

TURKEY BECOMES MORE INTOLERANT: STUDY

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✖ Menekse Tokyay, [SETimes](#) 5 August 2011

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Some experts say this religiosity is closely linked to the pro-Islamic policies of the ruling AKP. However, Sezin Oney, a journalist with the daily Taraf, tells SETimes that conservatism has a broader social and political scope in Turkey that extends beyond religion. She says nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance towards diversity also play a part.

"Today, the AKP has an unprecedented political majority and Turkey has a sociopolitical culture that adores power," she told SETimes, adding that "the AKP is too pragmatic to promote a standardized social view on any given issue."

Still, religious preferences, race and sexual preference are significant factors in how people view their neighbours. The survey found, for instance, that 84% of citizens do not want gay neighbours, while 64%, 54%, and 48% do not wish to live next to an atheist, Jew, and Christian, respectively.

The survey also shows the extent to which domestic violence is "internalized": 62% of the respondents -- men and women -- argue that women should obey men, while 30% say that some women deserve spousal abuse.

Murat Somer, associate professor of international relations at Koc University and fellow at the Institute for International and Regional Studies at Princeton University, says the survey results indicate that despite socioeconomic development, Turkish society is not becoming more open to diversity, pluralism and equality. "Instead, many people are becoming more religious-conservative,

The study also shows society's aversion to civic participation: 61% of respondents would categorically refuse to sign a collective petition, while 68% would not attend a peaceful demonstration.

According to Somer, these results reflect the public's hesitancy to exercise basic democratic rights out of fear of the police, the justice system, and the power of government.

Still, trust in government has ballooned from 29% in 2001, to 61% in 2011, which may be a reflection of the government's performance. Since the 2001, the government has secured economic stability and growth, increased civilian control over the military, and has been elected three times.

Given these facts, Somer argues that the trust in the government could be expected to be even higher, but significant segments of society strongly oppose the governing party's political identity and some policies.

In contrast, support for the military has steadily declined from a high of 94% in 1996 to 75% today. There are significant regional variations, with support above 90% in the western parts of the country, but only 43% in the largely Kurdish populated southeast, which has witnessed the brunt of the military's efforts to combat the PKK for over three decades.

Somer says confrontations with the government, charges of conspiracy and incompetence in the war against the PKK have led to the military's declining popularity.

"In fact, trust in the military could have fallen more, but the image of the Turkish military has traditionally been strong and some people rely on the military because they distrust the government," he adds.

