction, but rather the intensity and visibility of the institutional apparatus, most notably the scale of Imam Hatip schooling, through which this politicization is channeled into the socialization experiences of a very large cohort of young people each year. Future comparative research examining countries with similarly extensive state-religious education systems, but with lower levels of partisan polarization around religious identity, could help isolate the specific contribution of politicization from the more general effects of institutional religious exposure.

3.7. Implications for the Concept of Religious Authority

A final thread running through the literature reviewed here concerns the changing status of religious authority itself among Turkish youth. Where earlier generations largely deferred to family elders, mosque imams, and state-appointed religious officials as legitimate interpreters of religious meaning, the evidence surveyed in this article suggests that young people increasingly evaluate religious authority on the basis of perceived moral consistency rather than institutional position. An imam, teacher, or parent who is perceived as living inconsistently with the values they preach forfeits interpretive authority in the eyes of many young respondents, regardless of formal credentials or institutional standing (Babacan, 2025; Yılmaz, 2026).

This shift toward performance-based, rather than position-based, religious authority has significant implications for how religious institutions in Türkiye might adapt to changing generational expectations. Rather than relying on inherited institutional prestige to secure the trust of young people, religious authorities may need to demonstrate, through visible and consistent ethical conduct, the kind of moral credibility that young people in the reviewed studies describe seeking and often failing to find in the adults responsible for their religious formation. This reconceptualization of authority as earned rather than ascribed represents, in the view of this article, one of the more consequential and underappreciated implications of the literature reviewed here for the future of religious institutions in Türkiye.

4. DISCUSSION

The pattern that emerges across the reviewed literature challenges a straightforward supply-side assumption that is implicit in much religious education policy: the assumption that increasing the volume or visibility of religious instruction will, by itself, increase the depth of religious commitment among the young. The Turkish case suggests instead that the perceived authenticity and consistency of religious transmission, rather than its sheer quantity, is the decisive variable. Where authenticity is compromised, whether by authoritarian parenting, by gendered double standards, or by the politicization of religious authority, additional exposure to religious content appears just as likely to provoke critical scrutiny as to reinforce belief (Babacan, 2025; Yılmaz, 2026).

This supply-side assumption is not unique to Turkish policy-making; it echoes a broader tendency within religious education systems internationally to treat contact hours, curricular coverage, and institutional reach as proxies for socialization effectiveness. The Turkish evidence assembled in this review suggests that such proxies can be seriously misleading once the perceived legitimacy of the socializing institution is itself in question, since additional exposure under conditions of low legitimacy does not merely fail to strengthen commitment but can actively supply young people with the material, in the form of closer familiarity with texts and teachings, needed to construct a more informed critique of the tradition in which they were raised.

This finding resonates with, and extends, the broader theoretical debate between secularization and desecularization theory as applied to non-Western, Muslim-majority contexts. Ertit's (2024a, 2024b) work suggests that Turkey's experience should not be read as evidence against secularization theory simply because religious institutions have expanded; rather, the coexistence of institutional revival and individual secularization is precisely what a more sophisticated, multi-level reading of secularization theory would predict once modernization, urbanization, and rising educational attainment are allowed to operate on individual consciousness independently of state religious policy (Şaşmaz, 2025).

It is also worth situating these findings against the backdrop of Türkiye's own recent history of religious policy, which has oscillated between assertive secularism in the early Republican period and assertive religious revivalism in the more recent past. Both projects shared a common feature relevant to this discussion: both were pursued primarily as top-down state interventions rather than as responses to organically emerging grassroots demand, whether for secularization in the 1920s and 1930s or for religious revival after 2002. The recurring difficulty both projects have encountered in durably reshaping individual belief, despite very different ideological content, suggests a more general proposition about the limits of state-directed religious engineering: political authority appears able to reshape the institutional landscape of religion far more readily than it can reshape the private convictions of the citizens who live within that landscape.

A further implication concerns the role of digital environments, which appear throughout the reviewed literature as a double-edged influence. Digital platforms provide young people with alternative sources of religious and secular information that lie outside the control of family and institutional authority, and this appears to accelerate both disengagement, by exposing young people to skeptical and pluralistic worldviews, and, in some cases, alternative forms of religious or spiritual engagement that do not map neatly onto institutional categories (Yilmaz, 2026). Future research would benefit from disaggregating these divergent digital pathways rather than treating digital exposure as a uniformly secularizing force.

The findings reviewed here also carry implications for how the crisis of faith should be classified within the broader typology of religious change. Unlike apostasy narratives common in earlier sociology of religion, which often emphasized a decisive, publicly declared break with a religious community, the Turkish evidence points toward a much more ambiguous and often unresolved middle ground, in which young people retain cultural or nominal religious identification while substantially withdrawing from belief and practice. This ambiguous middle ground is precisely what graded secularity measures are designed to capture, and its prevalence in the Turkish case suggests that survey instruments relying on simple self-identification as religious or non-religious are likely to significantly understate the true extent of generational religious change already underway (Ertit, 2023).

Finally, the gendered dimension of the crisis of faith identified in family-level research deserves particular attention in future theorizing. Where religious discourse is deployed to justify unequal treatment within the household, the resulting erosion of trust appears to generalize beyond the specific issue of gender to a broader skepticism about the moral authority of religious teaching as such (Babacan, 2025). This suggests that efforts to strengthen intergenerational religious transmission in Türkiye cannot be separated from broader conversations about gender equity within religious and family life.

Taken as a whole, the discussion above suggests that the Turkish case offers a valuable corrective to socialization models that were originally developed in far more religiously homogeneous, institutionally stable settings. Where religious authority is politically contested and unevenly practiced, socialization outcomes cannot be predicted from exposure variables alone; the perceived legitimacy of the socializing agents themselves becomes a decisive intervening factor. This has implications well beyond Türkiye, since many contemporary societies are witnessing analogous entanglements between religious identity and partisan political mobilization, and the mechanisms identified here, inconsistency, politicization, and digitally mediated peer influence, are unlikely to be unique to the Turkish setting even though their specific institutional expression, through Imam Hatip schooling and Diyanet-coordinated religious life, is distinctly Turkish.

A final point concerns the temporal dimension of the crisis of faith. Because the process is gradual and cumulative rather than sudden, it is likely to be substantially underdetected by cross-sectional survey instruments administered at a single point in time, which can capture the prevalence of disengagement but not the sequence of experiences that produced it. This methodological limitation reinforces the case, developed further in the recommendations below, for longitudinal designs capable of tracking the same individuals across the socialization experiences identified as pivotal in this review.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This article has argued that religious socialization among Turkish youth is best understood as a contested, multi-level process in which young people actively interpret, rather than passively absorb, the religious frameworks presented to them by family, school, religious institutions, and the state. Three convergent findings support this conclusion: family-level research shows that authoritarian and gendered religious parenting styles predict a gradual crisis of faith; institutional-level research shows that the politicization of religious education undermines rather than strengthens perceived religious authenticity; and macro-level research shows that state-led religious revival and individual-level secularization coexist rather than substitute for one another in the contemporary Turkish case.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the durability of religious commitment in Türkiye depends less on the volume of religious instruction a young person receives than on the experiential coherence between what is preached and what is practiced across every context in which religious socialization occurs.

This conclusion carries a certain irony that is worth stating explicitly: the very political actors most invested in reversing secularizing trends among Turkish youth may, through the specific manner in which they have pursued this goal, have inadvertently contributed to the disillusionment they sought to prevent. Politicized piety, however sincerely intended by individual practitioners, appears in the reviewed literature to function as a corrosive rather than a protective force once young people come to associate religious identity primarily with partisan loyalty rather than with personal meaning, ethical guidance, or communal belonging.

5.2. Limitations

As a conceptual and integrative review, this article synthesizes existing qualitative and theoretical scholarship rather than generating new primary data, and its conclusions are accordingly bounded by the scope and sampling characteristics of the underlying studies it draws upon, most of which rely on relatively small, purposively sampled qualitative interviews. The generalizability of the proposed integrated model to other regions of Türkiye, to rural populations, or to religious minority communities within the country has not been directly tested and should be treated as a hypothesis for future empirical verification rather than an established finding.

A further limitation concerns the restriction of substantive citation to sources published from 2023 onward. While this restriction ensures that the review reflects the most current empirical picture available, it necessarily excludes a substantial body of earlier foundational scholarship on secularization and desecularization theory that continues to inform the recent sources cited here indirectly. Readers seeking the full genealogy of these theoretical debates are encouraged to consult the citation trails within

the 2023–2026 sources reviewed, which engage extensively, in their own reference lists, with the earlier canonical literature that could not be cited directly within the scope of this review.

5.3. Recommendations

For religious educators and family counselors, the reviewed literature suggests that interventions aimed at strengthening intergenerational faith transmission should prioritize modeling consistency between religious teaching and religious practice over simply increasing the volume of religious instruction, and should attend explicitly to how religious discourse is used, or misused, in relation to gender roles within the household. Practically, this implies creating structured opportunities within religious education, in mosque-based youth programs, and within family life for young people to raise doubts and receive substantive, non-punitive engagement with those doubts, rather than treating expressions of uncertainty as themselves a disciplinary problem to be suppressed.

For policy-makers responsible for religious education, the evidence reviewed here cautions against treating institutional expansion, such as the growth of religious schooling, as a sufficient strategy for cultivating durable religiosity, given that politicization of religious institutions appears to be directly associated with disengagement rather than commitment among the young people such institutions are intended to serve. Insulating religious educational content, insofar as this is administratively feasible, from direct association with partisan political messaging may help preserve the perceived authenticity of religious instruction in the eyes of young recipients, independent of whatever broader political debates surround religious policy at the national level.

For researchers, this article recommends further longitudinal and mixed-methods work that tracks individual religious trajectories over time using graded secularity measures rather than binary classifications, and that examines directly how digital environments differentially channel young people toward disengagement, reconstructed forms of religiosity, or renewed conventional commitment, since the present review indicates that all three pathways are represented in the current evidence base without yet being adequately disentangled from one another. Comparative research extending this model beyond the Turkish case, to other Muslim-majority societies experiencing state-mobilized religious revival, would further test the generalizability of the mechanisms proposed here and clarify which elements of the Turkish experience are context-specific and which reflect more general dynamics of religious socialization under conditions of political contestation.

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