

ECPS
EUROPEAN CENTER for POPULISM STUDIES

Populism & Politics
Article #22

The Impact of Civilizational Populism on Foreign and Transnational Policies: The Turkish Case

IHSAN YILMAZ
NICHOLAS MORIESON

MAY 5, 2023

DOI.ORG/10.55271/PP0022

Bios

IHSAN YILMAZ is Research Professor and Chair of Islamic Studies and Inter- culturalDialogue at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI), DeakinUniversity, Melbourne, Australia. He has conducted research on nation-building; citizenship; ethnic-religious-political identities and their securitization (Middle East, Pakistan, Indonesia); minority-majority relations (Australia, Turkey, the UK, and the USA); socio-legal affairs, identities, belonging and political participation of Muslim minorities in the West (the UK, Australia, and the USA); Islam-state-society relations in the majority and minority contexts; global Islamic movements; political Islam in a comparative perspective; Turkish politics; authoritarianisation; Turkish diasporas (the UK, Australia, the USA); transnationalism; intergroup contact (Australia); and politics of victimhood (Australia, Turkey).

Dr. NICHOLAS MORIESON holds a Ph.D. in politics from the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, and a Masters in International Relations from Monash University. He is the author of Religion and the Populist Radical Right: Christian Secularism and Populism in Western Europe, and a casual Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation.

ABSTRACT

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), an Islamist and populist political party led by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has increasingly incorporated what we term civilizational populism into its discourse. This article examines civilizational populism in AKP discourse, especially in the discourse of its leader Erdoğan, and finds it to be an important element of AKP discourse and ideology. The article also examines the impact of civilizational populism on Turkish domestic and foreign policy under AKP rule. The article finds that the AKP has increasingly, and especially since the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the mysterious coup attempt in 2016, construe opposition between the Turkish 'self' and the 'other' not in primarily nationalist terms, but in civilizational terms, and as a conflict between the Ottoman-Islamic 'self' and 'Western' other. Furthermore, the article finds that the AKP's domestic and foreign policies reflect its civilizational populist division of Turkish society insofar as the party is attempting to raise a 'pious generation' that supports its Islamizing of Turkey society, and its neo-Ottoman imperialism in the Middle East. Finally, the paper discusses how the AKP's civilizational populism has become a transnational phenomenon due to the party's ability to produce successful televisions shows that reflect its anti-Western worldview and justify its neo-Ottoman imperialism in the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars observing the AKP transformation describe the party as increasingly defining Turkish identity not in a narrowly nationalist or ethnonationalist manner, but in religious and civilizational terms (Hazir, 2022; Uzer, 2020; Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). Language describing a clash between civilizations in AKP discourse is not difficult to find. Turkey, according to Erdoğan, is "heir" to Islamic civilization, and has called upon the people of his nation to rejuvenate Islamic culture, claiming that this duty not merely of government but also general "society, the business world, NGOs, universities, people of arts and culture" (Erdoğan, 2017).

This paper argues that a civilizational turn in Turkish politics analogous to the civilizational turn in European and American populism identified by Brubaker (2017) Haynes (2017; 2020), Morieson (2023) and Yilmaz and Morieson (2022; 2023a) has taken place. Brubaker, for example, describes how right-wing populist parties in north-western Europe are increasingly constructing "the opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms" (Brubaker, 2017: 1191) (i.e. between the Western and Judeo-Christian 'self' and the Islamic 'other'). Haynes (2017; 2020) finds that a similar present in populist discourses in the United States, particularly within the Trump Administration and its supporters. According to Yilmaz and Morieson (2022) "In the 21st century, across a variety of democratic political contexts, 'civilizationism,' a political discourse that uses a largely religious classification of peoples in order to define national identity, has become a significant component of populist political rhetoric." Yilmaz and Morieson (2022), drawing on Mudde's definition of populism (2004), argue that "civilizational populism" is "a group of ideas that together considers that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people, and society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite' who collaborate with the dangerous others belonging to other civilizations that are hostile and present a clear and present danger to the civilization and way of life of the pure people. Is there, then, evidence of this 'civilizational populism' in Turkey, an in the form of the AKP led government? Moreover, what role does civilizationism play in AKP discourse? And is civilizationism evident in Turkish domestic and foreign policy?

CIVILIZATIONAL POPULISM IN TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS

What is civilizationism? Civilizationism, or the belief that the world can be divided into several civilizations, has been present in political discourse across the world for decades. For example, Samuel P. Huntington's (2000) famously argued that post-Cold War politics is defined by civilizational identities, and that the nations of the world can be divided into several clashing civilizations, often possessing at their core a single dominant state (i.e. the United States is the 'core state' of Western civilization). This interpretation of post-Cold War politics arguably influenced American foreign policy throughout the 2000s. Populists in the West also adopted 'clash of civilizations' narratives. Across a number of European nations and in the United States, civilizationism entered populist discourse as a reaction to the rise of Islamist terrorism in the 2000s, "large-scale immigration from the non-West to the West resulting in rapid demographic change, the deindustrialization of much of Europe and North America" (Morieson, 2023), and the dominance of "a new cultural politics" that "emerged around difference and identity" and thrived within the neoliberal environment despite its origins on the political left (Robertson and Nestore, 2022).

A civilizational turn in populist discourse was first observed by sociologist Rogers Brubaker. Brubaker (2017: 1193) identified a number of right-wing populist parties in North-Western Europe who, he wrote, "reconceptualized in civilizational terms ...the boundaries of belonging and the semantics of self and other." The ultimate causes behind the civilizational turn, according to Brubaker (2017), is the growing presence of Islam in Europe and the perception among many Europeans that Muslims pose a threat to Europe's Western and Christian identity. Other scholars have identified a similar civilizational turn occurring in populist political discourse in many other Western nations, including in the United States, Hungary, and Italy (Haynes, 2020), Germany, France, Greece (Kaya and Tecmen, 2019) and Poland (Morieson, 2023). Other scholars now find that civilizationism has entered populist discourse beyond the West (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022; Shukri, 2023; Gamage, 2023; Saleem, 2023) including in many Muslim majority democracies and hybrid regimes (Hadiz, 2018; Mietzner, 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2022).



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's supporters listening to his speech in Balıkesir, Turkey on April 6,l 2017. Photo: Thomas Koch.

In the Muslim majority world, Turkey is home to an influential and powerful populist party, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which incorporates civilizationism into their discourse in several important ways. In this section we first discuss the role of civilizationism in the AKP's ideology – Erdoğanism – and its populist division of society into three groups: 'the pure people,' 'corrupt elites' and 'dangerous others,' and attempt at constructing a new desired citizen and 'pious generation. Following this we describe the role of civilizationism in the AKP's domestic politics, and the manner in which the AKP frame its repression and authoritarianism as a defense not merely of the Turkish nation, but of Islamic civilization and the ummah. Finally, we discuss the role of civilizationism in the AKP's foreign policy discourse and discuss how the party justifies its military intervention in Syria and its attempts to increase cooperation between majority Sunni Muslim nations as part of its responsibility as the core state of Islamic civilization and heir to the Ottoman Empire.

Civilizationism is an important element of Erdoğanism, manifested in its glorification of the Ottoman Empire, and its claim that Turkey is "the legitimate inheritor of Ottoman legacies and power, the leader of the Islamic world, and the protector of Palestine (Hintz, 2018: 37, 113). Erdoğanism combines Turkish nationalism with Islamism and neo-Ottomanism, and the result is an eclectic ideology that asserts that majority Muslim nations ought to come together for mutual protection against an aggressive West and as a civilizational bloc led by Turkey. The belief that a 'clash of civilizations' is occurring between the West and

Islam is a critical component in the AKP's construction of ingroups and outgroups in Turkey. The AKP portrays itself as defending pious Turkish Sunni Muslims (or the ummah) from their enemies: morally corrupt secular 'elites' and dangerous non-Muslim 'others' alleged to be working with Western powers to dismember Turkey and destroy Islam.

The AKP has attempted to create the distinction between 'the people' (ummah) and their enemies (non-ummah), and to portray themselves are protectors of ummah, in a number of ways. The mysterious coup attempt in 2016 provided the AKP with an opportunity to 'prove' that its opponents were dangerous enemies of the Turkish people and Islam. The Gülenists were subsequently branded terrorists by the government, which claimed that they were working with Western powers to destroy Turkish democracy (Taş, 2018). Shortly after the coup attempt Erdoğan remarked "This coup attempt has actors inside Turkey, but its script was written outside …unfortunately the West is supporting terrorism and stands by coup plotters" (Reuters, 2016). Erdoğan furthermore claimed that the coup was a "gift from God" that allowed him to expose all of Islam's and the Turkish people's enemies within the country (Şik, 2016; Ak, 2022). Thus, the AKP portrayed the coup as part of a wider conflict between Islam and its enemies: Gülenists and other "perverters of Islam" within Turkey and the West. Furthermore, Erdoğan portrayed himself as acting in the name of God to protect the Turkish people from their enemies.

The AKP's response to the coup included attempts to re-educate the Turkish people and to raise an Islamist 'pious generation.' This 'pious generation' is taught the key ideas of Erdoğanism, including the glorification of the Ottoman Empire and conservative Islamic values in Islamized schools and state-controlled mosques. Erdoğan and his party also encourages Turkish Sunni Muslims to perceive "non-Turkish Muslims, such as Kurds and Lazes, …and non-Muslims, such as Christians and Jews" as enemies (Yilmaz, 2021: 58). These minority groups are now part of the AKP's 'unwanted citizens,' a group consisting of people involved in the Gülen movement, journalists critical of the government, human rights activists, and opposition political parties critical of AKP regime (Yilmaz, 2021; 2018). Furthermore, these groups and individuals are increasingly portrayed by the AKP as "traitors" who do the bidding of foreign "dark forces" trying to "destabilize Turkey" (Yilmaz, 2018). This categorization is intended to help Erdoğan both a sense of a common community in the ummah, but also fear and hatred of non-ummah, including Kemalist 'elites' who wish to return to the secular nationalism of the 20th century, and non-Sunni Muslim minorities, Gülenists, and non-ethnic Turks.

Another important element in the AKP's attempt to raise a 'pious generation' and revive Islamic civilization has been its use of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Under AKP rule, Diyanet has been transformed from a body created by Kemalists to encourage

Turkish Muslims to accept, through a programme of social engineering involving control of the texts of Friday sermons, fatwas, and education, the new Turkish Republic and its secular constitution, to an instrument of the AKP itself. The AKP, throughout its period in power, increasingly staffed Diyanet with AKP supporters (Yilmaz, 2018; Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017). As this occurred, Diyanet used its authority to support the AKP's political agenda and feed the growing cult around Erdoğan, who the body portrayed in sermons as a pious Muslim who was liberating Turkish Muslims from secular authoritarianism.

The AKP installed two successive pro-AKP and staunchly Islamist Diyanet leaders, Ali Erbaş and Mehmet Görmez, who sought to perpetuate Erdoğanism and help the AKP construct a 'pious generation.' Görmez sought to perpetuate Erdoğanism and demonize the West by declaring that Muslims should not enjoin 'Western' traditions such as celebrating the New Year. According to Görmez, "No one can say it is right for the pagan culture and consumption culture, converging with hedonism, to create a corrupt culture over our children and teens, especially if all those are joined by things like Christmas, pine tree, gambling, drinking, lottery and such forth, that will move a human away from himself and his God to create a tradition that will corrupt the society" (Korkmaz, 2015).

In making such statements Diyanet officials are not merely attempting to prevent Muslims from partaking in Christian rituals but attempting to frame both Christian corrupt and inherently Western, and therefore as a foreign threat to the Turkish people. Erbaş, Görmez's successor, in his inaugural address called for Turkish people to "work harder than ever to deliver the eternal and everlasting messages of the God and his Prophet to the humanity which flounder into the clamp of secularism and valuelessness" (Parlamento Haber, 2017). Later, during a sermon upon the converting of the Hagia Sophia museum into a mosque, Erbaş held a sword and spoke from the minbar in imitation of an Ottoman Sultan, and in what was likely a calculated affront to Christians and Turkish secularists (Hurriyet, 2020).

Friday sermons in Diyanet mosques are also used to perpetuate Erdoğanism, especially insofar as the sermons portray Turkish Sunni Muslims as part of a global ummah forever threatened by non-Muslim enemies, and by Gülenists and others false Muslims who pervert the religion, and whose corrupt activities are ultimately the product of the West attempting to create conflict among Muslims. These efforts have become increasingly pronounced since the 2016 attempted coup (Yilmaz et al., 2021). These sermons, which name no specific enemy, imply that the West is attacking the Muslim ummah, and attempting to destroy Turkey "the flagbearer of the Muslim Ummah" (Yilmaz et al., 2021). Even when Muslims attack other Muslims Diyanet – reflecting AKP ideology – frames the conflict as the result of Western attempts to divide the ummah. For example, a Friday sermon delivered on October 4, 2014, claimed that "By looking at the conditions the believers live

in, it should be known how the power centers [i.e. the West] gather strength through the blood of the believers and how the brotherhood of faith that makes believers closer to each other is attacked and damaged and turned into fighting, violence and hostility" (Yilmaz et al., 2021). Each of these sermons re-enforce Erdoğanism insofar as they portray the world as riven by clashing civilizations in which the Muslim ummah is forever threatened by the West, and in which Turkey –the core state within Islamic civilization and heir to the Ottoman Empire – is the particular target of Western attacks. Equally, the sermons portray conflicts between Muslims as the product of Western attempts to weaken Islam, rather than the result of political, economic, and cultural differences between Muslims themselves.

Erdoğan has also attempted to portray the damage caused his party's unorthodox economic strategies, which have brought the nation close to economic ruin in the 2020s, as part of an economic war waged on Turkey by the West, which he claimed was attempting to bring "Turkey and its people to their knees" (Voice of America, 2018). Contrasting the pious Muslim values supposedly shared by his followers with Western consumerism, and in an effort to rally support for his economic policies following the dramatic decline of the value of the Turkish lira, Erdoğan told the Turkish people to remember that "if they [the West] have their dollars, we have our people, our God" (CNBC, 2018).



Ethnic Uighurs are seen during a protest against China near the Chinese Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey on December 15, 2019. Photo: Shutterstock.

CIVILIZATIONAL POPULISM IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

The civilizational turn in Turkish populism is present in AKP rhetoric on Turkey's foreign relations, where it has two purposes. First, the AKP often presents foreign conflicts to their domestic audience as part of a 'clash of civilizations' between Islam and the West, in which Turkey is targeted by Western powers because it is the leading nation within Islamic civilization. However, the AKP is also driven by a mixture of Erdoğanism and national self-interest, and its foreign policy is the product of the intertwining of Turkey's new identity as their heir to the Ottoman Empire are protector of the ummah, and the government's desire to increase Turkey's power.

As a result of the Islamist belief in the decline of American "the AKP had desired to pursue a more 'independent' foreign policy as a regional hegemonic power and demoted its foreign policy with the West to transactionalism" (Bashirov and Yilmaz, 2020). Thus, since its rule was threatened by the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the 2016 failed coup, the AKP has attempted to maintain transactional relationships with Western countries while also using a discourse in which the West is portrayed "as the 'other' of Turkey" (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019).

By "invoking the glories of the Ottoman period, the AKP has engaged in a (neo)imperial project" (Taş, 2022a) which has caused Turkey to become deeply invested in Middle East geopolitics. Turkey's involvement in the Middle East is "unmatched" in the Republic's history, and "along with the country's drift away from its Western

orientation in the 2010s" demonstrates how the AKP's ideological divergence from Kemalism has altered both its domestic and international politics" (Taş, 2022a). Following the Arab Spring, and in an attempt to restore the glory of the Ottoman Empire and reinvigorate "Pax Ottomana," Turkey "pursued a maximalist, regional-hegemony-seeking" foreign policy in the Middle East, calculating "that the authoritarian regimes in the region would sooner or later crumble through the Arab uprisings, paving the way for the rise of Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood) offshoots across the region (Taş, 2022b). Yet when the Muslim Brotherhood and its associated political parties were banned or marginalized following the failure of democracy across the much of the Middle East and the re-establishing of secular authoritarianism, the AKP continued its neo-Ottoman foreign policy with an even "more hawkish tone after the siege of Kobani in 2015 and, more pronouncedly, the 2016 abortive coup" (Taş, 2022b).

Erdoğan's 'clash of civilizations' rhetoric is echoed in Diyanet's Friday sermons. For example, a sermon delivered on December 9, 2016, argued "Because of the ambitions and power struggles of the hegemonic powers in our region, the Islamic lands are falling into ruins" (Yilmaz et al., 2021). A Friday sermon delivered in January 2018 asked listeners the rhetorical question: "Isn't the greed of global powers the cause of the bloodshed and suffering in our geography?" (Yilmaz et al., 2021). Another argued that "What happened in the Islamic geography today clearly shows the point reached by those who try to destroy our women, children, lives, values, history, culture, and civilization. In Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, the unity of the ummah, the honor of the nation, the respect of the country has been trampled" (Yilmaz et al., 2021). Although the foreign nations attacking Muslims are not mentioned, these remarks suggest that Western powers are conspiring to divide Muslims and destroy their civilization, and in this way they echo anti-Western remarks by Erdoğan and other AKP officials. Diyanet sermons have also encouraged the faithful to believe that Turkey is the defender of all people who suffer oppression. On October 11, 2019, for example, a sermon told argued that "Just as in the past, today, too, our nation will continue to be the remedy for the remediless people, be there for those people who has nobody by their side and be the hope and safe haven for the victimized and the refugees" (Yilmaz et al., 2021).



Turkish TV series Ertugrul Ghazi (Dirilis: Ertugrul in Turkish and Resurrection: Ertugrul in English) is an international hit, but it has found unprecedented acclaim and fandom in Pakistan, where it is broadcast in the country's national language (Urdu) by the state-owned Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV).

CIVILIZATIONISM WITHIN THE AKP'S TRANSNATIONAL POPULISM

Yilmaz and Demir (2022) suggest the AKP is attempting to win support from and perpetuate Erdoğanism within the 3.1 million strong Turkish diaspora and the wider and far larger European Muslim population. Like early secular nationalist Turkish governments, they argue, the AKP "have also tried to use the Turkish diaspora to foster a positive image of Turkey while trying to prevent undesired ideologies spreading among them and thus influencing Turkey's domestic politics" (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022). However, rather than promoting secular nationalism within the diaspora, the AKP has "reengineered the position of ideologically proximate conservative-nationalist diaspora Turks, as loyal allies that would help Turkey extend its legitimacy and soft power beyond its borders and to produce a new state-centric identity" (Arkilic, 2021: 591). Furthermore, the party "has tried to mobilize its loyal diaspora against the dissidents abroad. It has also invested heavily in its diaspora policies and has created new institutions to reach out to the transnational diasporic spaces occupied by Turkish-speaking communities, especially in the West, and to proactively engage with the Turkish diaspora" (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022).

Yilmaz and Demir (2022) contend that "This policy shift has also been reflected in the state's diaspora definition," in which "YTB (Yurtdışı

Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı – Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities), in its Strategic Plan 2019–2023, included members of non-Turkish Muslim communities who are not from Turkey in its diaspora definition as 'related communities'" (YTB, 2019: 7).Yenigun and Adar (2019) argue that the AKP is using a variety of institutional tools, including Diyanet and Turkish media, to 'validate Turkey [as the] leader of the Muslim world and patron of the Muslim masses worldwide.' These include "formal institutions such as the Diyanet's overseas organization (DITIB, Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği – The Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) and its mosques," but also Turkish embassies and consulates and other "state institutions that work with Turks abroad and related communities (YTB, Yunus Emre Enstitusu, Maarif, and others)."

The AKP also operates or funds "country-specific organizations operating in Western Europe" including the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD) and the Turken Foundation which "was established jointly by the pro-AKP TÜRGEV (Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı – the Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation)," and also the "Ensar Foundation in the US and the UK operate for the purpose of transnational populism" (Yimaz and Demir, 2022). Diyanet plays a vital role transnationally in reproducing the AKP's ideology. An analysis of Diyanet Friday sermons delivered under AKP rule concludes that "the interests of Turkey are weaved in by using identity-creating elements" (Carol and Hofheinz, 2022: suggesting that promoting Sunni Muslim unity under Turkish leadership is a key element of Diyanet's messaging. Indeed, in order to spread the message of Sunni Muslim unity under Turkish leadership, "Diyanet has organized conferences and visits and sent out delegations to disseminate the Islamist civilizational populist narrative of the AKP regime" including "the Diyanet organized the First World Muslim Minorities' Summit in Istanbul" in April 2018 (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022).

Finally, the AKP has also sought to perpetuate Erdoğanism, and especially the notions that Islam is under attack by the West, and that globally Muslims must unite under Turkish leadership on the grounds that Turkey is the heir to the glorious Ottoman Empire, to a worldwide audience of Muslims via television. (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022). Pan-Islamism and the glorification of the Ottoman Empire have become important elements in popular Turkish television programs during AKP rule over Turkey (Özçetin, 2019a: 247). According to Çetin (2014: 2477), the AKP politicizes television dramas by using as a means of: "(1) dealing with contemporary political issues, (2) settling accounts with the past, (3) neo-Ottomanism, and (4) piety and the Islamic worldview." Turkish dramas, then, "disseminate the AKP's narrative of historical and contemporary in-groups and out-groups" both within Turkey across the Muslim world (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022; Çevik, 2020: 177). For example, Dirilis (Resurrection) and Payitaht (Abdulhamid, the Last Sultan are historical dramas that attempt, at times, to find parallels

between the Ottoman past, in which the Ottoman Empire came into conflict with the Christian West and other non-Muslim civilizations, and Turkey's present (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022).

Within these dramas, Muslims are portrayed as threatened by "Crusaders, the Templars, the Mongols, Byzantium and their contemporary successors such as the EU, the US and the Jewish lobby" (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022). At the same time, the dramas frequently present opponents of Islamism and the AKP within Turkey as "collaborators and pawns of these external enemies" (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022; Özçetin, 2019b: 947). Throughout these series Muslims who act as guardians of Islamic lands from Christians and Jews – and against false Muslims who secretly collaborate with Muslims' enemies – are portrayed as heroes (Yilmaz and Demir, 2022). Within these television dramas, as in Diyanet sermons to a domestic and transnational audience, the AKP – to borrow a phrase from Brubaker (2017) – construes opposition between 'self' and the 'other' not in primarily nationalist terms, but in civilizational terms, and as a conflict between the Ottoman-Islamic 'self' and 'Western' other.

CONCLUSION

The AKP's civilizational populism impacts Turkish domestic and foreign policy in a variety of ways. Domestically, the AKP have attempted to perpetuate their rule by raising a 'pious generation' who glorify the Ottoman Empire and wish to rejuvenate Islamic civilization within Turkey. As part of this project, the AKP has not only altered the school and university curriculum to reflect their ideology, but has greatly enlarged the budget, scope, and direction of Diyanet to encourage Turkish Sunni Muslims to believe that the AKP is protecting them from internal and external enemies who hate Islam and wish to destroy Turkey. The AKP and Diyanet portray Western culture and Christianity as corrupting influences on Turkish Muslims and admonish believers to cease celebrating so-called Christian holidays including New Year's Eve. Equally, the AKP has sought to encourage Turkish Muslims to think of themselves as part of a great Islamic civilization through their opening of a museum glorifying Islamic civilizations and through his call for everyone in Turkey to "make efforts to build and revive the civilization while thinking over the culture" (Erdoğan, 2017).

The AKP's civilizational populist turn has also impacted Turkish foreign policy. Erdoğanism, as an ideology, defines Turkey's role in the world as leader of the ummah and successor to the Ottoman Empire, and possessing many of its responsibilities to the ummah. As a result, AKP ruled Turkey plays an especially active role in Middle East geopolitics. After the Arab Spring, the Turkey began to attempt to achieve the AKP's goal of "reinvigorating Pax Ottomana" and "pursued a maximalist, regional-hegemony-seeking" foreign policy, believing that American power was growing weak and that the secular authoritarian regimes in the Middle East were at an end. However, Turkish foreign policy is also constrained by the region's other powers, and by the world's sole superpower, the United States. Thus, rather than acting to consistently protect the ummah from non-Muslim aggression, Turkey has instead sought alliances with European nations such as Hungary, remained in NATO despite Turkey being the only non-Western, non-Christian member of the alliance, and re-established full diplomatic relations with Israel. Equally, Erdoğan has remained quiet on China's abuse of Muslims in Xinjiang, despite evidence of Muslim Uighurs being interned by the hundreds of thousands in concentration camps where they face secular 're-education.' This suggests that the AKP and Erdoğan remain pragmatic actors and will not act rashly to protect Muslims' interests when the result might be contrary to Turkey's national interest. Finally, the AKP is spreading its ideology within both the Turkish diaspora and the wider European Muslim population via a variety of organizations and through popular television series. In this way, the party attempts to move its ideology beyond Turkey's borders, in an effort to convince diaspora Turks and Sunni Muslims in Europe to perceive themselves to be part of an aggrieved ummah facing constant attacks from the West, and Erdoğan and the AKP as the leaders of the ummah.

The AKP has increasingly, and especially in reaction to the Gezi Park protests and 2016 attempted coup, construed opposition between 'self' and the 'other' not in primarily nationalist terms, but in civilizational terms and as a conflict between the Ottoman-Islamic 'self' and 'Western' other. Furthermore, the party has achieved repeated electoral success by portraying its opponents as anti-Muslim and therefore illegitimate and morally bad and portraying the party's mistakes as the result of foreign anti-Muslim forces intervening in Turkish politics and attempting to destroy Turkey's economy and society. Finally, despite the AKP's success in framing Turkey's economic and social problems as the result of Western attempts to oppress Muslims globally and prevent Turkey from flourishing, Turkey's increasingly poor economic performance has caused the party to lose support. The May 14, 2023, general elections will therefore test the AKP's ability to perpetuate its rule via an anti-Western populist narrative.

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EMAIL: ECPS@POPULISMSTUDIES.ORG

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