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Investigating Changes to Syrian Refugee Education in Turkey: Political Motivations and National Interests

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Abstract

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Following an attempted coup in 2016, Turkey's leaders leaned into attitudes of nationalism and conservatism. In the months after the coup and concurrently with rising nationalist conservative sentiments, sweeping changes were made to Turkey's treatment of refugee education. These changes indicated attempts to integrate refugees into Turkish society; they centered measures such as teaching Turkish language in schools in efforts to assimilate Syrian refugees into the Turkish populace. Integration efforts were a stark change from previous language from 2011-2016 from the Turkish government: Syrian refugees had been considered temporary residents and were expected to leave instead of becoming permanent citizens. Education measures that reflected this sentiment included the existence of Temporary Education Centers (TECs) and instruction in Arabic rather than Turkish. The conservative rhetoric occurring at the time heavily involved emphasis on strengthening Arab identity in Turkey. This paper describes the extent to which the new increase in nationalist sentiment and Arab identity building was responsible for these changes, and what that means for how Turkish leaders view their refugees, as permanent citizens or temporary residents, within a nationalist agenda.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Puzzle

Since the start of the 21st century, Turkey's leaders have leaned into attitudes of nationalism and conservatism. These attitudes amplified after a coup attempt in 2016. In the months after the coup attempt and concurrently with rising nationalist conservative sentiments, sweeping changes were made to Turkey's treatment of refugee education. These changes shifted refugee educational administration from being decentralized in the hands of unmoderated non-state actors to centralizing it by putting it in the hands of the main education ministry in Turkey. This change indicated one of the first attempts to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society since their arrival in 2011. Integration efforts were a stark change from previous language from the Turkish government; Syrian refugees had been considered temporary residents and were expected to leave instead of becoming permanent citizens. This thesis investigates this change in educational administration and policy. I look at what factors drove these changes, what motivated policy makers to make these decisions, and why they did not happen sooner.

There is a broader purpose of mass education institutions, their relationship to the nation-state, and how refugees fit into that picture. According to Waters and Leblanc's "Refugees and Education: Mass Public Schooling without a Nation-State," one of the most important roles that mass public schooling plays, especially as a tool for the nation-state, is its function in indoctrinating populations. Public education creates people who can effectively participate in the society that is providing their schooling. These people are typically citizens of a nation-state, and educating them requires some kind of consensus around who the nation wants their citizens to be. Thus, decisions around mass public education and its curricular choices are inherently

politically driven.[1] Each decision that is made about mass public education, such as language of instruction, presentation of history, and religion's role in society, is a political statement about the desired citizen. These political decisions around mass education are integral to the formation of the collective knowledge and values the citizenry as a whole holds. Thus, the schools in a nation define who is included in the citizenship of a state.

With this context, the question of educating refugees becomes paradoxical. Refugees are stateless, meaning they are not citizens. As temporary residents, Both governments and international humanitarian organizations must make a decision about which nation they are educating refugees for: the host nation or the home nation. Essentially, the state must decide how to educate them without a guarantee that they will contribute back to the nation's society using that education in the future. Waters and Leblac argue that refugees exist in a pseudo-state. While they do not belong to a particular state, they do belong to a community that consists of both other refugees and the relief organizations providing for them.

The Waters and Leblanc article is based on the idea that non-governmental organizations are the primary proprietors of refugee education. The state does not tend to take control of refugee education because refugees do not contribute to its educational goals of fostering nationalism and preparing people to economically contribute to the nation. Until 2016, this was also the case in Turkey. Non-state actors managed nearly all initiatives to provide education to Syrian refugees, but the integration decision halted the activities of most of these actors and put it in the hands of the Turkish government. Syrian refugees do not meet the historical criteria for Turkish citizenship, and creating citizens is the primary role of Turkish education. The remainder of this thesis will unravel the puzzle of why the Turkish government decided to integrate

[1] Waters and LeBlanc, "Refugees and Education."

refugees into public education. Turkey is no exception to the idea that schools exist for the purpose of creating citizens. As I will discuss further in Section IV, Turkey's public educational institutions have existed to create desirable citizens since the first Turkish Republic in 1922. In addition, Turkish citizenship is extremely exclusive. Until recently, citizenship has been mostly restricted to people of Turkish ethnicity. As a result, Turkish public education has been effectively restricted to people of Turkish ethnicity. These factors make Turkey's 2016 decision to integrate all Syrian refugees into Turkish public education a puzzling one. Syrians are not of Turkish ethnicity, yet they have been incorporated into an institution that exists primarily for the purpose of fostering Turkishness.

1.2 Context and Literature Review

In the last decade, Turkey has experienced two major disruptions that caused the government to make considerable adjustments to their normal mode of operation: a huge influx of migrants in a short period of time, and an attempted coup of the Turkish government. The first of these began in 2011, when Turkey started to receive refugees from Syria during the Syrian Civil War which started the Syrian Refugee Crisis. The way that nations handle incoming Syrian refugees has tested the humanitarian good will of Syria's neighbors, especially Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. The Syrian Civil War has displaced 13.5 million people and made 6.8 million people refugees. In such a dire crisis, nations who host those fleeing to their borders gain credit in the international community as nations who care about human rights.[2] As a result, the countries surrounding Syria, where most Syrian refugees fled to, face intense pressure to host refugees to the best of their ability, regardless of their existing policies on refugees.

A nation that fails to host refugees in the midst of one of the largest humanitarian crises in decades signals to the international community some level of disregard for human rights. Their inaction may also show a lack of regard for international organizations like the UN that, which have to take on a larger burden because they provide for refugees who were not accepted into Syria's neighboring nations. As a result of this intense international pressure, Turkey declared early on in the crisis that they would have an open door policy for Syrian refugees in which they committed to opening their borders to Syrians as opposed to intercepting them.[3] Currently, Turkey hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, and has the largest refugee population in the

[2]World Vision, 2021
[3] Olejárová, "The Great Wall of Turkey."

world. While it does host around 350,000 refugees from other countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran, Syrian refugees outnumber other nationalities by far.[4]

This influx of Syrian refugees came rapidly, and the Turkish government created policies to address their presence just as quickly. 1.2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, or roughly 50%, are children.[5] The massive increase in school-aged residents in Turkey called into question how they would be educated, and the question of educating refugees in Turkey was particularly difficult. Refugee education was delegated to NGOs at the beginning of the decade, and there was very little public infrastructure in place where Syrian refugees could be schooled. In addition to the lack of educational infrastructure, educating refugees is generally a tough dilemma for governments, even in countries that are not experiencing an inundation of migrants. The majority of refugee-hosting nations largely view education's purpose in two ways: as a means to create a national identity or as an investment for future economic growth as a result of an educated workforce.[6] Waters and Leblanc contend that as long as education is viewed in this way, refugees will not receive equitable education. Refugees are people who, by definition, are simultaneously temporary residents of their host nations and hold allegiances to their home nations. Thus, most refugees are unlikely to be perceived as either long-term economic investments for a single country or as valuable to building a cohesive national identity. As unwilling migrants, they are not ideal candidates to advocate for the ideologies of their host nations or foster a sense of nationalism and patriotism for their host countries.

This dilemma of refugee education is likely part of the reason that the Turkish government did not attempt to take control of refugee education until a centralized approach was

[4]UNHCR, 2021
[5]World Bank 2021
[6] Waters and LeBlanc, "Refugees and Education."

more pressing with the Syrian refugee crisis. Using education as a policy tool to create homogenized beliefs and identity has been a prevalent practice in Turkey since the beginning of the Turkish Republic in 1923. This era was called the Kemalist Era because the first president of Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, was deliberately fostering an aspirational sense of nationhood for a new country by rejecting many ideologies from the previous Ottoman Empire. The nation was young and Ataturk wanted his people to take an identity that was distinctly different from the one that defined the region for centuries. The first president enacted policies through several institutions to create a new Turkish identity, one of the main ones being the public school system. As a result of this aspirational nation building, Turkish citizenship at the time was based around a very specific concept of citizenship that was defined by rejecting Islamic and Eastern values from the Ottoman Empire and embracing Western ones such as secularism. The national education curriculum at the time strongly emphasized loyalty to Turkey and pride in Turkish citizenship above anything else. From the very infancy of the nation, the explicit purpose of the Turkish education system has been to mold Turkish citizens.

Educating Syrian refugees has been particularly difficult for Turkish policy makers. The Turkish education system is deeply rooted in citizen building. Although Turkey did not have external infrastructure to support refugee education, they did not consider integrating refugees into their existing education system because they had no desire for these refugees to ultimately become citizens. The most recent development in refugee education was surprising in the context of both Turkish elites' attitude towards refugees and their refugee education policies up until that point. Turkey's education branch, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) partnered with the UN to create the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) to integrate Syrian refugees into the national Turkish education system. These changes indicated attempts to integrate refugees into Turkish

society; they centered measures that demonstrated a new desire to blend Syrians into Turkish society such as teaching Turkish language in schools in an effort to assimilate Syrian refugees into the Turkish populace. Integration efforts were a stark deviation from previous Turkish government rhetoric in 2011-2015: Syrian refugees had been strictly and explicitly considered temporary residents who were expected to leave instead of becoming permanent citizens.

These changes came around the time of the second major disruptive event: the 2016 attempted coup of the Turkish government. While nationwide changes to refugee education and demonstrated government resistance in the form of a coup do not seem related at first glance, there may be a connection between these two events. The coup attempt in 2016 signaled to national leaders that there was a significant amount of the population whose values did not align with that of the national leadership in Turkey to the point where they felt a coup was necessary. In order to combat a potential loss of power, Turkish national leaders, particularly Prime Minister Erdogan, honed in on conservative national rhetoric. Erdogan leaned into notions from the conservative Muslim Brotherhood.

This thesis investigates external factors which may have influenced this stark change in policies surrounding refugee education, the increasing nationalism in the country being one of them. Typically, in times when authoritarianism, isolationism, and conservatism increase, xenophobia also increases. Thus, it is counterintuitive that the Turkish government enacted the policy shift in refugee education, indicating some desire for refugee integration. I argue that national political interests surrounding the creation of a more unified, Arab identity for Turkish citizens had an influence on the changes to refugee education in the country. Prior to 2016, the primary messaging regarding Turkey and Istanbul specifically consisted of clear attempts to define them as places where the West and the East met. There was emphasis on a Western type

of industrialization that was met with culture and aesthetic from the East that made it a comfortable vacation destination for Westerners in Europe, as well as a liberal haven for Muslims trying to distance themselves from more conservative Arab countries.

However, the coup attempt brought about a notable shift towards conserative values and a much bigger emphasis on Islam rather than secularism within the government. The education system for nationals changed to include a more religious curriculum, higher enrollment in religious schools, and more financial support for Islamic institutions. It is clear in the Erdogan era, particularly after the coup, that Islam became an unspoken requirement for being a Turkish Citizen. This Islamic emphasis distinguishes the New Republic from the Kemalist Era. Erdogan is more concerned with solidifying religious emphasis in Turkey, and Ataturk was distinctly leaning more towards secularism and creating an ethnic, Turkish identity.

In the Erdogan Era, identifying as Sunni Muslim is an important aspect of Turkish citizenship. As the emphasis on religion increased, as did the treatment and integration policies for Syrian refugees. Around the time of the coup attempt, education for Syrian refugees (who had been in the country in large numbers since 2011) went from being based in Temporary Education Centers (TECs) to becoming more integrated with the national school system. The discourse surrounding Syrian refugees shifted from them being largely viewed as temporary citizens to more permanent members of Turkish society. This change in rhetoric around Syrian refugees and their assimilation happened, in part, because Syrian refugees can contribute to national political interests surrounding the newer Arab emphasis in Turkey. Understanding what factors influence countries to make sweeping changes to refugee education in an effort for integration can help give insight into what can help encourage nations to create positive education policy later on.

There exists a gap in the literature on refugee education that my research may help to fill. In 2007, Pinson and Arnot, who are researchers at Ben-Gurion University in Israel and Cambridge University respectively, conducted a literature review of the research about education and refugees until 2007. The authors find that there is more of a need to research the refugee crisis than the education component of it, but research on the sociology of education for refugees is still necessary. They argue that because education is both a right and a key determinant of social mobility, education is an important part of studying refugee rights after migration. They posit that there is a particular need for "modern states ... to face the decision whether an individual's social rights should continue to be distributed according to citizenship or according to personhood."[7] Though there have been some developments in researching refugee education since this article was written, there is still a need to fill this void in the research space. My research will not only help contribute to the literature on refugee education as a whole, but will also contribute to the conversation on refugee rights compared to citizen rights in their host country.

Sarah Dryden-Peterson, a leading researcher on refugee education who directs the REACH program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, studies the amount and quality of education that refugees receive, and on both counts has found that they have significantly less access compared to nationals. She proposes that this presents an interesting intersection between countries wanting to gain a better international standing by signing onto human rights doctrine in which they promise education provision, but where they also take advantage of the lack of enforcement mechanisms in international NGOs so that they can provide refugees second class

[7] Pinson and Arnot, "Sociology of Education and the Wasteland of Refugee Education Research: British Journal of Sociology of Education: Vol 28, No 3."

educational services.[8] My thesis will be an extension of Dryden-Peterson's research. I will study the quality of education refugees receive, but also why they receive that quality of education. The "why" question will help to differentiate whether education is applied as a human right based on committing to international treaties or as a tool to further the self-interests of the host nation. I will particularly see how her argument applies to places like Turkey, where the motivations to educate anyone at all are in direct opposition to educating the refugee population.

Through this research, I will investigate how Turkish political leaders typically view education: as a basic human dignity or as a means to an end. A significant, more nationalist oriented change in curricula for refugees following the coup would have two primary implications: that Turkey considers refugees an important aspect of cultivating a national identity, and that they are using education as a tool to further nationalist agendas. Tracking changes to refugee education, and education in general during this time, in relation to the increase in nationalism can provide insight into the performativity of signing a UN convention such as the one Turkey signed and the role of education as simply a human right or as a tool to further the political ideologies of the country providing it.

[8] Dryden-Peterson, "Refugee Education."

1.3 My Approach

This thesis was initially intended to be informed by interviews, and much of my research was set to take place in Istanbul. I planned to interview people who worked at NGOs involved in education as well as people from the Education Ministry using a grant from the Halle Institute. However, due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, I was unable to carry out my initial plan. I decided to exclude interviews from my thesis and focus on using a humanistic approach. This entails conducting an analysis using existing literature, press releases from the Ministry of Education, and reports from non-state organizations in Turkey. My aim is to use my thesis to effectively create my own archive focusing on Turkish education policy, regime change, and educational provision for Syrian refugees. Rather than conducting my own interviews, I am relying on interviews that have already been conducted with people from the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, the UN, Turkish public school teachers, Syrian parents and teachers, and smaller NGOs that were involved in refugee education in the early years of the refugee crisis.

I use a variety of different types of sources in my analysis. Many of them are from international organizations and NGOs like UNESCO and the UN. Some are also press releases directly from the Turkish Ministry of Education. In my analysis, I consider these sources primary sources. These organizations worked closely with the Turkish Ministry of Education to implement the integration of refugees, and funded many of MoNE's initiatives. They collaborated with the Turkish government through the integration process, and sat in on many of the meetings where it was discussed, and would have some insight into the motivations for the decisions. I consider my other sources secondary sources. These sources discuss general education in Turkey, refugee education, and political regimes in Turkey, but do not discuss the political nature of the decision to integrate Syrian refugees into the education system. Using a

combination of these sources, I contribute uniquely to the literature by drawing conclusions about the political motivation of this decision.

Chapter 2: The Political and Historical Landscape

2.1 Erdogan's Authoritarian Regime

From Kemal to Erdogan

Why did the Turkish government respond to the failed coup attempt with an increase in nationalism and conservatism? Ataturk founded Turkey with ideals for the country to be a liberal and secular nation between the East and West. Now, Erdogan runs the country emphasizing conservatism and religion. In order to understand the political and historical context for how Turkey's political priorities evolved, it is necessary to look beyond just the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Turkey's political leadership went from staunchly enforcing secular citizenship to promoting religious citizenship within a decade. Understanding how the foundations of Turkey's political structure allowed Erdogan to gain the power he currently has will inform later discussions about his political decisions surrounding Syrian refugees.

The extent of Erdogan's power stems, in part, from the remnants of Ataturk's regime. Though Ataturk's values were quite the opposite of Erdogan's, as he believed in promoting liberalism and secularism, he was not a democratic leader. He enforced these ideals in an authoritarian way. Secularism was not a choice for his people, as it was enforced by a series of laws that Ataturk was responsible for. To enforce secularism, he banned headscarves, put mosques under state control, and made women's education compulsory.[9] Ataturk was enforcing somewhat liberal values for his time, but he was not a liberal leader, as much of his power came from an unbalanced system.

[9] Burç and Tokatlı, "A Second Foundation?"

The Turkish military's role is different from that in its neighboring countries. The military is bound to the state and they are expected to execute state agendas. Ataturk trusted the military with the responsibility of keeping Turkey secular. Consequently, Turkish armies were dominated by people who were loyal to Ataturk and dedicated to his values of nationalism and secularism. While the number of Ataturk's supporters in the military has decreased over the years, there is a fraction of the military that still exists who are loyal to him. After his death, there were military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 in response to regimes that were deviating from Kemal's ideals, with the aim of continuing Ataturk's secular regime.[10] With each coup, Turkey became increasingly unstable. With secularism being enforced in such a strict manner, many religious Turks felt oppressed by the state.

Kemalism relied on building nationalism from Turkish ethnicity, which ostracized many minority groups in Turkey. With 99% of Turkey being Muslim, and 78% of the total population being Sunni Muslim, religious nationalist movements started becoming increasingly prevalent among the populous and began replacing Kemalist ideals.[11] The first Islamic leaning Prime Minister since 1923, Nekmettin Erbakan, was elected in 1996, but resigned in 1997 at the request and pressure of the military. Erdogan was known for his dedication to Islam, which made him popular with those who felt that Kemalist era policies were surpressing their faith. He founded the conservative Justice and Development Party (known in Turkey as Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) which gained a lot of support among religious conservatives in Turkey. AK in Turkish means light, pure, and uncontaminated. They deny having a Islamist political agenda, instead defining themsleves as a conservative party that emphasizes traditional Turkish religious ideals.

[10] Fardfar, "Analysis of Decemalization in Turkey Post Ataturk."
[11] "Purge in Numbers New | Turkey Purge."

His first political office was Mayor of Istanbul in 1994. In 2002, representing the AKP, Erdogan became the prime minister of Turkey.

Erdogan saw Sunni Islam as a way to unite a fragmented country. With tensions between Turks and the minority cultural and ethnic groups in Turkey, particularly the Kurds, Erdogan saw Islam as a common demonator, and thus, a unifying force.[12] In 2013, Erdogan's goals to unite Turkey under Sunni Islam, rather than ethnic Turkishness, were demonstrated in his decisions relating to Kurds. He announced reforms to address Kurdish demands for civil rights, which have been contested in Turkey for a long time.[13] Typically, civil rights issues for Kurdish people in Turkey is an agenda item for liberal parties. As a staunch conservative, Erdogan's willingness to address these issues and go against his political tradition exhibited his loyalty to the idea of making Turkey a nation for Sunni Muslims. His actions with the Kurds foreshadowed the steps Erdogan took in 2016 towards integrating Syrian refugees, who are also Sunni Muslims. As Erdogan stayed in office longer, it became increasingly clear that he and his party had an Islamist agenda. The coup attempt in 2016 was a directed effort to oust Erdogan and end his regime.

The 2016 Coup Attempt

The coup began on July 16, 2016. Military officers seized critical infrastructure in Istanbul, such as airports, a television station, and police headquarters. The people behind the coup also bombed the parliament and and The Turkish Intelligence Service's headquarters with fighter jets.[14] During the coup, the opposition group called themselves the Peace Council. Their main aim in the coup was to kill Erdogan, but he was vacationing out of Istanbul at the time.

[12] Karaveli, "Erdogan's Journey."
[13] Karaveli.
[14] Yavuz and Koç, "The Turkish Coup Attempt."

Erdogan was ultimately able to broadcast over television and on the internet, calling the public to take a stand against the coup. He blamed it on the religious Gulen movement, bringing both secularists and Erdogan's religious supporters to the streets to take a stand against the rebels. The Gulen movement is not a political party, but worked closely with the AKP in the past. Though they have similar goals in promoting Islam in Turkey, they differed in a few key aspects that drove them apart in the early 2010's.

The friction between the two groups stemmed from Erdogan's unwillingness to allow the Gulenists to achieve more power in the government. Additionally, Erdogsn's moves to negotiate with Turkish Kurds caused a significant rift between the AKP and the Gulenists. Fethullah Gulen, the founder of the Gulenist movement, began to criticize Erdogan's political decisions, so Erdogan removed the Gulenists political influence in Turkey. Even though the Gulenist movement is a religious one, it was also one that was critical of Erdogan's regime in many ways. Erdogan's resentment against the movement led to a systematic liquidation of their influence in the political sphere. Erdogan made sure Turkey knew that the Gulenists were to be resisted even prior to the coup, designating them as a terrorist group. Thus, people from many walks of life resisted their attempt to seize political power.[15] Erdogan's supporters rallied with him against the Gulenists, and his secular opponents joined them.

As a result of Erdogan accusing the Gulen movement of the coup, 240 people were killed and thousands were injured.[16] Rallying around a call to defend democracy, support for Erdogan against the coup was widespread. The vast majority of opposition parties joined his side against the coup. However, a large number of people who were in the streets against the coup were religious conservatives. The most common phrase heard through the streets of Turkey on the

[15] Taş, "A History of Turkey's AKP-Gülen Conflict."
[16] Yavuz and Koç, "The Turkish Coup Attempt."

night of the coup was "God is great."[17] This liquidation movement, known as the Turkish Purge, was not only in the army, but also in academia, and many government ministries including the Ministry of National Education.

The coup attempt failed because the majority of the Turkish army did not support it and actively resisted it. After the coup attempt, Erdogan's government declared a state of emergency, It allowed him to purge anyone suspected of being disloyal. The liquidation process was massive. Tens of thousands of military officials were either dismissed, under investigation, or jailed.[18] Notably, the largest purge happened in the Ministry of Education, with nearly 34,000 officials dismissed.[19] It was later confirmed that the Gulen movement was behind the coup attempt, though Gulen himself denied responsibility. The state of emergency was directly in response to the coup and framed by the government as an attempt to protect democracy. In April 2017, there was a referendum that significantly expanded Erdogan's powers, arguably extending them further than the ones Ataturk had in the 1920's. The referendum changed Turkey's political structure from a parliamentary system to a presidential one with few institutional checks on the power of the executive.[20] This fundamental political change cemented Turkey's democratic backsliding under Erdogan. The 2016 coup attempt is considered a huge turning point in recent Turkish history because it allowed the state of emergency, which allowed Erdogan to take advantage of vulnerabilities in the system to increase his influence. Political decisions after 2016 enforce Erdogan and the AKP's agenda because they come from a centralized, authoritarian government with Erdogan at the heart of it. His regime is now widely considered an autocratic

[17] Yavuz and Koç,
[18] Yavuz and Koç.
[19] "Purge in Numbers New | Turkey Purge."
[20] Esen and Gumuscu, "The Perils of 'Turkish Presidentialism.'"

one, and he is free to enforce the ideals he founded the AKP on: religious conservatism and nationalism.

2.2 The Requirements of Turkish Citizenship

Requirements and Expectations of Turkish Citizenship

The Turkish political elite put a special emphasis on Turkish citizenship due to the nationalist nature of the country's politics. In most places, citizenship in the nation is a privilege that comes with either duties and obligations owed to the government, a guaranteed set of social rights, or both. In the Turkish case, citizenship entails a very specific set of duties and expectations for Turkish identity and requires contribution to society. This model of citizenship is commonly called Republican Citizenship, and it has been the prevalent model in Turkey since the Early Republican, or Kemalist Era. The Kemalist Era was partially characterized by rejecting the identity of the Ottoman Empire that came before it, and in turn, deliberately crafting a new identity that was heavily ingrained in being a Turkish citizen. Since the conception of the Turkish Nation, Turkish citizenship has entailed adopting a specific Turkish ideology as well as a Turkish identity enforced by state messaging and used to create a homogenous nation.[21]

There are a few studies assessing the obligations that the Turkish government expects as a result of Turkish citizenship, with many of them analyzing Turkish citizenship curricula in schools. Several scholars cite Ustel, who examined secondary school history curricula for messages about citizenship. Ustel's study found that these curricula reveal that Turkish citizenship imposes militaristic and patriotic obligations to the nation. These responsibilities include responsibility towards the family, upholding public order, dutifully paying taxes, and men committing to engaging in military service above all else. In recent years, especially while

[21] Kardam and Cengiz, "Republican Citizenship in Turkey."

the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been prevalent in the government, the ideal citizen goes beyond these duties and is also a nationalistic and religious Sunni Muslim.[22]

Sen continues Ustel's 2004 research in a 2020 study critically examining citizenship education.[23] He finds that there are three predominant themes in recent Turkish citizenship education curricula: ethno-religious nationalism, statism, and neoliberalism. As time progresses, the messaging in this curriculum about Turkish identity being tied to a particular faith only increases. These textbooks equate Turkish identity with Sunni Muslim identity, present Sunni values as Turkish values, discourage expressions of cultural identity, and place non-Muslims in a negative light.

Sen also finds that there is no material in these textbooks portraying the government, or any entity associated with the government, in a negative or critical way. The state is presented as a body of benevolence that altruistically takes care of its citizens. Notably, much of Sen's section on statism discusses the way that the curriculum teaches students about the state's relationships with Syrian refugees. The rhetoric in these instructional materials refers to Syrians as guests, and the government as a welcoming entity that is hosting people who are in need out of sheer compassion and good will. In regards to the statism aspect of these curricula, there is also a lot of discussion of what it means to be an active citizen. This is where the duties and obligations that come with republican citizenship are described. The ones Sen describes are congruent with Ustel's findings, with the addition of pointed and cautious language about the 2016 coup attempt. The participants of the coup are described as treacherous enemies of democracy, and people who resisted it are described as heroic. This implies that active Turkish citizens should not only

[22] Güney, "Syrian Refugees between Turkish Nationalism and Citizenship."
[23] Sen, "Three Evils of Citizenship Education in Turkey: Ethno-Religious Nationalism, Statism and Neoliberalism."

perform the types of duties that Ustel described, but also demonstrate extreme loyalty to the Turkish government.

The last facet of good Turkish citizenship that Sen found was neoliberalism. There was a strong emphasis on contributing back to society, particularly in a consumerist way. Turkish citizens are expected to not only be good consumers and contribute to the economy in that way, but also be innovative business people. These textbooks tell stories of successful entrepreneurs, inventors, and leaders to encourage citizens to make society better by creating new products that work towards the same end. It is clear from this literature that being a good Turkish citizen not only means being Sunni Muslim, but also being Turkish, defending the Turkish government, and contributing meaningfully to Turkish society. Thus, any moves to give non-Turkish groups Turkish citizenship are significant political moves. The Turkish government making deliberate efforts to equate Sunni Muslim identity with Turkish citizen identity is especially important in regards to the legal status of Syrian refugees. The majority of Syrians are Sunni (74%), Turkish policy makers opening any door for Syrians to enter the exclusive concept of Turkish citizenship is likely related to their religion being congruent with that of Turkey, especially as Turkey increasingly leans into that aspect.

2.3 Evolution of Syrian Refugees' Legal Status

The significance of Syrian refugees' Muslim identity was made clear upon their initial entrance into Turkey. People from outside the EU were originally not granted refugee status in Turkey, and instead given conditional refugee status until they could migrate to another place (UNHCR, 1951). This original policy is demonstrative of Turkey's historical attitude towards refugees, especially non-European refugees; they were temporary residents and given no path to settle in the country with time. Turkish officials offered their country as, at most, a stop on the way to their ultimate destination, a third country, where they could seek asylum. However, the Syrian refugee crisis brought on international pressure for Syria's neighbors to accept refugees. As the neighbor that shared a large border with Syria, Turkey obliged. President Erdogan made a point that he was giving Sryian refugees special status specifically because of their Muslim faith. Erdogan, in many speeches, referred to Syrians as Turkey's "Muslim Brothers" and granted them a legal status as "guests."[24] The term "guest" was not clearly defined and it left most refugees in legal limbo, wondering what rights they had access to. Giving Syrian refugees "guest" status still implied that Syrians would not be in the country long-term. In the beginning stages of Syrians coming to Turkey as refugees, the national government made it clear that they would not be welcome for a long time.

Other Turkish policies also reinforced this sentiment, particularly ones that put a cap on the number of refugees that were allowed into the country. The Turkish government simultaneously had an open door policy in place as they were constructing walls around the border to stop Syrians from being able to freely enter the country.[25] The open door policy

[24] Karaçizmeli, "Muslim Brothers or Overstaying Guests?"
[25] Olejárová, "The Great Wall of Turkey."

signaled benevolence and openness to the international community, while the construction of the wall demonstrated the reality of Turkey's attitude towards Syrian Refugees. It was clear that their borders weren't as open as they claimed they were with the open door policy. Further, in August 2012, Turkey announced that they would take no more than 100,000 refugees.[26] This number is relatively small compared to the sheer amount of need that Syrians had for asylum, indicated by the fact that the number was nearly doubled every year until 2015 as international pressure on the Turkish government increased.[27]

Another policy that revealed the reality of Turkish attitudes towards Syrian refugees in the beginning periods of them being accepted into the nation was the strong government emphasis on refugees staying in refugee camps. This shows a deliberate "othering" of refugees from Turkish citizens as "Camps are characterized by the separation of refugees from locals, government control, and easier coordination of relief activities in a secluded territory."[28] As the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey increased, the rights they were allowed expanded. In 2014, Syrian refugees were granted temporary protection, which was a step up from their guest status, but it still precluded them from having refugee status. This temporary protection status ensured non-refoulement, or the forced return to their nation, and ensured humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees both inside and outside of refugee camps.[29]

Prior to this 2014 legislation, Syrian refugees were not ensured non-refoulement, which forbids countries that accept refugees from returning them to a place where they are in danger of persecution. The addition of these crucial legislative aspects is reflective of the state Syrians in Turkey existed in prior to the 2014 legislation; one where they did not know what rights they

[26] Hurriet Daily News 2020
[27] UNHCR, 2017
[28] Karaçizmeli, "Muslim Brothers or Overstaying Guests?"
[29] Yıldız and Uzgören, "Limits to Temporary Protection."

were owed and how long they could stay in Turkey. At this point, Turkey was still trying to limit the number of refugees they hosted in somewhat covert ways so that they would not be frowned upon by allied nations who also claim to value human rights. It is also clear that, at this point, policy makers had no desire for Syrians to stay in the country permanently.

The 2014 legislation provided a bit more clarity, but as people who were explicitly under temporary protection, it could only be expected that their stay would be temporary. Still, this legislation improved their ability to access rights such as healthcare and employment, with the condition that Syrian refugees register themselves with the police of a specific city first, which would prohibit them from seeking the same rights in a different city if they were to move. Thus, even during the Temporary Protection Regime, not all Syrian refugees in Turkey were given these improved rights.[30] The Temporary Protection Regime lasted until 2016. During this year, there was a significant change in policy that indicated a significant change in the Turkish political elites' attitude towards integrating refugees. In December 2016, there was an amendment to Turkish citizenship law that would grant Turkish citizenship to Syrians who offered significant social, economic, or cultural capital. However, the government does not offer an application process for Syrians who wish to obtain Turkish citizenship. Rather, Turkish government officials determine who is eligible for naturalization and get in touch with them. There are certainly implicit criteria that speak to the special emphasis that Turkish politicians place on ethno-religious and nationalist aspects of citizenship in their country. For example, "Almost one-third of Syrians already naturalized are reportedly either of Turkish descent, like Turkmen Syrians, or married to Turkish nationals."[31]

[30] McCarthy, "Politics of Refugee Education."
[31] Akcapa, "The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship."

These criteria of having significant amounts of capital to offer to Turkish society in order to obtain citizenship is related to the neoliberalism aspect of Turkish citizenship. As the emphasis on Islam in Turkey becomes stronger, the rights allowed to Syrian refugees become stronger as well. The emphasis on having a certain amount of social and economic power highlights the importance of educating Syrians, particularly with curricula that center around Turkish History, the Turkish Language, and lessons around Islam. Considering the fact that the three facets of Turkish citizenship are religious identity, loyalty to the Turkish government, and contributing to Turkish society, beginning to integrate Syrians into Turkish society makes sense especially as they are Sunni Muslims. Syrian refugees already meet the first criterion of religious identity, so their presence in the national education system both helps expose nationals to groups whose religious values align with that of Erdogan's desired citizen, and helps Syrians become closer and more loyal to the Turkish state while expediting their process of accumulating social and cultural capital to ultimately qualify them to become a version of the ideal Turkish citizen in the New Republic.

2.4 The History of Social Engineering through Education Reform in Turkey

Kemalist Era

Political regimes in Turkey have a distinct history of using education as a tool for national identity creation. The first president of the current Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, addressed his vision for Turkish education policy in a speech in 1922, saying "The first goal of our education program is to teach all peasants how to read and write and give them enough information on geography, history, religion and morality so as to acquaint them with their country, nation, religion, world."[32] In this quote, there is a clear purpose for the first educational model in Turkey: to provide an avenue for citizens to become closer to the country and the nation.

The focus of the Kemalist regime was to establish a Turkish nation with Turkish people. In the process of doing so, there was a deliberate rejection of previous Ottoman attitudes, especially ones associated with Islam and eastern values. History textbooks were rewritten to discuss the prevalence of religion in the Ottoman empire as superstitious and not based in science. The goal for the first Turkish Republic was to instill a sense of secularism and thought based in science in order to work towards goals of Westernizing the nation. Much of this change in ideology happened through education reform. Religious schools were removed, and science curriculum was emphasized. Additionally, campaigns to promote the use of the Turkish language were emphasized both in school and out of school. Since this regime, Turkish citizenship has entailed very specific aspects, especially ethno-nationalism. Citizenship education for a long time has been a significant part of the education system as a whole in Turkey. Turkish citizenship has been an exclusive concept for a long time. Since the beginning, an aim of the

[32] Sula, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Early Republican Period: An 'International Society' Approach."

education system has been to craft the ideal Turkish citizen. Therefore, people who are precluded from being citizens are also precluded from national education.

Yasim Bayar analyzes the prevalence of education in the nation building process during the Kemalist era in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East.* The article explores how education policy progressed as the Turkish Republic formed through the 1920's. Bayar argues that religion was situated at the center of the education system at the time, and that attempts to define a unified Turkish identity. The political elite in Turkey at the time saw themselves as moral agents, and used religious teachings as moral teachings. Bayar also writes, "in the second half of the 1920s, the reasoning behind the need to control foreign and minority schools became closely tied to developing a sense of nationhood and creating 'real' Turkish citizens."[33] This article touches on two points that are foundational for my research. First, the article establishes that education, and particularly an emphasis on Islam-centric religious teaching, have been an important part of Turkey's attempts to build national identity since the country's conception. Second, Bayar explains that minorities in Turkey have been included in attempts to establish Turkish nationhood deliberately through education policy.

When a nation is becoming established, the political elite typically have a clear sense of what kind of identity they want their citizens to adopt. As educational systems tend to be controlled by one central political authority, education is often used as a tool to achieve that goal. Bayar's article focuses on religion in education during this period, but it also acknowledges that history education, and the rewriting of history, was a significant avenue for the same goal of nation building. Yazıcı and Yıldırı, in an article published in the I*nternational Journal of the History of Education*, discuss the role of history education in the same period. They argue that

[33] Bayar, "The Dynamic Nature of Educational Policies and Turkish Nation Building."

history education is extremely integral to nation building because it is often used to promote identification with a group, such as the national citizenry.[34] These beginning stages of the nation (1923-1938) are particularly interesting to look at because the establishment of the new regime brought with it a sense of an aspirational nation. In this period, there was a similar sense of nationalism and authoritarianism as there is in the period of my research. The authors write, "When nationalism and authoritarianism became the determining factors in the nation-building process after the 1930s, it led to the mobilization of almost every element with the potential to affect society for the sake of nation-building" which include education policy and history education as state policy. They contend that, through something called the Turkish History Thesis, there was a systematic process of rewriting history education curriculum to emphasize the nationalistic ideals of the political elite. While neither Bayar or Yazıcı and Yıldırı discuss the focus of my research, refugee education, it is notable in both sources that significant changes to education policy were made for the express purpose of nation building during this time.

The New Republic

While The Kemalist Era was a distinct one for Turkish nation building, the current one is arguably only second to it. The Kemalist Era was significant because it was the first attempt at constructing a cohesive national identity for Turkish people, but the 2016 coup attempt prompted an era of rebuilding national identity in similar ways. The current, post-coup period in Turkey resembles the Kemalist era, particularly through social engineering via education policy. The difference between the current era and the Kemalist one, however, is the notable increase in authoritarianism and populist sentiment communicated via these policies. While nation building

[34] Yilmaz, "Populism, Erdoganism, and Social Engineering through Education in Turkey."

in the Kemalist Era was concentrated around building an ethnic Turkish identity, the same process in the Erdogan era centers building citizenship around being Sunni Muslim as well as having Sunni Muslim values.

While social engineering around the concept of the citizen has always been prevalent in the Turkish education system, Yilmaz argues that this recent era has been different because, "the Turkish education system has been transformed into a political tool to manipulate youth and mold them into *cadres of a peculiar Islamist ideology* supported by the Recent Tayyip Erdogan regime."[35] Erdogan's intentions to increase religious identity are clear in the types of policies implemented during his regime. These include increasing religious courses in schools, increasing attendance of religious schools, changing the national curriculum to include more religion, and using Islamic foundations to financially support students.[36] From the Kemalist Era, there was a historical precedent in Turkey to use the education system for the purpose of nation building. However, the Kemalist Era featured a distinct adoption of secularism, science, and distancing from religious ideologies. The Erdogan era has been undoing those efforts from the Kemalist era and leaning into a strong religious identity for its citizens.

Many of these religious policies were under the guise of other educational reforms. For example, a 2012 law approved the opening of junior religious schools. However, the law primarily claimed to extend the amount of years compulsory for education from 8 to 12. It also reduced the starting age for kindergarten in order to give students more time in school. However, in practice the bill directed middle school students to enroll in religious schools. The extension of compulsory education meant that primary students could attend one of three categories of secondary school: academic, religious, and vocational. Since these religious schools did not exist

[35] Yilmaz.
[36] Ibid., 11

this way prior to the bill, it dramatically increased the amount of students who were enrolled in religious secondary schools. It is clear that this bill was pushing a political agenda, because there was strong opposition to it. Regardless, Turkish government officials pushed it through unusually quickly and without allowing public discourse on it. Another relevant education policy separate from this bill was the implementation of elective courses. This policy came under the guise of diversifying education by allowing students to take courses of their choosing, the reality was that many of these courses were religious. They featured courses such as ones on the life of Prophet Mohammed, The Quran, and other courses that were equally religious.

While much of the legislation described happened before the Coup attempt, the operation of schools in the post-coup period changed to solidify similar ideologies. On the first day back to school after the coup attempt, much of the curriculum was focused on making sure that students were aware that those who attempted the coup were opponents of democracy. Additionally, an alleged 1300 textbooks were discontinued due to "terrorist content," enrollment numbers in schools decreased drastically due to expulsions, and almost 3000 education institutions closed. The Justice and Development Party used rhetoric that distinguished New Turkey from Old Turkey, and dismissed the Kemalist Era as a "a land of military tutelage and elitism where secular republican elites oppressed believers with their top-down policies of modernization and betrayed their own Islamic roots with their Westward-looking reforms."[37] Shortly after the coup attempt, the Ministry of National Education announced a "Values Education" based curriculum to strengthen Islamic morality and national ideologies. This curriculum added 5 new courses and was directly in response to the July 15 Coup. Most notably, this curriculum erased the teaching of evolution from schools and redacted any mention of Darwinism.[38] Expunging concepts of

[37] Kandiyoti and Emanet, "Education as Battleground." 6
[38] Ibid., 8

evolution from the curriculum made it clear that these new curricula were not meant to diversify courses available for Turkish students, nor were they meant to expand Turkish thought or innovate new ideas as it said in the initial legislation. Rather, its purpose was to indoctrinate its younger residents with a very specific official ideology of the AKP, and thus, the New Republic.

Despite this clear shift towards conservatism, populism, and authoritarianism, Turkey's reputation in the international community has only become stronger, particularly its partnership with the UN. This is significant because of the UN's history of human rights doctrine. The UN Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was created in 1948 in order to create international standards for human rights. All UN member countries have signed on to at least one of the treaties described in the document, and the vast majority of member countries have signed on to all of them. Historically, the UN has made many efforts to define the parameters of what constitutes human rights, and the UDHR was the foundation for many of them. This attempt to define human rights is in an attempt to internationally designate what people are owed by their governments simply because they are people. In addition to their declaration on human rights, there is another document that details the human rights for refugees. The UN Refugee Convention (UNHCR) was created shortly after the UDHR in 1951, and most UN member countries have ratified this document as well. These documents both reference education as a fundamental human right. Specifically, Article 22 of the United Nations' Refugee Convention, states that refugees should be afforded the same education as nationals in their host country.[39] Additionally, the UN's Declaration on Human Rights declares that everyone has a right to free elementary education.[40] Turkey was among the many nations who signed in agreement to both documents. In addition to these documents, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and

[39] UN 1951
[40] UN 1948

Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MoNE) came together and drafted the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) meant to integrate Syrian Refugees into Turkish K-12 public schools.

While it is not evident upon first glance how this initiative also incorporates the AKP Islamic ideology, upon further analysis there are important aspects of this initiative that reflect it. Toker performed a discourse analysis on the documents produced by UNICEF and MoNE about these initiatives to understand what factors drove the messaging in these documents. Toker specifically looks at how MoNE tries to convince teachers in Turkish schools to be inclusive. This model of inclusive education is constructed as one that lines up with Islamic values and ideals, which further are shared by refugees and Turkish society.[41] This analysis makes it clear that the driving forces for integrating Syrian refugees into the Turkish education system were very closely tied to their religion. Thus, the integration of Syrian refugees into other institutions and parts of Turkish society is likely happening for similar reasons. Alishan McCarthy, a research fellow at La Trobe University in Australia, outlines the way that recent Turkish policies changed educational administration for its refugees as nationalist efforts increased. The Turkish education system for citizens has been extremely centralized at least since Erdogan took office, with a single cohesive curriculum for all schools (both public and private) and no room for deviation. Initially, the government delegated education for refugees out to non-governmental organizations, but after the coup MoNE took control of refugee education as well. Based on this shift in authority for refugee education, it is clear that the Turkish government wants more control over what refugees are learning.[42] Toker argues that the reasons for integration and the centralization of education are problematic because the Turkish government is both manipulating refugees and Islamic ideology to achieve their own goals, however the Inclusive Education

[41] Toker, "Subtle Islamization of Teacher Education."
[42] McCarthy, "Politics of Refugee Education."

Initiative may serve to benefit both Syrians and Turkish nationals by diversifying the makeup of students in schools. However, I contend that these measures actually act to serve the opposite purpose. By integrating Syrian refugees in schools, rather than diversifying thought and experience with multiculturalism, the Turkish Government aims to expose nationals to a more religious population in an effort to make them more religious, and therefore, more homogenous.

Chapter 3: Syrian Refugee Education Provision in Turkey

3.1 The Evolution of Syrian Refugee Education Policy in Turkey

At the beginning of the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the Turkish government had no intention to integrate Syrian children into the education system. Both the Turkish Government and the UN assert that this was because they were under the impression that the Syrian Refugee Crisis would be very temporary.[43] Schools for Syrian refugee children existed primarily in camps. The first measure to provide education to Syrian refugees came two years after their arrival in 2013. While non-state actors had been coordinating refugee education for a while, MoNE did not regulate them. They arose as a result of volunteer Syrian teachers trying to fill the gap in education for Syrian refugees. These teachers were Syrian refugees themselves and were typically either not paid at all or paid by non-state organizations. Most did not have any teaching qualifications, and the schools they taught in were ad-hoc and improvised.[44]

While TECs did provide education services to Syrian refugees, they were restricted to camps and allowed no opportunities for Turkish language acquisition. There were also no plans from MoNE in place to educate non-camp refugees. Fewer than 8% of refugees live in camps, while the rest are scattered around the country and concentrated in Urban areas.[45] However, providing education for non-camp refugees was seen as unjustifiable, and as something that would affect refugees' decisions to eventually leave or stay in the country. In response, NGOs and civil initiatives, and Syrian teachers began setting up Syrian schools outside of camps, many of which were completely outside of MoNE's influence. In some MoNE circulars, these schools

[43] UNESCO 2018
[44] Unutulmaz, "Turkey's Education Policies towards Syrian Refugees."
[45] Erdoğan, "Thinking Outside the Camp."

were mentioned as educational institutions (rather than as schools), demonstrating that they were aware of schools taught in Arabic using Syrian curriculum. There is some legislation in Turkey that limits the right to open schools operating in any language that isn't Turkish with foreign curricula. The Syrian schools opening outside of camps were illegal and "the presence of the Syrian Schools for Syrian refugees were against the law, and under normal circumstances they could not be allowed. However, the state turned a blind eye to the existence of these schools until it developed a means to control them"[46] This was an unprecedented tolerance of decentralized, non-Turkish educational practices.

A legal basis for providing education to Syrian refugees did not come until late 2013 or early 2014 with the enactment of the new immigration law (Foreigners and International Protection Act no. 6458). This marked a period of mixed education where existing non-state organizations operated under strict government control. MoNE named all non-state education initiatives for refugees Temporary Education Centers (TECs).[47] As a result, institutions that previously did not have formal status gained formal status and recognition by the Turkish government. MoNE and UNICEF coordinated Temporary Education Centers (TECs) for refugees in camps. TECs provided both primary and secondary school education in the Arabic language. Notably, by this time, the curricula in TECs was designed by the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Interim Government with approval from MoNE.

The fact that MoNE did not design the curricula for these camps is inconsistent with their typical behavior. The Turkish education system is extremely centralized, with the Ministry of National Education being in charge of the majority of educational institutions in the country. For example, private schools in Turkey have no freedom to decide curriculum or deviate from the

[46] McCarthy, "Politics of Refugee Education."
[47] Mccarthy, "Non-State Actors and Education as a Humanitarian Response."

curriculum that MoNE mandates. The fact that MoNE themselves did not design the curriculum for TECS indicates that refugee education was viewed as a separate entity than most other educational activities in the country at the time. The lack of opportunity for Turkish language acquisition was also a deliberate effort against integrating Syrian refugees. The Minister of Education, Omar Dincer, stated in a press release that education aiming for Turkish skills and integrating Syrians into Turkish schools would prevent Syrian refugees from voluntarily returning to their home country later on.[48] This statement subsequently suggests that later integration efforts would be an act of encouragement for refugees to stay in Turkey.

As part of MoNE's new regulation of TECs, MoNE attempted to standardize and regulate both the content and administration of education for Syrian refugees. Between 2012 and 2013, 60% of school aged children in camps were enrolled in school. However, only 14% of school aged children outside of camps attended school.[49] MoNE released documents that asserted themselves into the planning and coordination of education for Syrian refugees. In doing so, they made some politically motivated changes to the existing Syrian curriculum. MoNE purged any positive mention of Syrian leader Assad from the curriculum and textbooks, reflecting the general stance of the Turkish government which supported Syrian opposition groups in the civil war. This move goes to show that education decisions under the Turkish government, even in a state of emergency, have political goals to support refugee education. Integrating Syrian refugee education into the jurisdiction of MoNE is important for two reasons: it was the first step that MoNE took to regulate refugee education outside of camps, and they simultaneously changed the curriculum to reinforce a political agenda. Therefore, it is likely that drastic changes to educational administration for Syrian refugees in later years also existed for political reasons.

[48] McCarthy, "Politics of Refugee Education."
[49] UNESCO 2018

The integration of Syrian refugees into the national education system centered an ending the presence of TECs. By 2015, TECs were still the primary method of educating refugees in Turkey. At the time, there existed around 34 TECs within camps and 232 outside of camps. Approximately 300,000 primary and secondary school Syrian refugee students attended school at TECs, while only around 76,000 attended Turkish public schools.[50] These centers were operated by a mix of public and private authorities. MoNE repurposed some public buildings into TECs, but they were still effectively managed by nonstate actors. Syrian teachers were employed on a volunteer basis and funding still came primarily from non state actors. MoNE approved the curriculum, but still did not control it in the centralized way they do in all other education institutions in Turkey.

The final policy changes to Syrian refugee education came around the same time as the 2016 legislation that would allow Syrians a path to citizenship. With this legislation, MoNE is now trying to integrate all Syrian refugee children into Turkish public schools. Part of this policy included a plan to phase out TECs completely, ending the mixed education model. TECs would be allowed to continue their operations, but not accept any new students. Additionally, MoNE mandated that TECs begin teaching Turkish language classes in order to facilitate their integration into the Turkish public school system. After this legislation, the number of Syrians who were enrolled in Turkish schools increased significantly. At the end of 2016, 155,852 Syrian refugees were enrolled in Turkish schools. By the beginning of 2017, this number almost doubled to 328,399 Syrian refugees.[51]

The 2016 legislation also severely limited the presence of nonstate actors who were previously running education for Syrian refugees. Starting in 2017, the government severely

[50] Mccarthy, "Non-State Actors and Education as a Humanitarian Response."
[51] Unutulmaz, "Turkey's Education Policies towards Syrian Refugees."

restricted NGO activities around educating refugees. Suddenly, all NGO activities and protocols needed to be directly approved by MoNE. Many existing programs that aided refugee education in TECs that came from non-state actors were promptly canceled. This move came after more than six years of NGOs and private organizations being the primary proprietors of refugee education.[52] It is worth noting that in 2011, UNHCR published a guide for how to best ensure access to education for refugees. One of these key points is labeled "Partnerships" emphasizes the importance of partnerships between the state and many different types of organizations, and is written in the guide as follows:

> *"Partner with a wide range of actors, especially Governments, local authorities, other UN agencies, international agencies, NGOs, civil society and community organizations, academic institutions and the private sector to ensure the availability of quality education services for refugees."*[53]

Thus, the policies and activities surrounding NGOs involved in educating Turkey's refugees following integration efforts in 2016 go directly against the advice of the UN, even though they are a major partner in these efforts.

MoNE also seems to favor faith-based nonstate actors over ones that are clearly secular.[54] Despite not playing any role in refugee education prior to 2016, the Diyanet Foundation is currently allowed the most significant role among nonstate actors in refugee education. After integration efforts started in 2016, the role of religion in integration became much more explicit, particularly through the inclusion of the Diyanet Foundation in integration efforts. The Diyanet

[52] Arık Akyuz et al., "Evolution of National Policy in Turkey on Integration of Syrian Children into the National Education System."
[53] UNHCR, "Education 2030."
[54] Mccarthy, "Non-State Actors and Education as a Humanitarian Response."

Foundation is a "non-governmental extension of the Presidency of Religious Affairs working for the promotion of Islamic values." In 2017, the Diyanet opened a new branch within its foundation to work specifically on refugee issues called The Department of Migration and Moral Support Services. In 2018, MoNE issued a circular called The Integration Strategy Document and National Action Plan (2018-2023) which emphasized the Diyanet's role in providing refugees religious education.[55]

Currently, Diyanet is working with UNESCO to facilitate the integration process of Syrian refugees. This project provides Turkish financial support and language classes to refugees. In the plan, it also emphasizes "religious and psychological rehabilitation activities to overcome the difficulties refugees face in social life."[56] This project, as proposed by the Diyanet foundation, aims "for refugee children and young people to complete their education. Our foundation wants to bring children and young people, who are our future, into society as mentally healthy individuals. This is the greatest service and investment that can be made for our country, our nation and humanity as a whole."[57]The emphasis on the country and the nation in this project is notable here. Not only does the Diyanet Foundation have religious-based goals, it also adheres to a very Turkish-specific model of citizenship and education. This is potentially the reason MoNE favors it over other non-state actors, especially over secular ones.

MoNE's policies around non-state actors have been inconsistent after 2016. They chose to phase out non-state actors who worked with Syrian refugee communities for several years, already had education and community programs established, and knew the communities well. Simultaneously, they funneled finances to religious non-state organizations that aligned with the

[55] Demirtaş, "State, Religion and Refugees."
[56] UNHCR, "Social Support and Educational Activities for Refugees."
[57] UNHCR.

Turkish State's nationalist own nationalist ideology, but had no experience working in Syrian refugee communities previously. Their policies about taking non-state actors out of refugee education after 2016 seemingly did not apply to specific faith-based organizations such as the Diyanet Foundation. MoNE prioritized The Diyanet Foundation and others liked it over actors that would have provided better educational resources and experiences for Syrian refugees because they had been working with them for years before. Thus, there continues to be apparent religious and nationalist motivations for integrating Syrian refugees into the public education system.

3.2 Practical Barriers for Integrating Syrian Refugees

Why did it take the Turkish government five years after their initial acceptance of Syrian refugees to finally integrate them into the Turkish public education system? The common answer to this question cites a number of reasons out of the Turkish government's control, most of them centered around the prediction that Syrian refugees would be a temporary presence. This section summarizes the barriers that accounted for the five year delay in integrating Syrian refugees into the national education system. This reflects the Turkish government's explanation for the delay in integration, and is extremely based on circumstance. The information in this section comes directly from UNESCO's report entitled "Education of Syrian Children in Turkey" published in 2018. This explanation is common in the literature, reiterated by organizations such as UNESCO, Human Rights Watch, and the Ministry of National Education in Turkey. In section 3.3, I will be investigating whether these factors were mitigated in any way to allow for Syrian assimilation into the public education system to happen.

Inaccurate predictions about the future of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The main reason education centers were not immediately set up when refugees started seeking protection in Turkey was because of the notion that the Syrian Civil War would be short-lived, and that refugees staying in Turkey would be very temporary. It was not until 2013, that Turkish officials understood the full scope of the refugee crisis. There was no effort to establish education for Syrian refugees because the Turkish government assumed that by the time they provided for their immediate needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, Syrians would be returning to their homeland. They believed that the camps along the Southern border would be an adequate short term solution for the influx of Syrians pouring into Turkey's borders.

Lack of physical infrastructure

Beyond their perception that the Syrian Refugee Crisis was transient, the Turkish government did not believe they had adequate educational infrastructure to support the integration of Syrian refugees. They lacked classrooms and teachers to support the influx of what was eventually almost one million school aged Syrian refugee children. MoNE calculated that they would need 700 new schools and 17,000 new classrooms to adequately educate Syrian refugees[58]. In order to avoid pushing Turkish public schools over their capacity, the government opted to allow Syrians to continue to be schooled in camps. While the facilities in the camps were quite ad-hoc and much less sophisticated than Turkish public schools, as temporary facilities, they would work well enough until better facilities were repurposed for education or new ones were built.

Language barriers

Turkey also did not have the infrastructure to support a large-scale acquisition of Turkish language skills. Even after the shift in policy supporting educational integration, the process of including Syrians in Turkish schools has been slow. Since students arriving from Syria had varying levels of Arabic literacy, and likely no exposure to the Turkish language, it would be extremely difficult to integrate primarily Arabic speakers into a Turkish language school system. Turkish schools are only taught in Turkish, and MoNE emphasized "the need to employ Turkish teachers, Turkish language and literature teachers, classroom teachers, and foreign language teachers in order to educate Syrians. However, such teachers either can't speak Arabic and

[58] Unutulmaz, "Turkey's Education Policies towards Syrian Refugees."

Turkish [...] therefore they are unwilling to teach Turkish to Syrians."[59] Educating Syrian refugees in Turkish would require generating a large number of education materials in order to do so. Still, MoNE opened no schools with Arabic curriculum for the purpose of educating Syrians, relying on the ad hoc ones Syrian teachers themselves opened. Thus, the government claims that many Syrians opted to send their children to TECs to acquire basic language skills before entering public schools. This claim, however, is questionable due to the lack of Turkish language education classes in TECs for the first few years of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Lack of teachers

Turkish classrooms have an estimated 30 students per teacher. With an estimated 500,000 more students entering the school system with the Syrian refugee crisis, MoNE calculated that 28,000 more teachers would be required to accommodate them. Additionally, the horrors of the Syrian Civil War left a lasting impression on refugee students who would have been entering the Turkish school system. These students were coming in with trauma and loss having fled their homes. In order to properly educate them, Turkish teachers would need to be adequately trained. Since the influx of refugees was so sudden, there were no protocols in place to train teachers in teaching refugees.

The finances of Syrian families

Another practical barrier for Syrians entering the Turkish education system is finances. Refugee student enrollment in primary schools is much greater than in secondary schools, indicating that previously enrolled students are dropping out of school after a certain point. This

[59] Coşkun and Emin, "Education of Syrian Children in Turkey."

is explained by teenage students exiting school and working to support their families. It is both difficult and expensive for Syrians to obtain work permits in Turkey. While the work permit application fees for Syrian refugees did reduce significantly in 2017, only a small percentage of Syrians have work permits. Thus, many of these young workers participate mainly in the informal sector (UNESCO). In 2014, the UNHCR predicted that 10% of refugee children worked rather than attending school. While this number is not specific to Turkey, it does indicate that there may have been a problem in Syrian refugees' willingness to allow their children to participate in education rather than working.

While there is some validity to these factors creating impediments to fully integrating Syrians into the national education system, this explanation likely does not capture the full story. These explanations fail to contextualize the way that the Turkish government viewed refugees in this early period. The integration of Syrian refugees into the Turkish national education system corresponded very closely with Erdogan and the AKP's desire to Islamize Turkey. Education decisions being extremely political in Turkey necessitates further examination into the political nature of the process of how, where, and when Syrian refugees were allowed access to resources typically reserved for national citizens. Barriers around language, curriculum supplies, teacher availability, and other practical ones are important to consider. However, the above factors alone likely do not provide the complete explanation for the delay in integration.

3.3 Education Integration in Practice

How did the decision to integrate refugees into public education play out practically in Turkey? As I write this thesis, the policy that called for integration has been in effect for 6 years. In theory, the barriers that UNESCO cited for the delay in integration should have been mitigated in some way to allow for the integration of Syrians into the education system by 2016. In evaluating the Turkish government's motivations for this policy, it is necessary to examine the way that this policy decision has played out over the last few years.

According to the UNHCR, at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, 771,458 Syrian students (378,218 girls and 293,240 boys) were enrolled in formal education in Turkey.[60] With more boys enrolled in school, these numbers call into question the barrier cited by a previous UNESCO report that claimed Syrian parents sending boys into the workforce was one of the main barriers to education access. This claim was based on the idea that significantly fewer boys would be enrolled in school if education for refugees was available. After the 2016 coup attempt, 20,000 more teachers were hired to replace those who were purged and accused of being Gulenists.[61] MoNE's initial prediction of teachers needed to educate Syrian refugees was 24,000. The ministry was unwilling to hire any number of teachers to accommodate the influx of refugees or even pay the volunteer teachers in TECs, but did hire tens of thousands of teachers when it was necessary for reinforcing Erdogan's nationalism in schools. It is clear that large numbers of hireable teachers were available, and with NGO funds for refugee education, the government could have made a greater effort to hire them. This indicates that they did have the means to hire teachers, but chose not to when integrating Syrians was not a priority. Though

[60] "Turkey Humanitarian Situation Report, July-September 2021."
[61] Press, "Turkey to Hire 20,000 Teachers Following Coup Attempt."

there may have been some changes to MoNE's resources between the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis and 2016, it is clear that MoNE is able to hire a vast number of teachers in emergency situations.

Within Turkish public schools, refugees are not offered additional Turkish language classes. Instead, language acquisition courses were relegated to TECs until 2020 and are currently run by approved NGO's. The Ministry of Education does not manage language classes, but it does offer "social cohesion classes" where students can learn about Turkey's culture and daily life.[62] MoNE's decision to prioritize providing these classes over Turkish language classes is interesting because language barriers were one of the main reasons cited by UNESCO for the initial delay to integrate refugees into the public education system. This move shows a clear prioritization of teaching Syrian refugees Turkish culture over Turkish language. This further suggests that integration into education indicates the Turkish government's desire to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society rather than for the purpose of allowing them to access equitable education. Since Turkish public school courses continue to be exclusively taught in Turkish, the first step for facilitating integration would be emphasizing the provision of Turkish language classes.

MoNE successfully concluded their plan to close all Temporary Education Centers, with the last one closing in 2020. In 2019, there were nearly 40,000 Syrian students enrolled across 100 TECs.[63] Studies that interviewed Syrian parents about TECs reveal that they prefer TECs over formal education for their children because they feel the presence of Arabic instruction and Syrian teachers in TECs shows the "value their culture and language and will ensure that their

[62] "Access to Education."
[63] "Access to Education."

children will learn Arabic and maintain their culture."[64] Closing these last 200 TECs, even in 2020, was a rapid move that effectively took away a significant amount of the available courses for Arabic speaking students to learn Turkish. It also took away any space for Syrians to learn that is cognisant of Syrian culture. This is detrimental because Syrians face bullying, harrassment, and discrimination at Turkish public schools from both students and staff. Teachers and principals in Turkish public schools have proposed creating specific curricula for Syrian refugees to solve the problems of language and social cohesion.[65] TECs served this purpose, and the curriculum from TECs that was made specifically for Syrian refugees still exists, but it has not been used in Turkish schools. MoNE does not support any special regulations or programs to help Syrian refugee students in their educational experience. The Turkish language classes that do currently exist to help Syrian refugees in school are generally run by volunteer teachers who do not get paid for them.[66]

Although laws technically allow Syrian refugees in schools, some school managers will still refuse to enroll Syrian refugees because it is difficult to manage. There is currently no evidence that the Turkish government or MoNE is imposing consequences for these situations, or even acknowledge that this problem exists.[67] Another point that UNESCO made accounting for the delay in education provision for refugees was the lack of resources for teacher training. One of the largest problems that Syrian students face is the psychological trauma of war. However, after the integration decision in 2016, "teachers who give education to refugees didn't receive any kind of qualified training."[68] Both the Ministry of Education and UNESCO assert that the

[64] Çelik and İçduygu, "Schools and Refugee Children."
[65] Toker Gokce and Acar, "School Principals' and Teachers' Problems Related to the Education of Refugee Students in Turkey."
[66] Aydin and Kaya, "Education for Syrian Refugees."
[67] "Full Article: I/NGOs' Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Opportunities and Challenges."
[68] Gürel and Büyüksahin, "Education of Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey."

government delayed integrating refugees into the public education system because they needed time to prepare for such a large influx of Syrian students. However, few of the factors they cited for the delay were mitigated or resolved prior to the integration decision. In schools, MoNE does not mandate or fund any support services for Syrian refugees. They closed TECs despite the fact that thousands of students still attended them and Syrian parents preferred them. Closing TECs removed available education institutions that promoted Syrian culture in any way. The move forced any students who want to attend low-cost schools into Turkish public schools, which are focused on promoting Turkish citizenship and taught exclusively in Turkish. The lack of additional services for refugees, despite that these were a big reason for delaying integration, suggests that the integration decision was made independent of mitigating such factors.

3.4 Completing the Puzzle

The puzzle I began this thesis with consisted of three main pieces. First, Turkish citizenship has always been exclusive to people who meet certain criteria: having Turkish ethnicity and being Sunni Muslim. Syrian refugees in Turkey meet the second part of this criteria, but not the first. Second, Turkish education exists for specific reasons: to foster a sense of nationalism into Turkish citizens. Since Syrian refugees do not have an accessible path to Turkish citizenship, including them in Turkish education did not make sense under this criteria. Third, refugee education tends to be different from the education nationals receive because refugees do not typically meet the criteria for education in general: to foster the host's country's ideology in its students and to prepare them to contribute to the host country economically in the future. Since refugees are usually temporary residents in a country, there is usually no point in reinforcing the state's ideology or preparing them to contribute economically in the future. All three of these points put the Turkish government's decision to include refugees in their public education system into question. Why include a group with very few members who are citizens in an institution that partially exists to promote citizenship and nationalism?

In my research, I found that the criteria for all three of the pieces of this puzzle have changed drastically while the AKP has held political power. The AKP has de-emphasized Turkish ethnicity as a part of Turkish citizenship and has redirected its emphasis on being Sunni Muslim. Since most Syrian refugees are Sunni Muslim, the government has created more avenues for them to obtain citizenship. Similarly, Turkish education has expanded to include more religious courses, and more religious public schools have been added during the AKP era. It is clear that education teaches students not only how to be a good Turk, but also how to be a good Muslim. Turkish public schools still have the same purpose as before - creating the

desirable citizen- but the desirable citizen is now a Sunni Muslim. Additionally, it is looking increasingly like the Syrian refugee crisis will persist for longer than initially expected. Syrian refugees in Turkey are not temporary residents. With this context, the decision to integrate Syrian refugees makes a lot more sense. The Turkish government is beginning to view them as potential citizens rather than temporary residents. Integrating them into the school system serves two purposes: Syrian refugees bring more Islamic influence into schools and around other students, and Turkish students and curriculum influences Syrian refugees to adopt a more Turkish identity. Assimilating Syrian refugees into Turkish public schools that have a very Turkish curriculum helps complete the part of Turkish citizenship they are missing: Turkish values and nationalism.

However, this decision is not in the best interest of Syrian refugees. Many of them do not know Turkish, and Turkish language classes are not offered in their new schools. Without classes taught in Arabic, Syrian refugees struggle to learn effectively in school. Additionally, Turkish education is not cognisant of Syrian culture. The combination of this with the increased bullying and harassment for Syrian students creates feelings of ostracization in Turkish public schools. With the large influx of students in schools, teachers are being overworked, but the burden is on them to accommodate Syrian students because the Ministry of National Education provides few resources to help them.

MoNE was aware that all of these factors would be impediments for Syrian refugee education upon integration since the beginning of the refugee crisis. They claimed that factors like lack of teachers, lack of training, lack of specific curriculum, Turkish language barriers, and potential discrimination in schools were the reason it took so long for them to take control of Syrian refugee education. However, there is very little evidence that these factors were mitigated

before the decision to integrate Syrian refugees into the public education system occurred. Rather, the decision lined up with two other events in Turkey: the 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent decision to open paths to citizenship for Syrians in Turkey in 2016.

I argue that the 2016 coup attempt was a call to action for Erdogan to increase efforts to enforce the AKP's type of nationalism, one that is focused on Sunni Muslim identity. Part of doing so was integrating minority groups who are Sunni Muslim further into Turkish life. The decision to integrate Syrian refugees into the education system served to further that political goal.

This brings me back to another question I posed in my first chapter: do governments provide refugee education because it is a human right, as they agree it is in international doctrine, or for some other reason? In the Turkish case, I argue that the decision to provide refugee education was done for the purpose of furthering national interests. The decision serves the Turkish government more than it does Syrian refugees; it makes them look good to the international community and it serves their nationalist agenda. In other countries where general education serves a similar purpose towards citizenship, it is likely that the conclusion will be similar. In these cases, refugee education will be best addressed when it furthers the national interests of the state. In order to change how refugee education is viewed, countries must first change how they view education in general. If all education is political, then refugee education will not be any different.

Conclusion

The Turkish government's decision to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkey's public education system was a political move that served to further Erdogan's new nationalist agenda. The crux of my research was figuring out what exactly this new nationalist agenda is, and why Syrian refugees and the public education system may have been used as mechanisms to further it. I was attempting to balance the official story from the Turkish government and the international actors that were working with them against my analysis of the true motivations behind the decision. The delay in integration between 2011, when Syrian refugees first arrived, and 2016, when the integration decision was made, was my main point of examination.

In my research, I concluded that a simple lack of preparation was not the only thing responsible for this delay. The Turkish government and UNESCO cited needing more time to prepare things like teacher training, language classes, and physical infrastructure. However, most of these factors weren't prepared by the time the integration decision was made. There were no programs in place for teacher training, and no government-funded language classes for Arabic speakers to learn Turkish in Turkish public schools. The physical infrastructure aspect was mitigated to some extent, as many mosques were repurposed into schools. However, this speaks to the same goal of Erdogan's government wanting to Islamize his population using Syrian refugees in schools.

The second piece of evidence to support my conclusion is the examination of how non-state actors were treated before and after the integration decision. From 2011-2016, non-state actors were the major proprietors of refugee education in Turkey. Largely, refugees received education through NGO services that were unmoderated by the Turkish government. This level of laissez-faire attitude around non-Turkish educational institutions was extremely

uncharacteristic of the Turkish education ministry. Non-Turkish education institutions were illegal and the Turkish government was turning a blind eye to them in the case of Syrian refugee education. After the integration decision, the Education Ministry took control of all educational activities for refugees and planned to shut down all NGO activities within a few years. By 2020, the NGOs that kickstarted and managed Syrian refugee education in Turkey were no longer allowed to participate in it. The primary non-state actors that remained were the UN, which funded many of the educational initiatives of the Turkish government, and the Diyanet foundation, which is a non-state actor that reinforces the religious goals of the Turkish government. Despite the Diyanet Foundation not being involved with educational initiatives before 2016, they were still given a special role among non-state actors and were allowed to participate in refugee education after.

Finally, social engineering has been built into Turkish public education since the very founding of the Turkish Republic. In Chapter 2, I discuss how Kemal Ataturk explicitly used education as a means to create a desirable citizen. His process of citizen building was extremely deliberate, as he was making efforts to distance Turkey from the previous Ottoman Empire. Turkish education has specifically been designed for this purpose, and that continues today. However, the definition of the desirable citizen has changed drastically since Kemal's era.

The key to Erdogan's "new nationalism" is emphasizing Sunni Muslim identity as part of Turkish citizenship. Turkey has previously been a very strictly secular country due to Kemal's influences, and many Turks have grown tired of what they see as religious oppression as a means to enforce secularism. Erdogan saw religion as a means to unite Turkey and its religious people behind him. Erdogan has prioritized being Sunni Muslim as a part of citizenship more than any other Turkish leader. As part of this, Turkish education is moving in a more religious direction

with the new addition of religious schools, classes, and curriculum. As Syrian refugees' main commonality with Turks is their religion, putting them in schools also creates a more religious environment. I argue that the 2016 coup attempt was an impetus for Erdogan to enforce his new nationalism, and integrating Syrian refugees into the education system was part of that strategy.

There are some other explanations that could have accounted for the integration decision, but enforcing Erdogan's nationalism is the primary one. Even though many of the factors that accounted for the delay of the decision were not mitigated by the time the decision happened, there were two that were: physical infrastructure and number of teachers. These factors alone could have allowed for Syrian refugees to be integrated into education. However, the integration decision happened at the same time the citizenship decision did. With how closely tied citizenship and education have been historically in Turkey, there is a strong suggestion that the integration decision was closely tied to the citizenship decision as well. Turkish education has always been for citizens, and Erdogan opened up a path to citizenship and a path to integration simultaneously, likely for a reason. Another alternative explanation would be an economic one. It is possible that Syrians are being included in the same education system without the same resources to set up for a class of less educated, low wage workers once they are out of school. If this were the case, it would likely be a result of private actors influencing the government. However, with Erdogan's authority increasing after the coup and with the 2017 referendum, it is much more likely that he and his party were the primary decision makers around this time.

This research has two main implications. The first one is refugee education's use as soft power. The integration decision helped Turkey more than it helped Syrian refugees, as Syrian refugee parents prefer education that was run by non-state actors over Turkish public education because it does not acknowledge Syrian culture, is not taught in their language, and the teachers

are inadequately trained. However, the decision did boost Turkey's image to the international community and international actors they work with. Refugee education in this case is being used as something only to benefit the Turkish government, as well as their standing and influence in the international community. This relates to the second implication, which is education's status as a human right. Politically driven decisions like these put education as a human right into question. Regardless of what nations agree to in international doctrine, for some, education is not a human right as long as it is nationalist-centric because education decisions only serve the best interest of the nation and not those being educated.

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