

Religious Schools and Voting: Evidence from Political Islam in Turkey*

Tolga Benzer[†]

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of the establishment of state-run modern Islamic schools during the 1970s on electoral outcomes in Turkey. Exploiting the variation in exposure to Islamic schools across district centers and election years, I find that district centers with an Islamic school voted significantly more for Islamist parties after exposure to Islamic schools. The effect appears after prolonged exposure to Islamic schools, once affected student cohorts came of voting age. Last, I provide evidence that increased organizational capacity, male political activism, and ideological change were influential mechanisms driving the effect.

JEL Classification: P16, Z12

Keywords: Religion, Education, Election, Politics, Islam

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[†]Turku School of Economics and INVESThub, University of Turku. Contact: tolga.benzer@utu.fi

1 Introduction

For centuries, religious institutions enjoyed a monopoly over the provision of education to successive generations of religious adherents. However, beginning in the 19th century, many states introduced secular mass schooling and compulsory schooling laws. Apart from secular education's role in economic development and industrialization (Squicciarini, 2020), an essential function of this mass schooling was to support the nation-building efforts of the political elite (Alesina, Giuliano and Reich, 2021; Ansell and Lindvall, 2013; Bandiera et al., 2019; Paglayan, 2021; Ramirez and Boli, 1987). Since then, the provision of religious education has been a central issue in politics. A recent ruling on public funding of religious schools by the United States Supreme Court and the state-driven promotion of religious schooling in several countries, including Turkey and Hungary, are notable recent examples on the matter.¹

This paper studies the consequences of access to state-run Islamic secondary schools during the 1970s on electoral outcomes in Turkey. Turkey offers an interesting case study for the question at hand with its historically strict secular institutions and notably conservative population. A candidate country for European Union membership, and once posited as a model among Muslim-majority countries for its secular institutions and electoral democracy, Turkey has turned into an electoral autocracy under the Islamist Justice and Development Party rule (Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg, 2017). In this paper, I provide novel empirical evidence that state-run Islamic schools were one of the significant driving forces behind the success of Islamist parties in the 1990s in Turkey.

In 1925, after the foundation of the Turkish republic, Islamic schools were abolished to secularize the education system. The monopoly of secular schooling was shattered in 1950 when state-run Islamic schooling was reintroduced. However, the first Islamic

¹In 2020, The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* that states can't exclude religious schools from receiving tuition funding simply because they are religious, in a 5-4 vote divided across ideological lines.

schools were established in highly populated province-centers with a single institution per locality, limiting access to these schools. Islamic schools expanded rapidly into relatively less populated district centers during the 1970s. To isolate the impact of exposure to Islamic schools on electoral outcomes, I exploit the expansion of the Islamic school network in the 1970s in a difference-in-differences framework by comparing the electoral results in district centers with and without an Islamic school over the period between 1969 and 1995.

My main focus is the impact of Islamic schools on Islamist party vote shares. I find that district centers with an Islamic school experienced a faster increase in their Islamist party vote share than district centers without such schools. I find no effect in the first election held right after the school expansion in 1977, indicating that the opening of Islamic schools was not effective in attracting votes for the Islamist party in the very short run. The effect started to emerge with prolonged exposure to Islamic schools, after the schools' first students came of voting age, allowing sufficient time for local mobilization. In the most conservative specification, the increase in Islamist party vote share after exposure is, on average, 1.8 percentage points, or about 15% relative to the mean. The magnitude of the treatment effect is substantial, as it explains about 30% of the surge in Islamic party support in treated district centers between 1973 and 1995. A heterogeneity analysis of the treatment effect further reveals that the impact of Islamic school access is higher for right-wing strongholds and localities with a lower attachment to secularist parties suggesting an increase in polarization. Overall, secularist center-left parties experienced a faster decline in their vote shares in treated district centers, while conservative right-wing vote shares remained largely unaffected. However, there is notable heterogeneity in the dynamics of the treatment effect over election years for outcomes other than Islamist party vote share. Nevertheless, the Islamist party managed to shrink its vote margin vis-à-vis established parties.

Finally, I provide evidence of the possible mechanisms that might drive the increased

support for Islamist parties in treated areas. First, I construct a new dataset that provides locations of Milli Turk Talebe Birliği (MTTB, hereon) and Akinci Movement branches, the two prominent Islamist youth organizations comprised predominantly of men. I find that district centers with an Islamic school were substantially more likely to have an Islamist youth organization branch in 1978 than in comparison district centers. For MTTB, I also have information on the opening years of their local branches, so I can further check whether the opening of an Islamic school triggered the establishment of an MTTB branch in treated areas. Using an event-study specification, I show that the likelihood of establishing an MTTB branch increases significantly only after the opening of an Islamic school. Next, using several waves of the World Values Survey database, I show that male cohorts who participated in secondary education during the increased presence of Islamic schooling at secondary education had lower secular values and were more likely to be Islamic party members later in life. On the other hand, I do not find any changes for female cohorts, which had fewer Islamic school enrollments in absolute terms during the early periods of Islamic school access. Last, I find that the impact of Islamic schools on electoral outcomes was more pronounced in treated district centers accompanied by Islamist youth organizations.

Ultimately, Islamic school access increased Islamist men's political activism and mobilization at the local level, which paid off for Islamists in the following elections. These findings suggest that the increase in the organizational capacity of Islamist movements and ideological change were two influential mechanisms that drove Islamic schools' positive impact on Islamist success in elections. I also rule out several other alternative explanations that may be related to increasing support for the Islamist party in treated district centers and provide further robustness checks. These explanations include increased visibility of Islamic brotherhoods in public life, the differential supply of other sorts of religious buildings, economic liberalization, and geographic sorting.

This paper makes two main contributions. First, it contributes to the recently

growing literature on the effect of religious institutions in support for political parties with religious agendas. A few studies investigate the role of religious infrastructure in Islam and Judaism and find that supply shocks on the stock of religious institutions increase the support for religious parties (Bazzi, Koehler-Derrick and Marx, 2020; Freedman, 2020; Grewal, 2020). My paper contributes to this literature by disentangling the role of Islamic schools with an examination of a specific policy change that exclusively enabled Islamic school exposure. This paper provides the first systematic evidence on the role of modern, formal religious schools—promoted by political entities—in a secular electoral democratic context. I further provide evidence on the short- and medium-run dynamics of the impact of Islamic school access on electoral outcomes, as well as through which mechanisms this effect operates.

Second, this paper contributes to the extensive literature in the political science and economics disciplines on the provision of education as a nation-building tool to design younger generations’ political beliefs and attitudes (Alesina, Giuliano and Reich, 2021; Ansell, 2010; Bozcaga and Cansunar, 2021; Cantoni et al., 2017; Fouka, 2020; Paglayan, 2021; Voigtländer and Voth, 2015). Bazzi, Hilmy and Marx (2020) show that the competition from the Islamic private school sector to secular public education had worked against nation-building goals in Indonesia and increased the religiosity of affected cohorts. This paper adds to this literature by showing that religious schools may be utilized effectively to strengthen the electoral support for religious parties and revert the aims of secularization, that is, the separation of religion from political institutions.

2 Islamic Schools and Islamist Electoral Advantage

In this section, I provide several plausible mechanisms through which access to Islamic schools might boost support for Islamist parties. With the rise and success of Islamist parties in the last couple of decades, there is an increasing interest in identifying the

reasons for Islamists' electoral advantage. Previous literature lays out several possible explanations for why there may be an Islamist political advantage. Among others, major explanations include ideological change, organizational capacity, and clientelism (see [Cammatt and Luong \(2014\)](#), [Pepinsky, Liddle and Mujani \(2012\)](#), and [Livny \(2020\)](#) for detailed discussions of several theories including other explanations on this topic). Here, I argue that Islamic schools act as an enabling force to mobilize Islamic movements and enhance Islamist party support through the aforementioned mechanisms.

Ideological change is one of the most commonly identified explanations for the mass appeal of Islamist parties in Muslim countries due to the clear connection between religious identity and voting behavior. According to this argument, an individual's religious preferences play an essential role in her voting behavior. Islamist parties try to attract religious voters by justifying their political agenda as religiously correct and claim to occupy the moral high ground ([Kepel, 2002](#)). There is also a large literature in the political economy of education that focuses on the role of educational institutions in transmitting values and beliefs. This literature suggests that educational institutions can be used as an effective way to influence the identity of children and teenagers ([Cantoni et al., 2017](#); [Voigtländer and Voth, 2015](#)). Therefore, Islamic schools can enhance students' religious identity by inculcating them with Islamic beliefs and values. In turn, strengthening voters' religious identity and preferences may boost the popularity of Islamist parties.

Another leading explanation for Islamist party support is the relative advantage of Islamist movements in terms of organizational capacity. This explanation attributes allegedly more efficient and sustainable organizational structures to Islamist parties relative to others ([Clark et al., 2004](#); [Wickham, 2002](#); [Wiktorowicz, 2004](#)). On the one hand, Islamic parties may enjoy easier access to material resources that support the welfare of religious communities, including mosques, Islamic schools, and charities. On the other hand, they can use these institutions as recruitment and propaganda centers

for their movements. A distinct advantage of Islamic schools over other types of institutions is the function of developing human capital that can provide educated human resources for Islamist parties. Islamic schools may also produce more dedicated cadres and sympathizers of Islamic movements by decreasing recruitment costs due to strengthened religious identity (Bazzi, Koehler-Derrick and Marx, 2020; Harmsen, 2008). Students or graduates recruited from Islamic schools can provide a young and dynamic human resource facilitating Islamic movements' local mobilization.

Last, Islamic school graduates voting according to their Islamic school allegiances may be rewarded with privileges and positions in public institutions as a form of patronage provided by Islamist networks within the government (Ayata, 1996). Political clientelism in exchange for votes is common practice among Islamist movements in Muslim countries (Brooke, 2019; Cammett and Issar, 2010; Hamayotsu, 2012; Wickham, 2002). Islamic schools can form a clientelistic relationship between Islamist parties and the religious communities that value Islamic education. Individuals may use an Islamic school degree as a signaling tool to obtain personal favors—jobs, procurement contracts, welfare support, and so forth—in exchange for Islamist electoral support. Taken all together, these arguments indicate that Islamic schools may work as grassroots arms of Islamist parties by promoting Islamic politics and enabling local mobilization of religious adherents.

3 Institutional Background

3.1 Brief History of Islamist Politics and Islamic Schools in Turkey

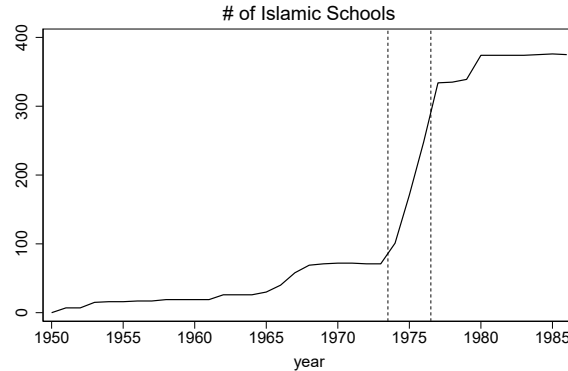
The global wave of democratization at the end of World War II also affected the Turkish republic. Turkey was transformed into a multiparty democracy with the 1946 general elections. The Democratic Party (DP), founded by the right-wing conservative faction within the Republican People's Party (RPP), won the first fair multiparty elections in 1950.

One of the first things the DP achieved after coming into power was to reintroduce Islamic schooling, proclaiming a need to train imams and preachers for mosques. However, the initial number of Islamic schools remained limited as they were established as one school per highly populated province-center. Several parties with a clear Islamist agenda were also formed during the 1950s, yet they were short-lived and shut down by the judiciary, which cited their reactionary religious activities. Therefore, Islamist movements remained mainly a faction within the mainstream right-wing parties—the Democratic Party and its successor, the Justice Party (JP)—and pro-Islam nationalist parties, including the Nation Party (NP).

Political Islam had experienced a sharp rise throughout the Muslim world by the end of the 1960s. The strictly secular Turkish republic was no exception. Following a dispute with the leadership of the JP regarding nominations, the Islamist factions within the JP and NP formed the “Independents’ Movement” under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan to present independent candidates in the 1969 elections in twelve provinces. Prior to the election, Erbakan published a manifesto called “Milli Görüş” (National Outlook), which later also gave its name to the movement, essentially focusing on economy- and development-related issues with a localist focus. The role of Islam in state affairs and daily life was also a general topic of the manifesto. Out of 12 independent candidates, only Erbakan qualified to enter parliament. However, public interest during the campaign period and the desire of Islamic brotherhoods to see Islam represented in politics led to the formation of the National Order Party (NOP) by Erbakan and fellows in 1970. This was the beginning of an era in which, in the decades to come, Islam would come to dominate Turkey’s political landscape. Again, however, this first attempt by Milli Görüş to politicize Islam under a party failed when the Constitutional Court shut it down after the 1971 military memorandum, citing antisecular acts. The year after, to succeed the NOP, Milli Görüş founded the National Salvation Party (NSP)—the first party to successfully espouse Islamist politics in Turkey.

Milli Görüs started to assume an important place on Turkey's political scene after the 1973 elections. The NSP received a surprising 11.8% vote share, and 48 of its candidates entered parliament. Between 1973 and 1980, when mainstream parties failed to achieve a majority to form a government, the NSP participated in several coalitions with both mainstream center-right and center-left parties. This helped the party achieve some of its Islamist agenda, although its vote share remained modest during this period. One of the most prominent achievements of the NSP was enabling the rapid expansion of the Islamic school network during coalition talks as seen in Figure 1. Another significant milestone

Figure 1: Evolution of Islamic School Numbers



Notes: Panel a shows the distribution of opening years of all Islamic lower secondary schools in Turkey. Panel b shows the total number of open Islamic lower secondary schools in Turkey in a given year.

for Islamic schooling was a Council of State ruling in 1976 that granted the legal right for girl students to attend these schools. Following the political turmoil during the late 1970s, the military took control with the 1980 coup d'état, and all political parties were shut down, including the Islamist NSP.

After the transition to civilian rule in 1983, Milli Görüs reorganized under the name of the Welfare Party (WP). In its first general election in 1987, the WP failed to enter parliament with its vote share of 7.20% since it remained under the 10% election threshold. The Turkish political scene in the 1990s was marked by an unexpected success of the WP that led it to power in Turkey. Allying with conservative nationalist parties in the 1991 elections, it received 16.9% of votes and entered parliament with 62

representatives. Another surprising result came in the municipal elections of 1994. The WP drew significant attention in Turkish politics when it acquired control of several municipalities, including the two largest and most developed cities, Istanbul and Ankara. This paved the way for the WP to arise as the winner of the 1995 general elections, earning a 21.4% vote share and 158 seats. Fifty-four of its MPs were graduates of Islamic schools, constituting a significant portion of the party's parliamentary seats. The WP's grassroots organizations, supported by the cadres from Islamic schools, claimed to be essential in its success during the 1990s (Ayata, 1996; Ozgur, 2012).² Islamists achieved a significant milestone in 1996 when the WP led a coalition government with the center-right party True Path Party (TPP) that lasted one year. For the first time in the history of the Turkish republic, an Islamist party held the reins of power.

3.2 Religious Schools of Turkey: Imam Hatips

Islamic schools in Turkey are tuition-free state schools operate from grades 6 to 12. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the responsible authority that determines and inspects all curriculum and textbook contents and appoints school staff. Therefore, the management of these schools solely belongs to the MOE. Islamic schools in Turkey teach a hybrid curriculum that combines secular with religious subjects.³ Religion courses mainly consist of teaching the traditional interpretation of the Quran. Roughly one-third of the educational content at the secondary level is religion-related, yet Islamic school students were spending one more year to compensate for this emphasis. In the end, Islamic secondary schools taught a share of secular education content similar to literature-track in secular secondary schools during my analysis period.

Although Islamist parties were involved in several coalition governments from 1973

²Anecdotaly, many Islamic school alumni questioned during this period attested that the WP and later the Justice and Development Party (JDP) represented their platform (Ozgur, 2012; Pak, 2004)

³See appendix figure C.1 and C.2 for curriculum of secular and Islamic schools as of 1975.

to 1999, they were never in charge of MOE. Therefore, they were not directly involved in the management of Islamic schools. The involvement of religious organizations and Islamist parties occurred mainly in the context of extracurricular social activities in the form of a hidden curriculum. Therefore, Islamic schools have enabled a homogeneous environment for students with conservative backgrounds to interact as peers and consolidate their religious ideology, unlike secular schools with a more heterogeneous student population. In the 1970s, male students who attended Islamic schools were often involved in political youth organizations—linked with Islamist NSP—such as MTTB and the Akinci movement (Zengin, 2021; Yarbay, 2021).⁴ Although both organisations dissolved in 1980 after a military intervention, many of their members stayed active in politics and became pioneers of Islamist political success in Turkey (Akyel, 2010).

3.3 Election System

Since the 1969 elections, general elections in Turkey have been conducted under a closed party-list proportional representation system characterized by the d'Hondt method. Starting with the 1983 elections, an election threshold of 10% was introduced. Members of parliament are elected from electoral districts, which share names and borders with provinces. Anyone who fulfills the constitutional requirements and wishes to run for office can apply to parties to run in their lists or can run independently. Turkey has a tradition of strong party leaders who hold sole power over party management. Therefore, party leaders and top management committees decide on party lists and list rankings. As provincial party branches manage and supervise local election campaigns at the district level, they play an essential role in reaching the people. The voting age is 18 in Turkey. Turkish women gained full universal suffrage in 1934 and have since shared the same rights as men. Although women widely utilize their voting rights by

⁴The most prominent example of such a student is the incumbent president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who attended an Islamic school, served as MTTB's local cultural director, and later joined the Islamist party.

casting ballots, women's representation in political office is low in Turkey.

4 Empirical Analysis

4.1 Data and Descriptive Evidence

To analyze the impact of access to Islamic schools on election outcomes, I combine data from two main sources. First, I obtain data on the locations and opening years of Islamic schools collected manually from various websites. I also cross-check Islamic schools' locations from a source that contains location information on all Islamic schools in 1991 (Özüdoğru, 1991). Second, I obtain district center-level electoral data for parliamentary elections between 1969 and 2018 from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK).⁵ Since Islamic schools were available only in district centers, I focus on electoral outcomes at the district center level and do not include rural areas in my analysis. As there were Islamic schools that opened before the expansion of the 1970s and thus the corresponding areas were always treated, I exclude them from my analysis.⁶ I end up with 813 district centers to be included in the analysis. Table 1 presents summary statistics of several district center characteristics used in my analysis.⁷ To discover underlying mechanisms, I collected a new dataset containing information on the locations of Islamist political youth organizations from annual reports of MTTB (1980) and Yarbay (2021). I also utilized several waves of Worlds Values Survey database (Inglehart et al., 2020), as well as building censuses in 1970, 1984 and 2000 from Turkish Statistical Institute.⁸

⁵I use data shared by Livny (2020) for the elections starting from 1991. For previous elections, I use ballot-level data to aggregate electoral outcomes at the district center level.

⁶Yet, I show as a robustness check that results remain similar when I include them as treated.

⁷The turnout rate may go above 100 when security forces on duty cast their vote in the location they operate, especially in small towns.

⁸Specifically, I use Wave 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 of WVS that contain required information for my analysis. For 2000 building census, I utilized the data provided by Meyerson (2014).

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Without Islamic School					With Islamic School				
	Obs.	Mean	Min	Max	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	Min	Max	S.D.
1973 Islamist Vote	512	10.46	0.00	74.76	11.13	301	10.44	0.14	41.42	7.77
1973 Conservative Vote	512	52.09	0.5	94.06	16.63	301	51.00	2.76	89.47	14.95
1973 Secularist Vote	512	33.32	0.39	91.46	16.79	301	37.71	1.15	85.26	14.51
1973 Turnout	512	64.02	23.16	101.32	10.12	301	63.74	5.96	87.40	8.59
1970 Population	512	6638	351	250605	18427	301	18906	1318	653290	51432
1990 Population	512	14626	802	506477	41090	301	43121	2250	1328276	126210
Province Capital	512	0.03	0	1	0.18	301	0.06	0	1	0.24

Notes: This table reports district center-level characteristics based on the 1970 and 1990 population censuses and 1973 general elections data.

I classify political parties into three main categories.⁹ The first and foremost category of interest consists of Islamist parties. This category includes mainly parties formed by the Milli Görüs movement and its split-offs. The Milli Görüs movement started to participate in elections under the umbrella of a political party beginning with the 1973 elections. However, there were other parties that shared the Islamists' focus and had characteristics similar to those of the Milli Görüs parties prior to 1973, including the Justice Party and the Nation Party. For the 1969 election, I classify the Nation Party and independent candidates in nine provinces that Milli Görüs ran after a disagreement with Justice Party leadership as Islamist.^{10 11} The second category consists of center-right and nationalist parties that are conservative in social terms. The third category comprises center-left parties that are prosecutorialist and socially liberal.

Figure 2 displays the raw data on several electoral outcomes of interest by Islamic school availability, including the mean vote share for different party classifications, voter

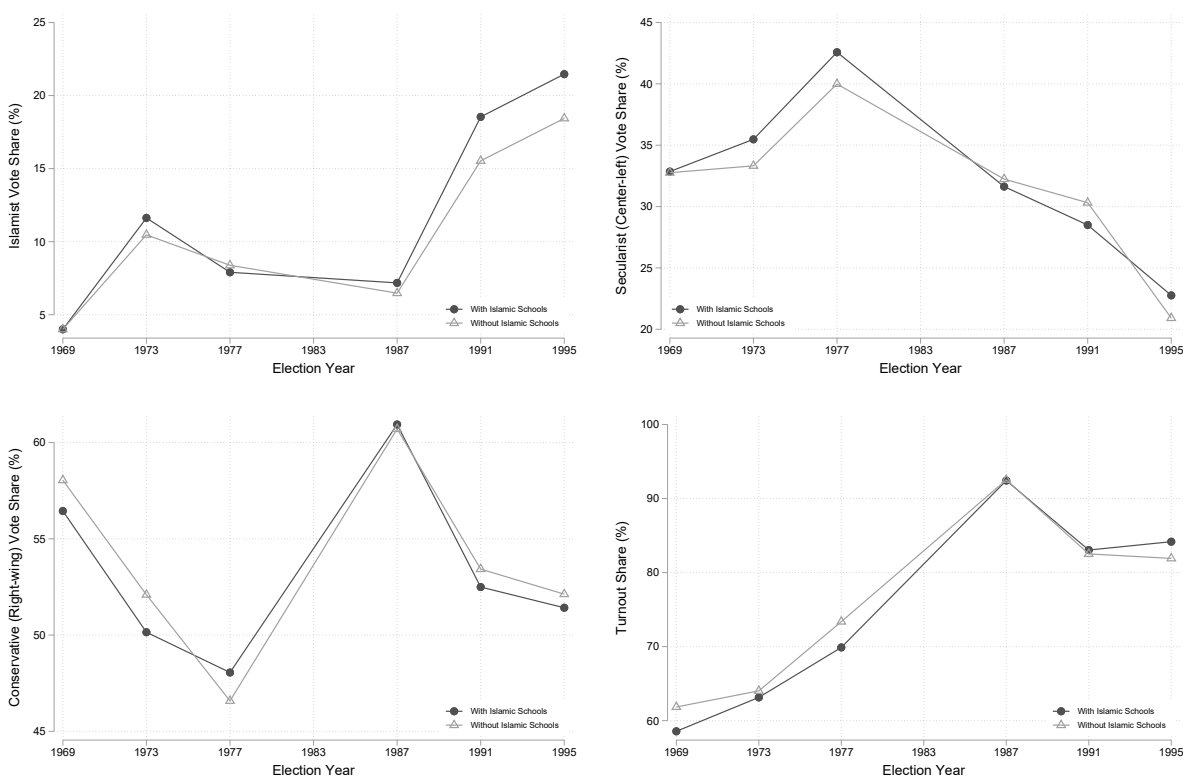
⁹For more information on the construction of party classification, see appendix table C.1

¹⁰Those seven provinces are Adana, Adapazari, Ankara, Aydin, Balikesir, Cankiri, Istanbul, Izmir and Maras. Although there may be other independent candidates from other political views, Islamists was the main body of independents that gathered votes in those provinces. Nevertheless, leaving independents out in my classification do not change the results for Islamist party as seen in section 6.4

¹¹Appendix Figure C.4 shows the positive relationship between the 1969 election vote shares of the Nation Party and independent candidates, and 1973 Islamist party vote shares. However, there was no relationship between the 1969 conservative and 1973 Islamist vote shares. This is a supportive evidence for my Islamist party classification for the 1969 elections.

turnout, and the margins of other parties against Islamists, over the six parliamentary elections in Turkey held between 1969 and 1995. The mean vote shares for Islamist parties followed a similar pattern in district centers with and without an Islamic school before 1991 and were stable over elections. Islamist parties experienced, overall, a sharp increase in their votes shares in the 1991 and 1995 elections. The mean increase was larger in district centers with an Islamic school than in other district centers. While the vote shares for conservative parties experienced an increasing trend in both types of district centers, center-left parties experienced a stable decrease starting from the 1980s.¹²

Figure 2: Evolution of Electoral Outcomes – Raw Data



Notes: This figure presents the raw mean trends in electoral outcomes across election years for district centers with and without an Islamic school.

¹²Uncommon trends in center-left vote share in the 1990s is driven by differential trends across provinces, and introducing province fixed effects account for it as seen in Figure 4.

4.2 Empirical Strategy

To evaluate the impact of access to Islamic schools on electoral outcomes, I employ a difference-in-differences strategy and exploit only within-district-center variation over time. The empirical specification takes the form:

$$y_{pdt} = \beta(Post_t \times Islamic_{pd}) + X_{d0}\theta_t + \eta_{pt} + \gamma_d + \delta_t + \epsilon_{pdt}, \quad (1)$$

where y_{pdt} is the vote share (in percentage points) for the different party classifications or the voter turnout rate in district center d of province p in election-year t , where $t = 1969, 1973, 1977, 1987, 1991$, or 1995 . $Islamic_d$ is a dummy indicating Islamic school availability in district center d in 1980. $Post_t$ is a dummy that takes value 1 for elections held in 1987 or later and value 0 for previous elections.¹³ In my main specification, I exclude the 1977 election, yet I also present specifications coding the 1977 election as post- or pre-treatment period in appendix tables 1 and 2.¹⁴ γ_d and δ_t represent district center and election-year fixed effects, respectively. In some specifications, I replace δ_t with η_{pt} , which represents province-by-year fixed effects. X_{d0} is a full set of pretreatment observable characteristics of district centers. These characteristics include population size, a measure for market access and political controls—the 1973 vote shares of each parties and turnout rates—and all interacted with election-year dummies.

The specification reported in Equation 1 allows me to account for various sources of potential endogeneity. In particular, district center fixed effects account for any time-invariant district center characteristics. Election-year fixed effects capture any shocks common to all district centers in a given election year. Province-by-year fixed

¹³A recent literature in DID methodology raises concerns about the bias in two-way fixed effect (TWFE) estimators due to staggered adoption designs (Callaway and Sant’Anna, 2021; Goodman-Bacon, 2021). It is important to note that my design, in practice, is not a staggered adoption design since all Islamic schools were opened between 1974 and 1980, therefore treatment switches on for all treated group at the same time.

¹⁴Although many schools were already opened prior to 1977 elections, the estimate for the 1977 election would only capture the opening effect, as the exposure to schools were fresh and many possible exposure channels were still not in action. Yet, the results are quantitatively similar for all those specifications.

effects control for province-specific shocks common to all district centers in a given election year. Finally, the inclusion of pretreatment characteristics interacted with year dummies allows those characteristics to have differential effects on electoral outcomes over election years. Specifically, inclusion of political controls account for any underlying trends due to initial political conditions in district centers. Standard errors are clustered at the district center level.

The key identifying assumption of the difference-in-differences specification is that vote shares in district centers with and without an Islamic school would have followed parallel trends in the absence of access to Islamic schools. Under the parallel trends assumption and in the absence of time-varying confounding factors, the estimated β is the coefficient of interest, which reflects the average causal effect of access to Islamic schools on electoral outcomes. Although the parallel trends assumption is fundamentally untestable, the absence of pretrends would provide supportive evidence for identification. To investigate pretrends as well as the dynamic evolution of the treatment effect, I also estimate an event-study specification:

$$y_{pdt} = \sum_t \beta_t (\theta_t \times Islamic_{pd}) + X_{d0} \theta_t + \eta_{pt} + \gamma_d + \delta_t + \epsilon_{pdt}, \quad (2)$$

where I replace $Post_t$ in Equation 1 with year dummies and use 1973 as the omitted category. The remaining specification stays the same as in Equation 1. My main outcome is the vote share of Islamist parties. Therefore, I would expect $\beta_k > 0$ from the 1987 election onward—the first for which Islamic school graduates were of voting age, and had the adequate time for political mobilization—and $\beta_k = 0$ for the 1969 election. As most Islamic schools had opened before the 1977 elections, the estimated coefficient for the 1977 election is not a pure pretrend estimate. It may still capture the effect of the opening of an Islamic school. However, it is unlikely to capture the effect of prolonged exposure because participating students were still below the voting age, and the period required to activate local mobilization may not have passed, as Islamic schools were new

to the corresponding localities. Therefore, I would not expect the estimated β_k for 1977 to be as pronounced as that for later election years.

4.3 Electoral Consequences of Islamic School Exposure

Table 2 reports the results on electoral outcomes from the estimation of the difference-in-differences specification described in Equation 1. Column 1 of Table 2 shows that when I include district center and election-year fixed effects, access to Islamic schools is associated with a 1.87 percentage points increase in the Islamist vote share. The estimated effects remain robust after inclusion of province-by-year fixed effects in column 2 or of pretreatment characteristics interacted with election-year dummies as controls. In the most demanding specification in column 4 of Table 2, access to Islamic schools is associated with a 1.93 percentage points increase in Islamist party vote share,

Table 2: Access to Islamic Schools and Electoral Outcomes

	Outcome: [...] Vote Share						
	(1)	Islamist Party (2)	(3)	(4)	Conservative (5)	Secularist (6)	Turnout (7)
Islamic x Post	1.87*** (0.53)	2.08*** (0.46)	1.93*** (0.52)	1.92*** (0.50)	0.27 (0.85)	-1.89** (0.79)	1.15* (0.69)
Mean Outcome	11.32	11.32	11.32	11.32	55.08	30.12	76.61
R^2	0.673	0.806	0.806	0.864	0.767	0.812	0.870
N	4065	4065	4045	4045	4045	4045	4045
Clusters	813	813	809	809	809	809	809
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓						
Province-by-Year FE		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Population and Market Access			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political Controls				✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table reports estimates β in equation (1) for electoral outcomes. Islamic refers to district centers with an Islamic school in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. Post is a dummy that takes value 1 for elections held in 1987 or later and value 0 for previous elections. 1977 election is excluded from the main specification. Population and market access includes the log of the 1970 district center population sizes and a measure for market access interacted with election-year dummies. Political controls include the 1973 vote shares of each parties and turnout rates interacted with election-year dummies.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered at the district center level.

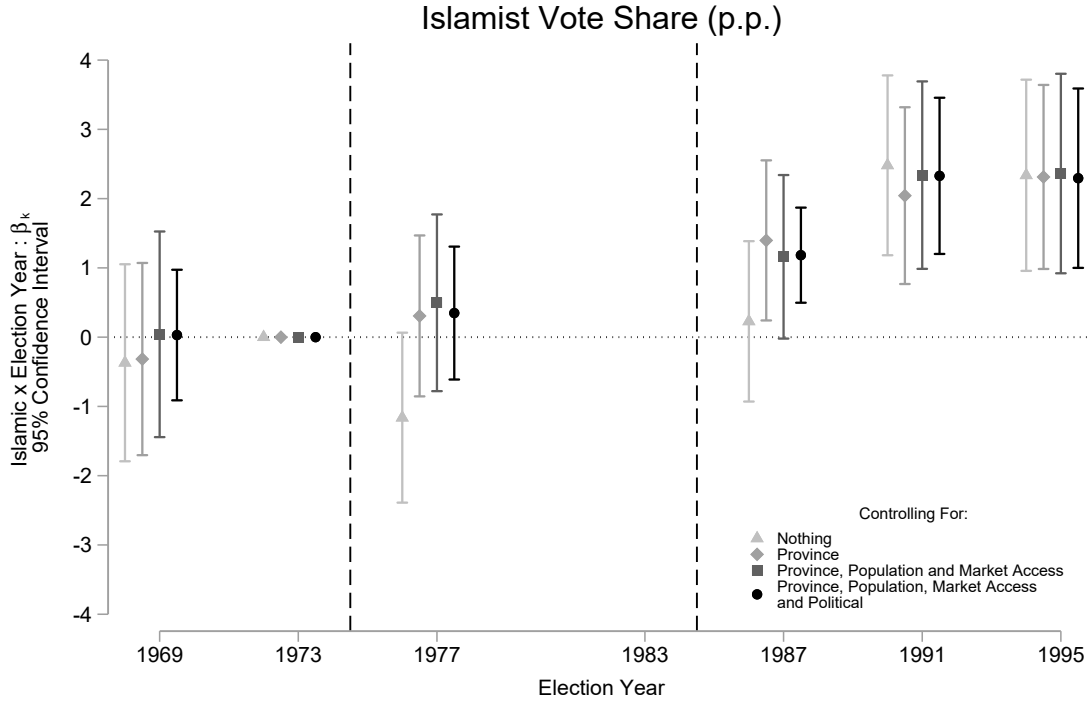
or about 17% relative to the mean. This indicates that the Islamist party vote share experienced a faster increase in district centers with an Islamic school than in other district centers during the period when Islamist party vote shares were on the rise in Turkey. Overall, access to Islamic schools explains about 30% of the surge in Islamist party support in district centers between 1973 and 1995, suggesting that Islamic schools were a crucial driving force behind the success of the Islamist party in treated localities.

To corroborate these findings, Figure 3 presents my event-study estimates showing the dynamics of the treatment effects on the Islamist party vote share in the general elections.¹⁵ I use 1973 as the reference category and report estimates without control variables and those allowing for differential trends by province, pretreatment population and market access, and pretreatment electoral outcomes of the district center. I find no clear pretrends in all specifications. The coefficients of the 1969 elections on the Islamist party vote shares are centered around 0 and statistically highly nonsignificant. This provides supportive evidence on the identifying parallel trends assumption, as there are no pretreatment differences in Islamist party vote shares. Even though most Islamic schools opened between the 1973 and 1977 elections, the estimate for the 1977 election is still close to 0 and statistically nonsignificant. This indicates that there was no imminent effect of the provision of Islamic schools. Starting from the 1987 elections, the estimates become positive and statistically significant with an increasing trend. These results suggest that access to Islamic schools increased the Islamist party vote share after prolonged exposure to these schools, when graduates of Islamic schools came of voting age.

Columns 5-7 of Table 2 present the estimated effects of exposure to Islamic schools for secularist center-left and conservative right-wing vote shares and turnout rates under the most demanding specification. Columns 5 and 6 show that secularist center-left parties experienced a faster decrease in vote shares in treated district centers after

¹⁵I present estimates including long term elections in Appendix Figure C.6 and C.7

Figure 3: Islamic Schools and Elections – Islamist Party Support



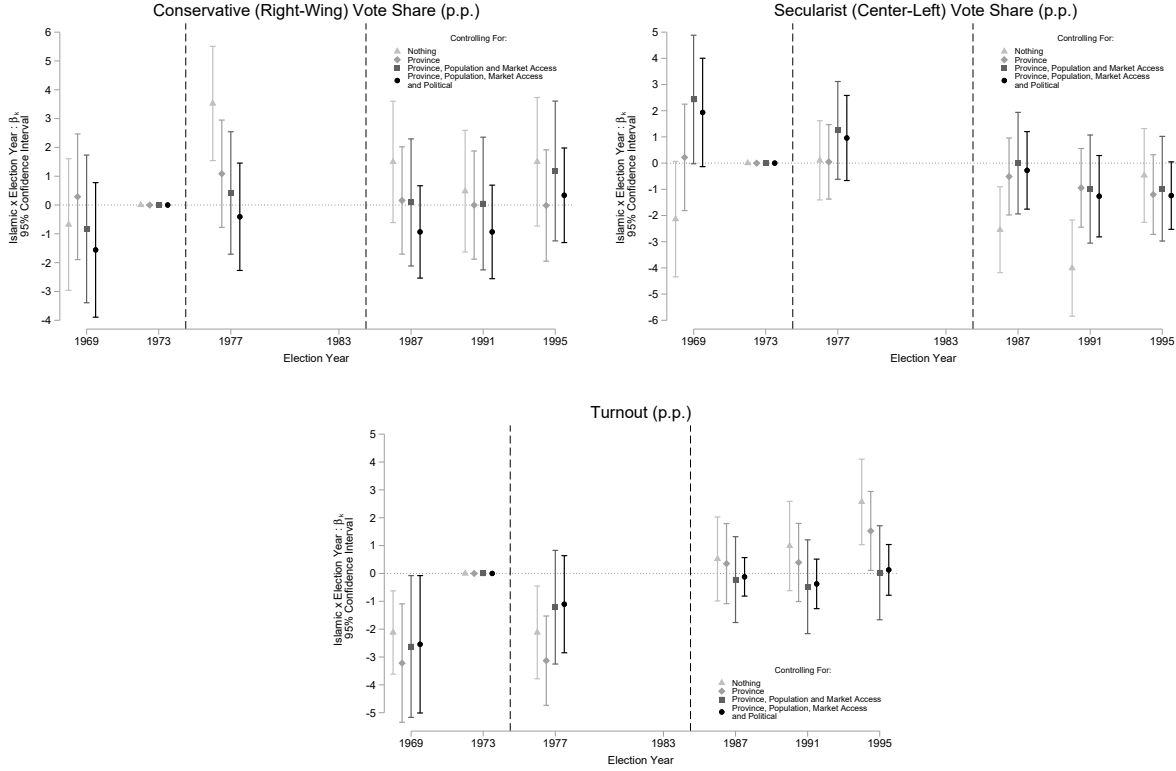
Notes: This figure reports election-year-specific estimates of β in equation 2 on a balanced district-center-year panel. $Islamic_d$ is a dummy indicating Islamic school availability in district center d in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. The 1973 election was the last just prior to Islamic school expansion and serves as the reference election. The elections in 1987 is the first in which exposed cohorts would have been eligible to vote. All specifications includes district center fixed effects and election-year fixed effects. In some specifications, I sequentially include province-by-election-year fixed effects and a full set of pretreatment observable characteristics of district centers interacted with election-year dummies. Standard errors clustered at the district center level.

Islamic school access while conservative center-right parties maintained their support. Column 7 suggests that access to Islamic schools is associated with a marginal increase in voter turnout in treated district centers.

To explore the dynamics of the treatment effects, I present my event-study estimates for the related electoral outcomes in Figure 4. This figure reveals heterogeneity in the treatment effects across election years. In panel b, there is evidence that the decrease in the secular center-left vote share is partly driven by pretreatment differences, although there is a sizeable decrease for the 1991 and 1995 elections. In panel a, the estimated coefficients for 1987 and 1991 are negative for conservative parties yet estimated

imprecisely. Panel c also shows that there is a pretreatment difference in voter turnout in favor of the comparison group, yet the difference disappears after treatment, and there is no systematic treatment effect for fully treated election years relative to the 1973 elections.

Figure 4: Islamic Schools and Elections – Other Outcomes



Notes: This figure reports election-year-specific estimates of β in equation 2 on a balanced district-center-year panel. See notes in Figure 3 for specification details. Standard errors clustered at the district center level.

Next, I conduct additional analysis to check the existence of heterogeneous effects by the initial political conditions. (See Appendix Section A for a formal explanation of the specifications.) Column 1 of Appendix Table A.1 provides suggestive evidence that the effect of access to Islamic schools was qualitatively higher in areas where the Islamist party initially had higher support, while there is no differential effect by the initial strength of conservative parties. Column 3 further points out that the Islamist party's increase was faster in district centers with low secularist center-left support. Overall, the

heterogeneity analysis of the treatment effects reveals that the increase in Islamist party support was faster in places with initial Islamist strongholds with lower attachment to secularist parties suggesting an increase in polarization.

These findings suggest that access to Islamic schools had favorable consequences for the Islamist party. While conservative party vote shares remained similar and the secularist party experienced a decrease in its vote share, there is notable heterogeneity in treatment effects across election years. Nevertheless, on average, the Islamist party decreased its vote margin vis-à-vis other parties in district centers with Islamic schools relative to district centers in the comparison group.

5 Mechanisms

Why might exposure to Islamic schools increase the electoral support for Islamist parties? In this section, I examine and provide evidence on the influential role of the increased organizational capacity, male political activism, and ideological change in the electoral success of Islamist parties.

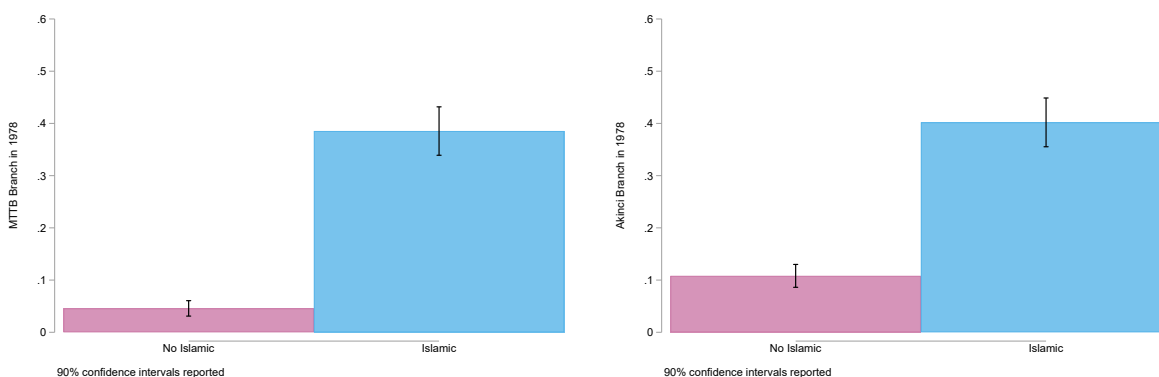
5.1 Organizational Capacity

One prominent explanation as a mechanism for the positive impact of exposure to Islamic schools in the electoral success of Islamist parties is increased organizational capacity. In other words, Islamic schools would provide the much-needed human resources to promote Islamist politics through increased political activism. First, I provide district-level evidence on the effect of Islamic school openings on increased local political activism and organizational capacity of Islamists. Second, I provide indirect evidence on later-life Islamist political activism by examining the gendered differences in educational consequences of Islamic school expansion at the individual level. Last, I show to what extent the increased organizational capacity influenced the electoral

success of Islamist parties.

I begin my analysis with district-level evidence on the impact of Islamic school exposure on the increased organizational capacity of Islamist movements. To execute this, I collect a new dataset consisting of the branch locations of two prominent Islamist youth associations—MTTB and Akincilar Movement—as of 1978. While the former youth association was one of the most prominent student unions that were under the influence of Islamists during the 1970s, the latter was closely linked with National Salvation Party and regarded as a grassroots organization of the aforementioned Islamist party (Zengin, 2021; Yarbay, 2021). It is important to note that both movements were male-dominated, as female political activism was mostly absent during this period. First, I show that district centers with Islamic schools had a significantly higher presence of both Islamist youth organizations in 1978 than comparison district centers, as seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Analysis of Mechanisms - Islamist youth organisations



Notes: The figure plots share of MTTB and Akinci movement local branch presence as of 1978 for district centers with and without and Islamic school.

Second, I utilize additional information on the establishment years of MTTB branches between 1974-1979. Therefore, I am able to analyze whether an Islamic school's opening affected the likelihood of establishing an MTTB branch in treated district centers. To examine this effect, I estimate the following event-study specification using Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) estimator that takes into account the problems related to staggered

designs:

$$y_{dt} = \sum_t \beta_t (\theta_t \times Islamic_d) + \gamma_d + \delta_t + \epsilon_{dt}, \quad (3)$$

where d indexes district center, and t indexes year. The dependent variables are an indicator of MTTB local branch presence. $Islamic$ is an indicator for Islamic school presence in 1980 and θ_t are dummies indicating year relative to Islamic school opening. γ_d and δ_t are district center and year fixed effects.

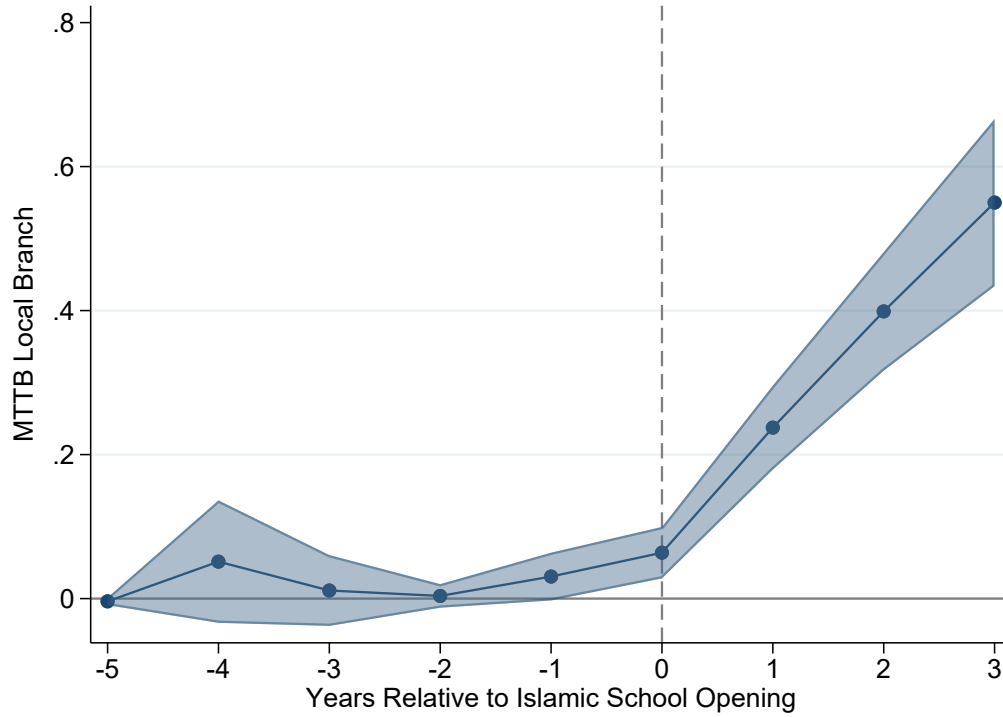
Figure 6 plots the estimated event-study coefficients from equation 3. While the pre-treatment coefficients are close to zero and follow parallel trends, the likelihood of having an MTTB branch increases sharply after the establishment of an Islamic school in treated district centers. Given this finding and that a significant portion of MTTB branches operated at treated district centers, the inauguration of an Islamic school was an influential triggering factor for rising political activism and organizational capacity in favor of Islamist parties.¹⁶

I proceed to reinforce my district-level findings on the short-run effects of Islamic schools on increased Islamist political activism with individual-level evidence in later-life. Testing this mechanism directly is challenging to have fine-grained data on the Islamist party political membership at the unit level of my analysis. Therefore, I leverage a unique aspect of the access to Islamic schools in the 1970s: the gendered differences in enrollment to Islamic schools. Girls had legal access to Islamic schools several years after the expansion, and their enrollment numbers increased gradually after being relatively low compared to boys. As seen in Appendix Figure C.5, female enrollment in Islamic schools was roughly less than one-third of male enrollment until the 1990s. Therefore, I hypothesize that if Islamic schooling had any effect on Islamist political activism and organizational capacity, it should be more prominent for boys than girls.

To test this hypothesis, I employ a difference-in-differences specification exploiting

¹⁶Appendix figure C.10 plots event-study estimates using the TWFE estimator.

Figure 6: Islamic Schools and MTTB Openings



Notes: This figure reports estimates of event-study specification in equation 3 using Callaway and Sant’Anna (2021) estimator. Outcome is an indicator of MTTB local branch presence in a given year.

the fact that Islamic schools only operate at the secondary level and birth-cohort variation in access to Islamic schools using several waves of World Values Survey. In practice, I assess how the difference in outcomes between individuals with and without a secondary education changes for cohorts that came secondary school age after the Islamic school access as compared to older cohorts that passed secondary schooling age. Students in Turkey were attending secondary education between the ages of 11 and 18, and secondary education was not compulsory during my analysis period. Therefore, I assume that men born in 1961 or later were exposed to the increased presence of Islamic schooling in secondary education. On the other hand, female students achieved their legal rights to register in Islamic schools starting from the 1977 school year, so I consider that women born in 1965 or later were exposed. These younger cohorts of men and women who attended secondary education constitute my treatment group. My simplest

specification takes the form:

$$y_{cg} = \alpha + \beta T_{cg} + g_c + c_c + \epsilon_{cg}, \quad (4)$$

where c indexes birth cohorts, and g indexes the individuals's group that is secondary education attendance. The dependent variables is a dummy indicating whether the individual is an Islamist party member. T is an indicator for individuals who attended secondary education and came secondary schooling age after access to Islamic schools.¹⁷ Unfortunately, I do not observe the type of school individuals attended. g_c and c_c are group and birth cohort fixed effects. Since I observe birth cohorts repeatedly at different ages across survey years, I include age and survey fixed effects. My preferred specification also includes individual controls such as income group and region dummies. The coefficient of interest is β , the differential change of ideology-related outcomes on exposed younger cohorts that attended secondary education. The validity of the difference-in-differences approach relies on two assumptions. First, outcomes of secondary and non-secondary groups would have been following common trends in the absence of increased presence of Islamic schooling in secondary education. Second, there should not be any time-variant shocks or confounding factors that differentially affect individuals with and without secondary education.

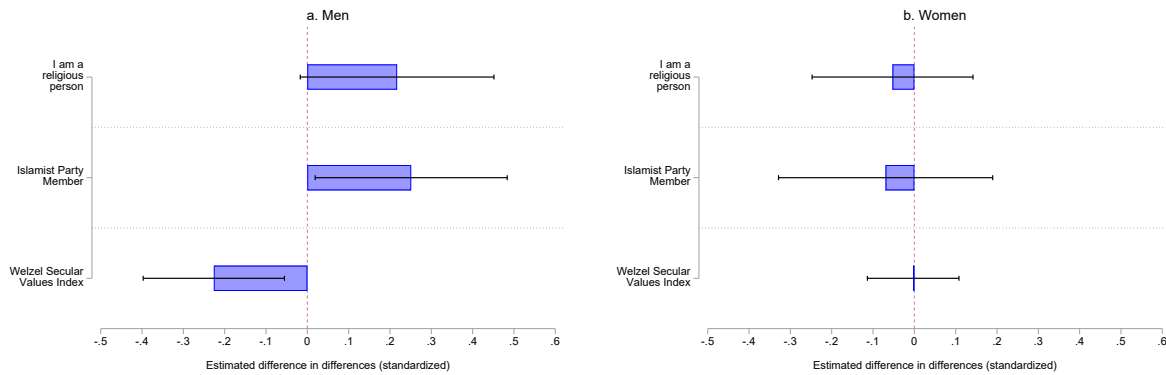
Figure 7 plots estimated difference-in-differences coefficients—for men and women subsamples separately—on Islamist party political membership for affected cohorts with secondary education.¹⁸ Male cohorts who participated in secondary education during the increased presence of Islamic schooling are significantly more likely to report themselves an Islamist party member. On the other hand, the estimated coefficients for affected female cohorts are close to 0 and statistically nonsignificant.

Next, I estimate a dynamic difference-in-differences specification that allows the

¹⁷Note that while first affected birth cohort is 1962 for men, it is 1965 for women.

¹⁸Appendix Table C.2 presents the magnitudes associated with this analysis.

Figure 7: Analysis of Mechanisms - Individual Level Evidence



Notes: The figure plots coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals from the interaction between secondary-educated group and an indicator for individuals born after 1962 for men and 1965 for women. The regression controls for birth cohort and group fixed effects, as well as for wave, age, income-group and region dummies. The sample only consists of Muslims. Outcomes are standardized and estimated effects can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations. Data is from the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2020).

effects of having access to Islamic schools to vary flexibly and across cohorts. To do this, I replace the single dummy indicating affected birth cohorts with 5-birth-cohort indicators. Everything else remains the same as in equation 4. The reference category corresponds to individuals born between 1955-1959 (1960-1964) for men (women). Appendix figure C.8 shows that the difference in relevant outcomes between individuals with and without secondary education remains similar to the reference category and follows common trends for both genders before Islamic school access. However, the trend in Islamist party membership changes in a positive direction starting from the first affected male cohorts and remains consistently negative. There does not exist a similar pattern for women, as estimated coefficients remained about 0 for affected female cohorts.

I also estimate a triple differences specification to formally compare the differential changes in related outcomes of affected cohorts by gender. To do it, I interact every term in equation 4 with a gender indicator. I exclude cohorts born between 1962 and 1964 since only men had access to Islamic schools for these cohorts. Triple difference specification relaxes the previously mentioned second assumption of

difference-in-differences by assuming that the possible bias due to time-varying shocks or confounding factors that might affect secondary and non-secondary educated groups differentially would be similar for both genders.

Table C.3 reports the double and triple interaction coefficients for related outcomes. The triple differences estimate in Table C.3 reveal that the gender differences in self-reported Islamist party membership also increased in favor of men. Overall, my results suggest that the establishment of an Islamic school increased Islamist political activism led by men at the district-center level in the short run and further enabled affected male cohorts to work for Islamist politics later in their life.

Last, I examine how the presence of the Islamist youth movements in treated district centers affected the Islamist electoral outcomes by examining the heterogeneous treatment effects. Although both organizations shut down in 1980 due to a military coup, the Islamist male political activists likely kept operating as Islamist party members later on, as I showed earlier. Therefore, I would expect the impact of Islamic school exposure to be more pronounced in treated district centers with Islamist youth movements. Table 3 shows that Islamist parties had, in fact, substantially higher gains in electoral support in treated district centers accompanied by an Islamist youth organization branch.

5.2 Ideological Change

Another prominent explanation is that exposure to a curriculum and school environment with increased influence of religion might change ideologies of students in favor of religion. In other words, students attending Islamic schools would acquire weaker secular values. I test this hypothesis indirectly by conducting the same individual-level difference-in-differences analysis as in the previous section 5.1. Again, my hypothesis is that if Islamic schooling had any effect on ideological change, it should be more prominent for boys than girls due to the gendered differences in enrollment to Islamic schools. Here, my outcomes of interest are an indicator of self-reported religious

Table 3: Analysis of Mechanisms - Heterogeneity by MTTB and Akinci Presence

	Outcome: [...] Vote Share					
	Islamist Party (1)	(2)	Conservative (3)	(4)	Secularist (5)	(6)
Islamic x Post	1.296** (0.514)	1.094** (0.517)	0.300 (0.891)	-0.141 (0.873)	-1.263 (0.847)	-0.959 (0.898)
Islamic x Post x MTTB	2.206*** (0.719)		-0.108 (1.181)		-2.228** (0.989)	
Islamic x Post x Akinci		2.272*** (0.724)		1.128 (1.157)		-2.569*** (0.973)
R^2	0.864	0.864	0.767	0.767	0.813	0.813
N	4045	4045	4045	4045	4045	4045
Clusters	809	809	809	809	809	809
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Province-by-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Population and Market Access	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table reports estimates of equation 5 for electoral outcomes. Islamic refers to district centers with an Islamic school in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. Post is a dummy that takes value 1 for elections held in 1987 or later and value 0 for previous elections. MTTB and Akinci are indicators of named Islamist youth organizations' presence. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered by district center.

identification and an index of secular values constructed by Welzel (Welzel, 2013).

Figure 7 plots estimated difference-in-differences coefficients—for men and women subsamples separately—on various self-reported measures of ideological change for affected cohorts with secondary education. Male cohorts who participated in secondary education during the increased presence of Islamic schooling are significantly more likely to report weaker secular values and identify themselves as religious. On the other hand, the estimated coefficients for affected female cohorts are close to 0 and statistically nonsignificant. Dynamic difference-in-differences specification in Appendix Figure C.8 further shows that the difference in relevant outcomes between individuals with and without secondary education remains similar to the reference category and follows common trends for both genders before Islamic school access. However, the trend in secular values sharply changes in a negative direction starting from the first affected

male cohorts and remains consistently negative. There does not exist a similar pattern for women, as estimated coefficients remained about 0 for affected female cohorts.

Last, Appendix Table C.3 reports the double and triple interaction coefficients from a triple differences specification for related outcomes on ideological change. Columns 1-2 of Appendix Table C.3 show that affected male cohorts are less likely to report secular values by about one-fifth of a standard deviation and more likely to self-identify as religious by about one-fourth of a standard deviation compared to affected female cohorts. While I cannot precisely test how much of the effect of Islamic schools on electoral outcomes is due to ideological change, I show that male cohorts who participated in secondary education during the increased presence of Islamic schooling had weaker secular values. In contrast, affected female cohorts had their secular values remained unchanged, and as a result, the gender gap in secular values had enlarged. Overall, these results align with my hypothesis on the gendered impacts of the Islamic school expansion of 1970s Turkey on ideological change.

6 Alternative Explanations and Robustness Checks

6.1 Islamic Brotherhoods and Supply of Other Religious Infrastructure

One potential explanation for the increase in the Islamist party vote-share is the increased presence of Islamic brotherhoods (tarikats) in the public sphere after the 1980 coup. The military junta promoted a new ideology called “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” to tame ideological polarization and unrest between nationalist and far-left factions (Yavuz, 1997). This paved the way for Islamic brotherhoods and organizations to increase their visibility and activities in public. If the increase in Islamic brotherhood activities were also reflected in boosting religiosity and Islamism, I would expect that support for political parties with religious platforms to increase. Therefore, it might be possible that the changes in Islamist party support were due to Islamic brotherhood activity and its

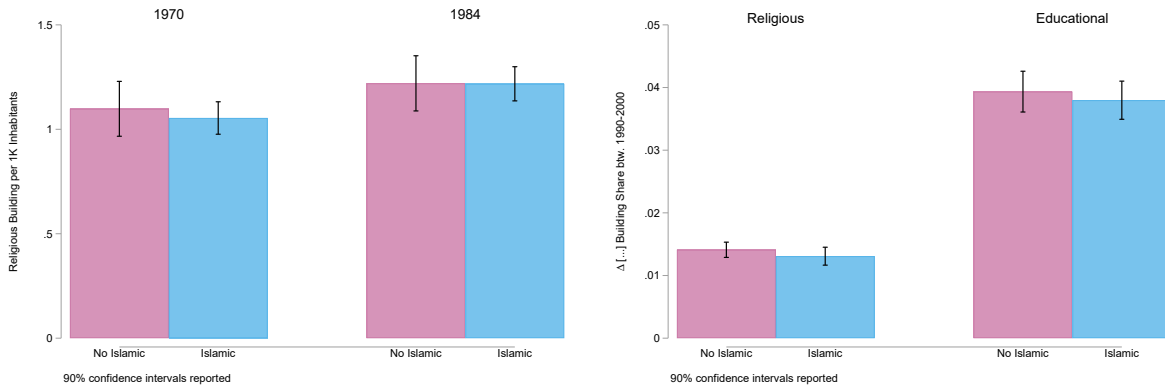
role in boosting Islamism rather than Islamic school exposure.

Although there is no extensive public data on Islamic brotherhoods' presence and activities at the district-center level, I argue that the Islamist party vote share in the 1973 general elections is a good proxy for this presence. The "partification" of the Milli Görüs movement was a project promoted by a cleric leader within Nakshibendi Tarikat, the most prominent and influential Islamic brotherhood in Turkey (Yavuz, 1997). Islamic brotherhoods actively supported the Islamist NOS party in the 1973 elections. Notice that, the share of Islamist party votes in 1973 elections is already included as a control by interacting with election-year dummies in my electoral analysis in equation 1. This allows district centers with different pretreatment levels of Islamist party support to have differential trends over time. The estimate remains similar to the baseline as seen in Column 4 of Table 1 and Figure 3, indicating that differential trends in areas with higher pretreatment Islamist party support do not drive my results.

Next, I examine whether a differential increase in demand for religious buildings exists between treated and comparison district centers. If Islamic brotherhood had a higher presence in treated areas, I would expect that the demand for religious services—therefore, the supply of religious buildings—to increase more in treated areas relative to comparison areas. Panel a of figure 8 shows that the number of religious buildings per 1000 inhabitants was at similar levels in treated and comparison district centers in 1970 and 1984.¹⁹ Panel b of figure 8 further shows that the change in the share of religious buildings was also at similar levels in treated and comparison areas between 1990-2000. These findings suggest that district centers with an Islamic school did not observe a relatively higher demand for religious buildings proxied by the supply of such facilities. Therefore, it is unlikely that the presence of Islamic brotherhoods would differ between treated and comparison areas during this period.

¹⁹I do not have information for one-third of district centers in building censuses.

Figure 8: Analysis of Mechanisms - Building Supply



Notes: The figure plots the supply of religious and educational buildings. Data is from 1970, 1984 and 2000 building censuses.

6.2 Economic Liberalization and Rising Inequality

Turkey underwent an extensive economic liberalization process during the 1980s, which led to increased economic activity and rising inequality within society (Aricanli and Rodrik, 1990). Given these circumstances of the period, the Islamist Welfare Party centered its rhetoric on economic development and rising inequality in its party agenda. They introduced a new party manifesto named the “Just Order” (Adil Duzen) that focused primarily on addressing economic and social inequalities in society and put less emphasis on Islamism (Yavuz, 1997). The Just Order manifesto is argued to be one of the factors behind the Welfare Party’s success in attracting widespread support from different segments of society during the 1990s. If Islamic schools opened in areas affected negatively by economic liberalization and rising inequality during the 1980s, this might increase the support for the Islamist party since their electoral campaign put an important emphasis on addressing such economic and social disparities in society.

To address this possibility, I conduct several robustness checks. First, It is important to note that my preferred specification already accounts for time-variant shocks common to all district centers in a province. Therefore, it should capture a substantial amount of differential regional impact of macro-level shocks. I also include the natural logarithm of population sizes in 1970—as a proxy for economic development—interacted with election

year dummies as a control. This should account for macroeconomic shocks that had a differential impact by different population sizes and economic development. Second, I construct a measure of market access for every district center. The market access of district center i is defined as $MA_i = \sum_j (P_j / \tau_{ij}^\sigma)$, with P_j being the population of district center $j \neq i$, τ_{ij} the Euclidian distance between district center i and district center j , and $\sigma = 3.8$, as in Donaldson (2017). The estimate is robust to the inclusion of market access as a control as presented in Column 3 of Table 1 and in Figure 3, indicating that district centers that are well connected to markets or more populous and urbanized district do not drive my results. Last, I control for education, unemployment, and labor force participation rates of the prime-working age population in 1990 interacted with election year dummies. Appendix figure C.11 shows that my main coefficient is robust to the inclusion of such post-treatment characteristics of district centers that are relevant for macro- and micro-level changes in the economy.

6.3 Geographic Sorting

Next, I examine whether my results can be explained by geographic sorting. Turkey has been experiencing a pattern of migration from rural areas to more urbanized towns and cities since the 1950s. Suppose voters who were more likely to vote in favor of Islamist parties were also more likely to migrate to district centers with an Islamic school or migrate away from other district centers. In that case, my results could be partially explained by geographic sorting. In other words, the relatively higher increase in Islamist party support in treated areas would reflect the underlying changes in the demographic composition of treated and comparison district centers, instead of exposure to an Islamic school. To investigate this issue further, I follow an exercise proposed by Acharya, Blackwell and Sen (2016) and Williams (2017) that examines observable differences in characteristics of those who migrated out of (or into) the localities of interest. (See Appendix Section B for a formal explanation of the

specifications.) Appendix Table B.1 panel a presents the results from equation 6 and shows no systematic differences between migrants from treated district centers and stayers relative to their counterparts in comparison district centers on selected attributes, except for age. Panel b of Appendix Table B.1 shows the results for individuals who migrated into district centers obtained by replacing an individual's 1985 locality of residence with her 1990 district center of residence in appendix equation 6. The results also show no difference between those who migrated into treated district centers and stayers compared to their counterparts in comparison district centers. Taken together, these findings suggest that geographic sorting is unlikely to explain my results on the faster increase in Islamist party vote shares in treated district centers.

6.4 Other Robustness Checks

I perform several additional robustness checks on my primary outcome of interest, namely, the Islamist party vote share, and report them in Figure C.11. In the forth row, I include district centers with an Islamic schools before the 1973 expansion as treated in all elections. I exclude 1969 elections where Milli Gorus did not participate elections as a party and 1991 elections in which the Islamist party formed an electoral alliance with two other nationalist right-wing parties, respectively in sixth and seventh row. Eighth row includes the 1977 elections as treated, and ninth row exclude the independents in my 1969 Islamist party classification. Next, I include number of religious, educational and cultural buildings per 1000 individuals interacted with election-year dummy as controls. Last, I weight the regression with population sizes in 1970. The estimates remain similar to the baseline for all robustness checks presented in this section. Finally, in Appendix Figure C.12, I drop a single region at a time from the sample to verify that outlier regions do not drive the estimates, and the results remain robust.

7 Concluding Remarks

This paper asks how access to religious schools affects electoral outcomes. I exploit the openings of Islamic schools in more than three hundred Turkish district centers between 1974 and 1980 and study their impact on electoral outcomes over the period between 1973 and 1995. I find that after school openings, the Islamist party vote share is about 1.9 percentage points higher, on average, in district centers with an Islamic school than in those without. I find no significant effect in the first election held after school openings in 1977, indicating that school openings alone were not effective in increasing support for the Islamist party in the very short run. The positive impact started to emerge as the first affected student cohorts came of voting age, about ten years after the Islamic school openings. I further show that male-driven ideological change and increased organizational capacity due to political activism were influential mechanisms driving the impact of Islamic schools. Last, I provide evidence that economic liberalization, geographic sorting, and the presence of Islamic brotherhoods do not drive my results. Given that Islamic schools were a prominent factor in Islamists gaining ruling power in Turkey, my findings on the link between religious schooling and political behavior have important implications that the ruling power might translate into new policies and institutions favorable to religious politics.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that there are several contextual differences between the Islamic school expansions of the 1970s and 2010s. While the expansion of the Islamic school network in the mid-1970s resulted from a bottom-up community movement, contemporary Turkey has been experiencing a top-down expansion of the Islamic school network since 2013 under Islamist AKP rule. There are also temporal differences between these two expansions. After the 1960s, like many other Muslim countries, Turkey experienced a politicization of Islam and a widening of popular support for Islamist parties. Since then, Turkey has been experiencing a secular downward trend in individual religiosity, and political Islam has been losing ground

since the mid-2010s ([Çokgezen, 2022](#)). While political activism was predominantly comprised of men in the 1970s and 1980s, women started to play a critical role in daily politics starting in the mid-1990s ([Arat, 2012](#); [Diner and Toktaş, 2010](#)). Recent studies also highlight that the Islamist advantage might disappear when the Islamist party is incumbent ([Magiya and Kilavuz, 2021](#)). The role that the internet and social media play in facilitating access to information is another important counter-factor that may complicate the effectiveness of Islamic schools in shaping the identity of students and leveraging it into electoral support for Islamist parties. Another outstanding question is whether we would see a similar effect of religious schools from other religious denominations. Increasing populism and polarization along social and cultural lines may motivate politicians to utilize (or disutilize) religious schools based on their desire to secure fresh support from the upcoming generations in some contexts. The findings of this paper, therefore, call for analysis under further scrutiny in different contexts.

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A Appendix - Heterogeneity Analysis

This section examines heterogeneity in the treatment effects to explore whether certain initial political conditions play a role in the magnitude of the results. To empirically investigate this, I estimate the following specification where, depending on the pretreatment municipality electoral outcomes under investigation, specific variables are interacted with Islamic school access:

$$y_{pdt} = \beta_1(Post_t \times Islamic_{pd}) + \beta_2(E_{d0} \times Islamic_{pd}) + \beta_3(E_{d0} \times \theta_t) + \beta_4(E_{d0} \times Post_t \times Islamic_{pd}) + X_{d0}\theta_t + \eta_{pt} + \gamma_d + \delta_t + \epsilon_{pdt}, \quad (5)$$

where the notation used in Section 4.2 applies. E_{d0} is a dummy variable that takes value 1 if a particular time-invariant pretreatment political condition of district center i is greater than the sample's median, depending on the specification under investigation. Note that the standalone E_{d0} is omitted from Equation 5 because district center fixed effects and all relevant double interactions are included. Here, the only outcome of interest is the Islamist party vote share, and everything else remains the same as the specification in Equation 1. The main coefficient of interest is β_4 , the one associated with the triple-interaction term.

Table A.1: Heterogeneous Results on Islamist Party Support by Initial Party Strength

	Outcome: [...] Vote Share		
	Islamist Party		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Islamic x Post	1.103** (0.507)	1.955*** (0.644)	2.775*** (0.757)
Initial Islamist Strength in 1973 x Islamic x Post	1.459* (0.843)		
Initial Center-right Strength in 1973 x Islamic x Post		-0.070 (0.848)	
Initial Center-left Strength in 1973 x Islamic x Post			-1.611* (0.864)
R^2	0.865	0.864	0.864
N	4045	4045	4045
Clusters	809	809	809
District FE	✓	✓	✓
Province-by-Year FE	✓	✓	✓
Population and Market Access	✓	✓	✓
Political Controls	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table reports estimates of equation 5 for Islamist party vote share. Islamic refers to district centers with an Islamic school in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. Post is a dummy that takes value 1 for elections held in 1987 or later and value 0 for previous elections. Initial support of each political party classifications are dummies that take one if a specific party classification had more than 50 percent of votes. 1977 election is excluded from the main specification. Population and market access includes the log of the 1970 district center population sizes and a measure for market access interacted with election-year dummies. Political controls include the 1973 vote shares of each parties and turnout rates interacted with election-year dummies. See section A for further information on heterogeneity related variables.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered by district center of residence.

B Appendix - Geographic Sorting Analysis

For this exercise, I use the 1990 5% sample obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute. This sample provides information about a respondent's current locality of residence as well as the locality of residence five years prior to the census. This allows me to identify individuals who migrated from (to) each district center. Then, I test for differences in observable attributes of those mobile individuals relative to those of stayers. Specifically, I estimate the following regression:

$$\begin{aligned} Attributes_{idp} = & \gamma_1 Out(in) - migrant_i + \gamma_2 Islamic_{ipd} + \gamma_3 Out(in) - migrant_i \times Islamic_{ipd}^{1985} \\ & + \gamma_4 (X^{1985} d0) + \delta_p^{1985} + \epsilon_{idp}, \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

where $Attributes_{idp}$ corresponds to various observable characteristics of individual i from district center d in province p and $Out(In) - Migrant_i$ is an indicator variable for whether the individual migrated out of (into) a district center. X_{ipd}^{1985} corresponds to the pretreatment controls for the district center where the individual resided in 1985, while δ_p^{1985} corresponds to fixed effects for the district center of residence in 1985. The coefficient of interest here is w , which captures potential differences between those who migrated out of (into) and those who remained in treated district centers relative to the corresponding differences for comparison district centers.

Table B.1: Geographic Sorting

Panel A. Out-Migrants vs. Stayers

Dependent Variable:	Age (1)	Female (2)	\geq Jun. High Degree (3)	Any Degree (4)	Literate (5)	Worked Last Week (6)	Rent (7)
Islamic x Out-Migrant Status	-0.273 (0.392)	0.006 (0.004)	-0.009 (0.020)	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.003 (0.008)	0.004 (0.008)	-0.010 (0.035)
R^2	0.019	0.001	0.028	0.045	0.053	0.010	0.058
N	848775	849501	848996	848996	849364	715864	784545
Clusters	802	802	802	802	802	802	802
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Panel B. In-Migrants vs. Stayers

Dependent Variable:	Age (1)	Female (2)	\geq Jun. High Degree (3)	Any Degree (4)	Literate (5)	Worked Last Week (6)	Rent (7)
Islamic x In-Migrant Status	-0.394* (0.221)	0.002 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.022)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.001 (0.009)	0.009 (0.021)
R^2	0.017	0.001	0.024	0.042	0.048	0.010	0.067
N	853734	854450	853964	853964	854339	720159	788102
Clusters	802	802	802	802	802	802	802
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table reports estimates of equation (6). Islamic refers to district centers with an Islamic school in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1974. $Out(In) - Migrant_i$ is an indicator variable for whether the individual out(in)-migrated from(to) a district center. X_{ipd}^{1985} corresponds to the pre-treatment controls for the district center where the individual resided in 1985, while δ_p^{1985} corresponds to fixed effects for the district center of residence in 1985. Pre-treatment controls include log of the 1970 district center population sizes and market access, and the 1973 vote shares of each parties and turnout rates.

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by district center of residence.

C Appendix - Additional Results

Figure C.1: Curriculum of Islamic Schools in 1975

Islamic Junior High Schools		Islamic High Schools	
Common Courses	Cumulative (h)	Common Courses	Cumulative (h)
Turkish	15	Turkish Language and Literature	15
Maths	12	History	6
Social Studies	10	Art History	1
Science	9	Geography	6
Foreing Language	9	Maths	10
Arts	3	Physics	7
Music	3	Chemistry	5
Physical Education	3	Biology	5
Morals	3	Psychology	2
		Philosophy	6
		Morals	2
		Foreign Language	12
		Physcial Education	3
		National Security	3
Total (h)	67 (72%)	Total (h)	83 (60%)
Religion Courses	Cumulative (h)	Religion Courses	Cumulative (h)
Quran	9	Quran	16
Arabic	9	Arabic	14
Religion Studies	8	Doctrines	2
		Islamic Theology	2
		Religious Studies	6
		Islamic Jurisprudence	2
		Quranic Exegesis	6
		Prophetic Tradition	6
		Life of Prophet	1
		Public Speaking	2
Total (h)	26 (28%)	Total (h)	57 (40%)

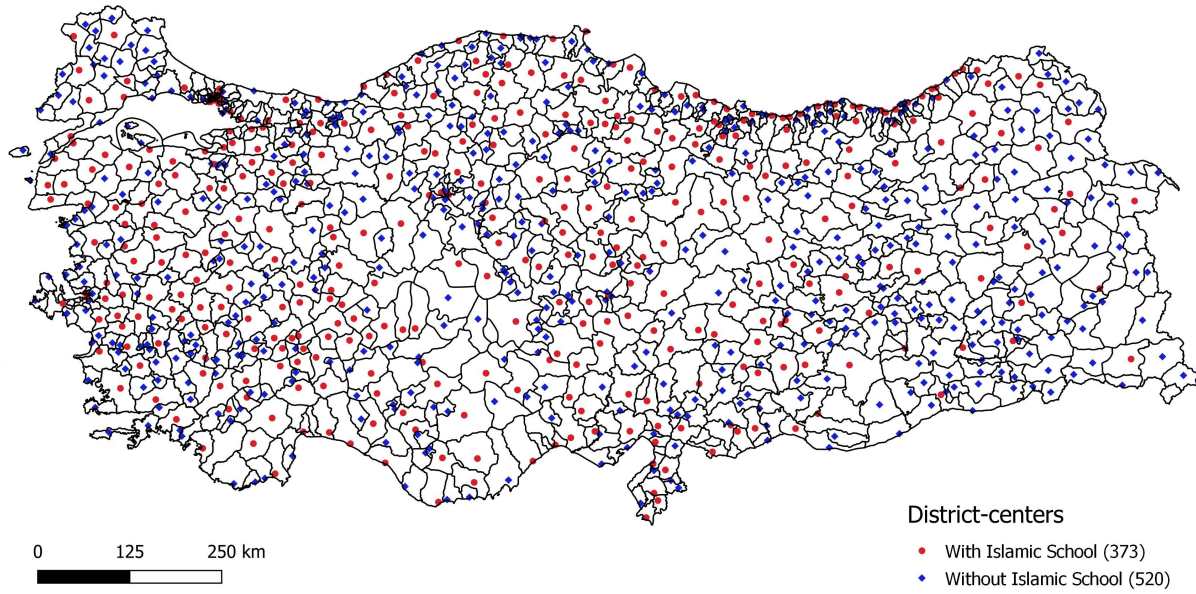
Source: Öcal (1999).

Figure C.2: Curriculum of Secular Schools in 1975

Secular Junior High Schools		Secular Academic High Schools (Literature Track)	
Common Courses	Cumulative (h)	Common Courses	Cumulative (h)
Turkish	15	Turkish Language and Literature	16
Maths	12	History	6
Social Studies	10	Art History	2
Science	9	Geography	5
Foreign Language	9	Maths	11
Arts	3	Physics	6
Music	3	Chemistry	4
Physical Education	3	Biology	5
Morals	3	Psychology	2
		Philosophy	6
		Morals	2
		Foreign Language	12
		Physical Education	3
		National Security	2
Total (h)	67 (72% w/max elec.)	Total (h)	82 (92%)
Elective Courses	Cumulative (h)	Elective Courses	Cumulative (h)
Technical or Arts Electives	12-24	Technical or Arts Electives	5
Religion Studies	2	Religion Studies	2
Total (h)	14-26 (28% w/max elec.)	Total (h)	7 (8%)

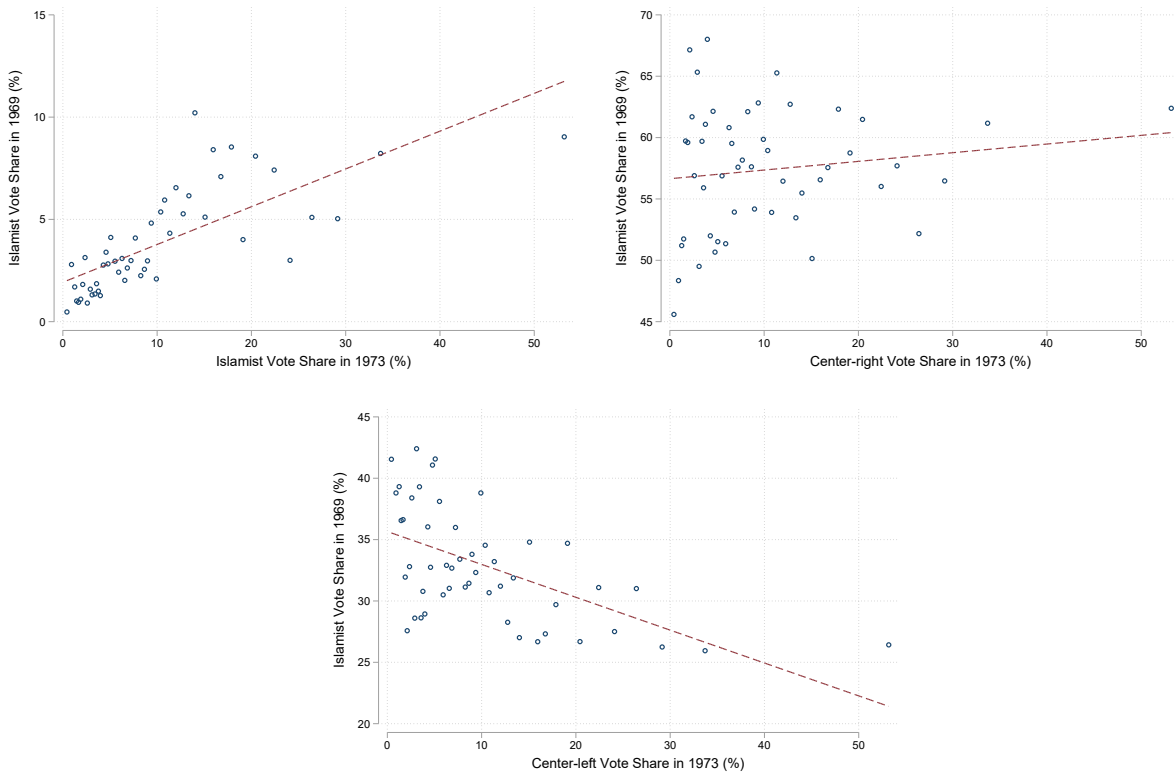
Source: MEB (1974).

Figure C.3: Locations of Islamic Schools



Notes: Map of Turkey showing the geographic locations of Islamic schools in 1980. Each dot represents a district center as of 1990.

Figure C.4: Relation between 1969 and 1973 Electoral Outcomes



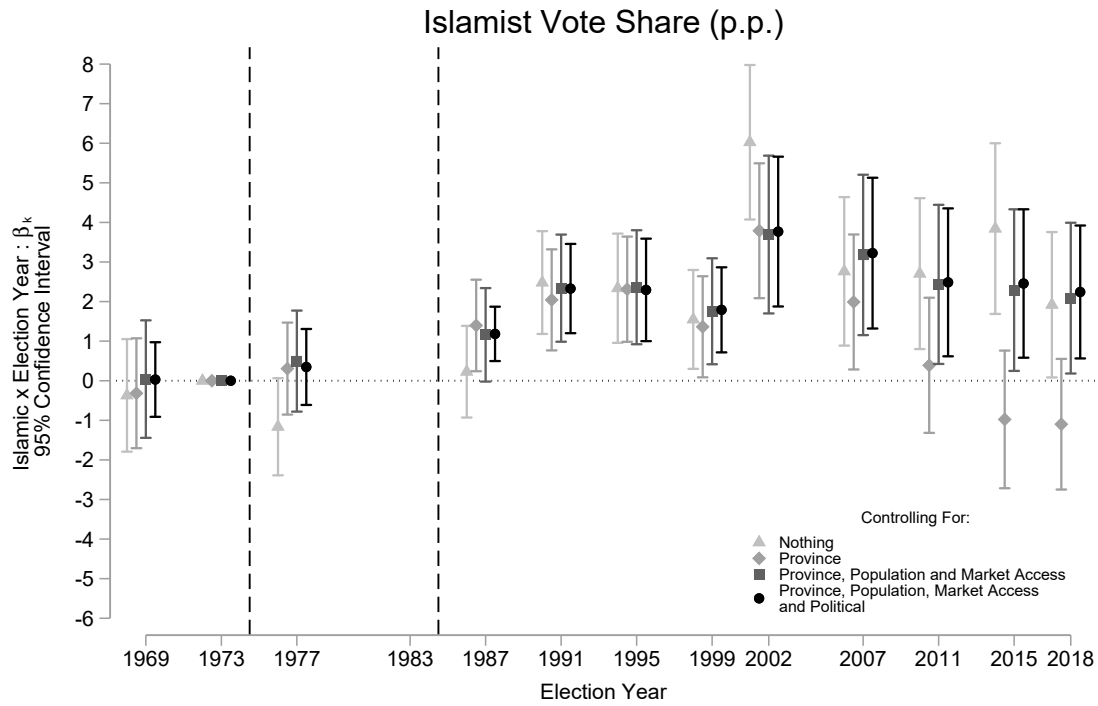
Notes: This figure shows the bivariate relationship between selected electoral outcomes of the 1969 and 1973 elections.

Figure C.5: Enrollments to Islamic School 6th Grade by Gender



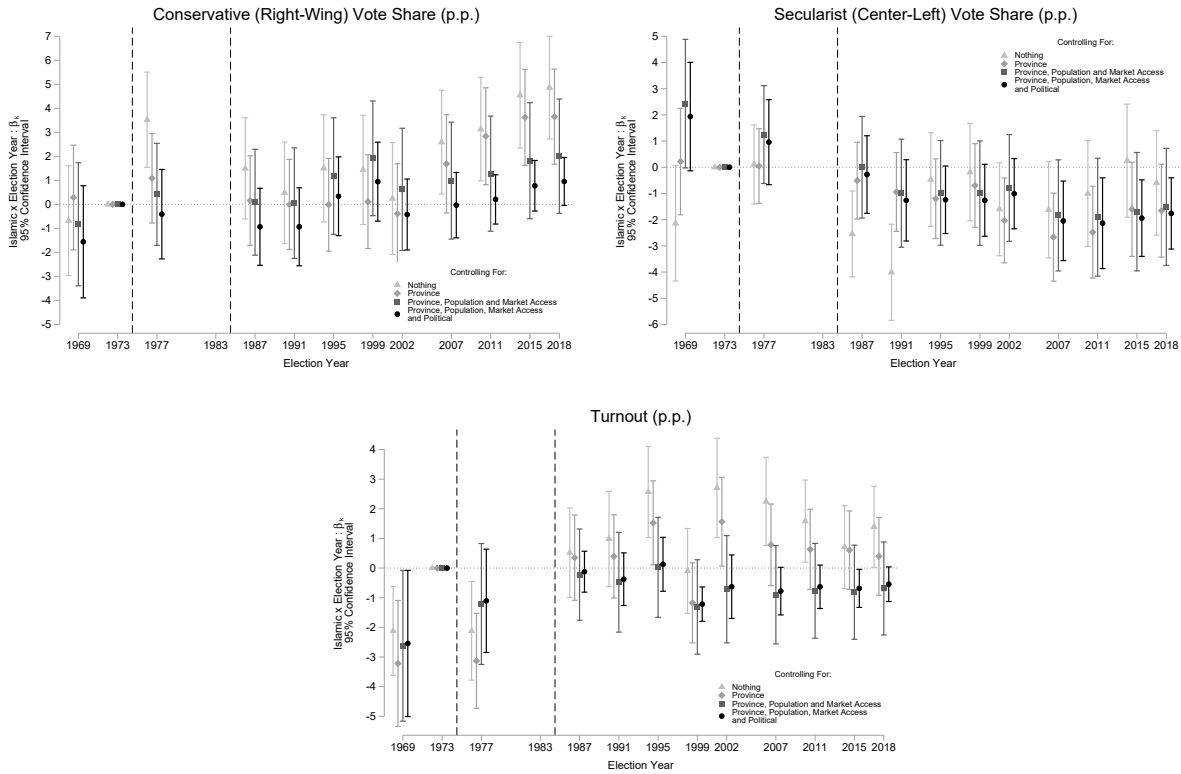
Notes: This figure shows the evolution of Islamic school 6th grade enrollment rates in a given school year by gender.

Figure C.6: Islamic Schools and Elections – Islamist Party Support in the Long Term



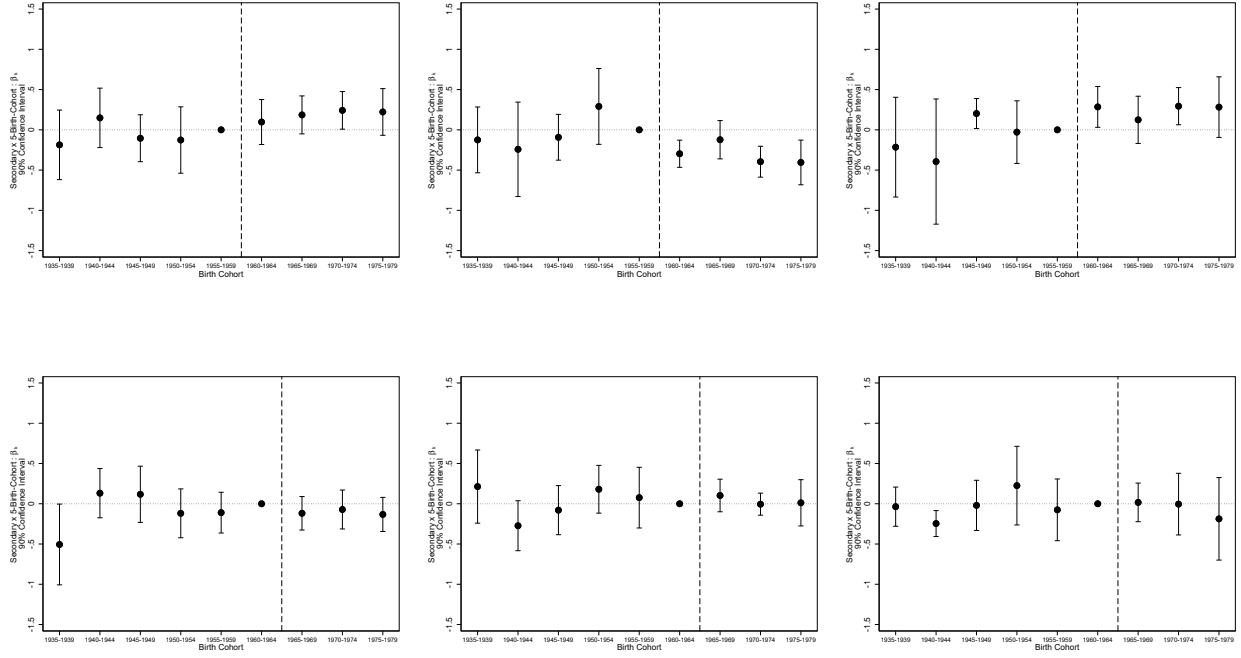
Notes: This figure reports election-year-specific estimates of β in equation 2 on a balanced district-center-year panel. $Islamic_d$ is a dummy indicating Islamic school availability in district center d in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. The 1973 election was the last just prior to Islamic school expansion and serves as the reference election. The elections in 1987 is the first in which exposed cohorts would have been eligible to vote. All specifications includes district center fixed effects and election-year fixed effects. In some specifications, I sequentially include province-by-election-year fixed effects and a full set of pretreatment observable characteristics of district centers interacted with election-year dummies. Standard errors clustered at the district center level.

Figure C.7: Islamic Schools and Elections – Other Outcomes in the Longer Term



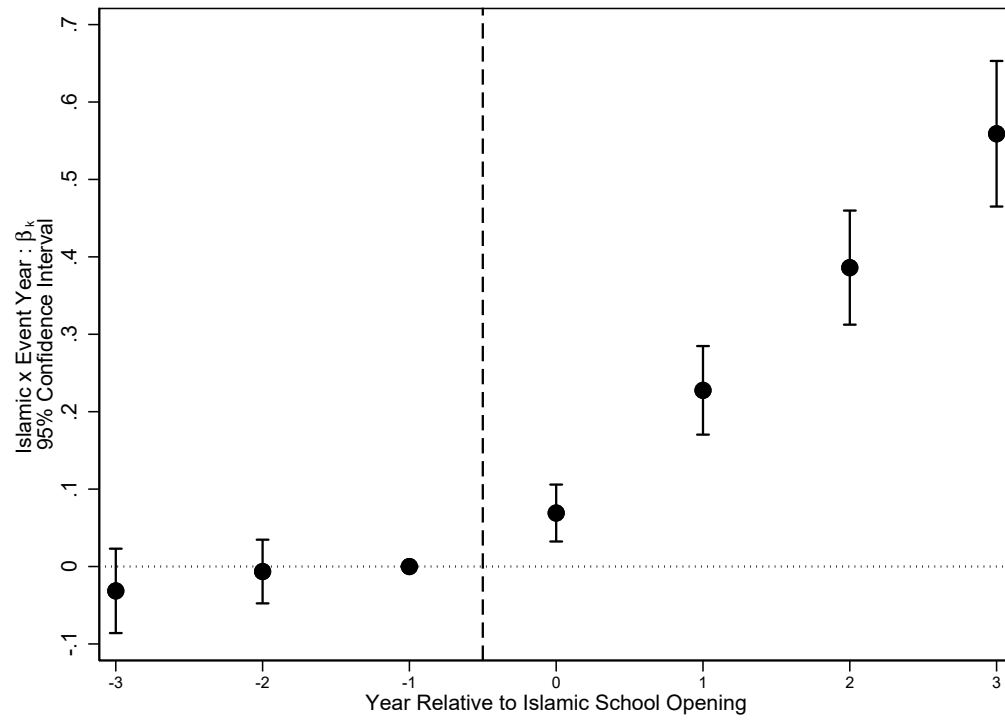
Notes: This figure reports election-year-specific estimates of β in equation 2 on a balanced district-center-year panel. $Islamic_d$ is a dummy indicating Islamic school availability in district center d in 1980, excluding district centers with an Islamic school prior to 1973. The 1973 election was the last just prior to Islamic school expansion and serves as the reference election. The elections in 1987 is the first in which exposed cohorts would have been eligible to vote. All specifications includes district center fixed effects and election-year fixed effects. In some specifications, I sequentially include province-by-election-year fixed effects and a full set of pretreatment observable characteristics of district centers interacted with election-year dummies. Standard errors clustered at the district center level.

Figure C.8: Analysis of Mechanisms - Dynamic Difference-in-differences



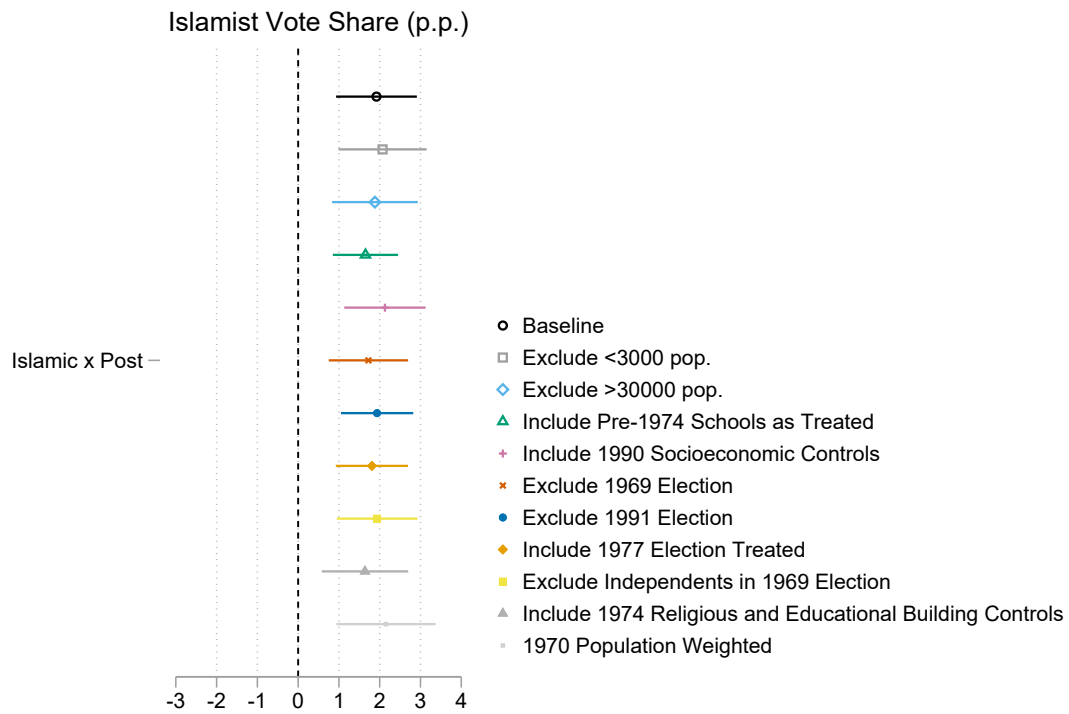
Notes: The figure plots coefficient estimates and 90% confidence intervals from the interaction between secondary-educated group and an indicator for 5-birth-cohorts. The regression controls for birth cohort and group fixed effects, as well as for wave, age, income-group and region dummies. The sample only consists of Muslims. Outcomes are standardized and estimated effects can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations. Data is from the World Values Survey.

Figure C.10: Islamic Schools and MTTB openings



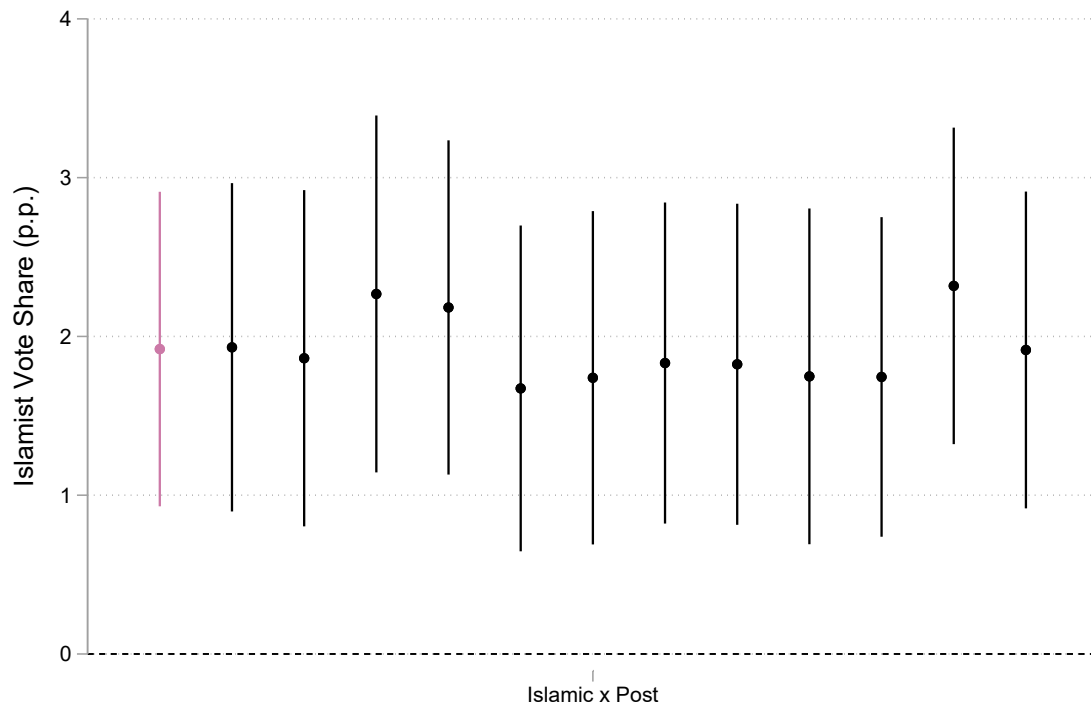
Notes: This figure reports estimates of event-study specification in equation 3 using TWFE estimator. Endpoints are binned. The omitted category is $t=-1$.

Figure C.11: Other Robustness Checks



Notes: This figure presents the estimates of β in equation 1 from several robustness checks in panel A for Islamist party vote shares. See Table 2 for details related to specification.

Figure C.12: Leave One Region Out at a Time



Notes: This figure presents the estimates of β in equation 1 leaving one NUTS1 region out at a time. See Table 2 for details related to specification.

Table C.1: Construction of Party Classifications

Year	Political Parties	Classification
1969	Republican People's Party, Unity Party	Center-left Secularists
1969	Nation Party, Milli Gorus Independents	Islamist
1969	Republican Reliance Party, Justice Party, Republican Reliance Party, Nationalist Movement Party, New Turkey Party	Center-right Conservatives
1973	Republican People's Party, Unity Party	Center-left Secularists
1973	National Salvation Party, Nation Party	Islamist
1973	Justice Party, Democratic Party, Republican Reliance Party, Nationalist Movement Party	Center-right Conservatives
1977	Republican People's Party, Unity Party	Center-left Secularists
1977	National Salvation Party, Nation Party	Islamist
1977	Justice Party, Democratic Party, Republican Reliance Party, Nationalist Movement Party	Center-right Conservatives
1987	Social Democratic Populist Party, Democratic Left Party	Center-left Secularists
1987	Welfare Party	Islamist
1987	Motherland Party, True Path Party, Nationalist Worker's Party, Reformist Democracy Party	Center-right Conservatives
1991	Social Democratic Populist Party, Democratic Left Party	Center-left Secularists
1991	Welfare Party	Islamist
1991	Motherland Party, True Path Party	Center-right Conservatives
1995	Republican People's Party, Democratic Left Party	Center-left Secularists
1995	Welfare Party	Islamist
1995	Motherland Party, True Path Party, Nationalist Movement Party, Rebirth Party, New Party	Center-right Conservatives

Notes: This table presents the construction of ideological classifications of political parties used in the main analysis over a period between 1969 and 1995.

Table C.2: Analysis of Mechanisms - Difference-in-differences**(a) Panel A. Men**

Dependent Variable:	Religious Person (1)	Welzel's Secular Values Index (2)	Member of Islamist Party (3)
Some Secondary	-0.440*** (0.067)	0.441*** (0.086)	-0.263** (0.087)
Some Secondary x Born after 1962	0.217* (0.099)	-0.226** (0.072)	0.251** (0.098)
R^2	0.099	0.124	0.097
N	2636	2700	1676
Wild-clustered Bootstrap (p-value)	0.070	0.000	0.031

(b) Panel B. Women

Dependent Variable:	Religious Person (1)	Welzel's Secular Values Index (2)	Member of Islamist Party (3)
Some Secondary	-0.253*** (0.066)	0.414*** (0.029)	-0.013 (0.048)
Some Secondary x Born after 1965	-0.053 (0.082)	-0.003 (0.047)	-0.070 (0.110)
R^2	0.120	0.177	0.086
N	2598	2664	1626
Wild-clustered Bootstrap (p-value)	0.5	0.929	0.718
Birth-Year FE	✓	✓	✓
Region FE	✓	✓	✓
Wave FE	✓	✓	✓
Income-Group Dummies	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table presents estimates from equation 4 for male and female subsamples separately. The regression controls for birth cohort and group fixed effects, as well as for wave, age, income-group and region dummies interacted with gender indicators. The sample only consists of Muslims. Outcomes are standardized and estimated effects can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations. Data is from the World Values Survey.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Robust standard errors clustered by region.

Table C.3: Analysis of Mechanisms - Triple Differences

Dependent Variable:	Religious Person (1)	Welzel's Secular Values Index (2)	Member of Islamist Party (3)
Secondary x Born after 1965	-0.005 (0.097)	-0.035 (0.068)	-0.028 (0.062)
Secondary x Born after 1965 x Male	0.246 (0.149)	-0.207** (0.063)	0.270* (0.125)
R^2	0.110	0.151	0.095
N	5234	5364	3302
Wild-clustered Bootstrap (p-value)	0.132	0.027	0.062
Birth-Year FE	✓	✓	✓
Group FE	✓	✓	✓
Wave FE	✓	✓	✓
Age FE	✓	✓	✓
Individual Controls	✓	✓	✓

Notes: This table presents double and triple interactions from a triple difference specification derived from 4. The regression controls for birth cohort and group fixed effects, as well as for wave, age, income-group and region dummies interacted with gender indicators. The sample only consists of Muslims. Outcomes are standardized and estimated effects can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations. Data is from the World Values Survey.

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors clustered by region.