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Religiosity and Deviance Among College Students in Türkiye: A Test of Ascetic Theory

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ABSTRACT

Although an inverse relationship between religion and deviance is empirically well-established in the western context, previous studies on Islam and deviance conducted in non-western countries are limited. To address this gap in deviance research, we hypothesized that individual religiosity would be inversely related to deviance with the inverse relationship being more likely for ascetic than anti-ascetic or secular deviance. To test this hypothesis, we applied ordinary least squares and logistic regression methods to analyze data collected from 2,005 survey participants of a Turkish public university student population. Regression results provided partial support for the hypothesis, as we found that religiosity was inversely related to both ascetic and secular deviance. The observed inverse relationship is noteworthy in that it was found in an institutionally secular, Muslim country. Implications of our findings are discussed.

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Introduction

Prior research conducted in the western and predominantly Christian world has found an inverse relationship between religion and deviance: that is, as involvement in religion increases, deviance decreases (Baier and Wright 2001; Ellis, Beaver, and Wright 2009; Johnson 2011; Johnson and Jang 2010; Johnson et al. 2000). Religious involvement or religiosity also tends to have a salutary effect more often on ascetic deviance (e.g., alcohol or drug use) than “anti-ascetic” or secular deviance (e.g., murder and burglary) (Baier and Wright 2001). Although the relationship between Christianity and deviance has been examined in western criminology since the 1960s (Baier and Wright 2001; Middleton and Putney 1962; Miller and Vuolo 2018), a gap remains in our understanding of the relationship between Islam and deviance because of limited research in non-western societies. Previous studies on that subject, though small in number, have found Islam’s influence on deviance was not significant or, at best, weak (Abu-Rayya et al. 2016; Groves, Newman, and Corrado 1987; Helal and Coston 1991; Junger and Polder 1993; Ozbay 2007, 2015; Sahin and Unlu 2021; Serajzadeh 2002; Souryal 1987; Stark 2001).

Among Muslim majority countries, Türkiye (previously Turkey) provides an interesting case for a study of religion and deviance because Islamic tradition and modern secularism coexist in the country (Ozbay 2007, 2015; Sahin and Unlu 2021). The present study examines whether individual religiosity is inversely related to deviance in the secular-Islamic context of Türkiye and, if so, whether the inverse relationship is more likely for ascetic than secular deviance as found in the western, Christian context. To empirically examine these relationships, we conducted multivariate regression analysis of survey data collected from a population of students enrolled in a Turkish public university.

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This paper begins with a review of literatures on secularization and Islam in Türkiye as a background of this study, religiosity and ascetic versus secular deviance, and Islam and deviance. After formally stating our hypothesis, we describe our methodology and present results from the regression analysis. This paper concludes with a discussion of the results and implications of our findings.

Literature review

Secularization and Islam in Türkiye

To properly contextualize this study, an overview of the unique Turkish historical background is necessary. Unlike many western nations, Turkish secularization did not begin with the establishment of a republic but began two hundred years prior during the Ottoman Empire (Sevinc, Hood, and Thomas 2017). Witnessing the rapid rate of technological advance in European societies, domestic elites of the 19th and 20th centuries blamed Islam for a comparative lack of development. As such, a conflict emerged between western-oriented secularist and Islamic elites (Kuru and Stepan 2013), which went on to define the history of the modern nation of Türkiye (Yavuz 2009).

The Turkish Republic, formed in 1923 after World War I and the partition of the Ottoman Empire, was deeply affected by French values of secularization and modernization. Called “laicism” in France, this prototypical ideal focused on the regulation of clerics through nonreligious and secular state actors (Sevinc, Hood, and Thomas 2017). This approach to religious regulation was used as the founding principle of the Turkish Constitution (Citak 2004).

The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, strove to institutionalize a secular and industrial character into the young republic. This was accomplished from 1923 to 1937 by introducing laicist reforms into many social institutions, including education, politics, law, social life, and government. To take the education sector as an example, theological schools called *madrassas* were shut down and course electives dealing with religion were dropped from both primary and secondary school curricula. With these changes, the social institution of education was secularized and put under the direct control of the state (see Sevinc, Hood, and Thomas 2017 for more information on institutional transformations).

Despite this institutionalized form of “assertive secularism,” Islam continues to play a large role in the sociopolitical life of Turkish society. Although Islam is seen as an alternative or “otherized” representation of the national identity, it has continued to serve as an important symbolic marker of individual and group identity. Indeed, Islam has served as a powerful player during the nonlinear process of Turkish modernization (Keyman 2010; Yavuz 2009).

According to Yavuz (2004: 227), modern “Turkish Islam is essentially *a ritualized Islam* that has a very limited impact on one’s moral conduct. There is a major gap between believing and behaving in Turkish Islam” (see also Esmer 2002; Junger 1989). The previous President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Bardakoglu 2017) likewise argued that contemporary religiosity and secularity historically evolved side by side, leaving behind a hybridized form of secularized Islam without ethical ramifications. As such, Turkish secularism has been seen as “too secular for the Islamists, too Sunni for the Alevis, (too Muslim for the non-Muslim minorities), and too Turkish for the Kurds” (Casanova 2001; Sahin 2001), highlighting issues in Turkish governance, democratic representation, and political legitimacy.

The policing of deviance still has roots in historical inheritances, though, largely derived from the codification of religious morality into legal sanctions (Gramsci 1999; Schmitt 1976). Through bureaucratic rational-legal authority (Weber 1993: 215) and linguistic domination (Foucault 1991) these sanctions have simply been sanitized of theological language and legitimated through the state power apparatus. This means that even in settings of institutional secularity, Islam likely continues to have a contemporaneous impact on what is perceived as a transgression.

Irrespective of secular institutionalization and ideality, religion in contemporary Türkiye remains salient. For example, the World Values Survey—which included Türkiye in the study beginning with

Table 1. Self-Reported Religiosity in Türkiye.

Religiosity	Percentage
Belief in Allah	9.7
Perform salaah (ritual prayer: five prayers a day)	42.5
Never performed salaah	16.9
Friday prayers (men only)	57.4
Fasting during Ramadan (health permitting)	3.4
Want to Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca)	4.9
Almsgiving	71.9
Reading the Quran in Arabic	41.9
Religious precepts shape life	64.9

Source: Self-reported study administered by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs in 2013 (Baskanligi 2014).

the second wave of sample in 1990—showed that the percentage of survey participants who said religion was “very important” or “rather important” in their lives remained high over three decades: 83.2% in 1990, 93.5% in 1996, 93.4% in 2001/02, 91.2% in 2007, 92.7% in 2011, and 88.4% in 2018¹ (World Values Survey 2022). Similarly, in a self-reported study administered by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs in 2013 (Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi 2014), 98.7% of the Turkish people indicated they believed in Allah, and more than 80% of them reported that they fasted during Ramadan (83.4%) and wanted pilgrimage to Mecca (84.9%) although the percentage of those engaging in other religious practices varied across other indicators of religiosity as shown in Table 1.

While these statistics tend to suggest that Turkish people are religious in both belief and behavior, disharmony between the sacred and secular ideal forms of Turkish life could create strain among individuals (Aksit et al. 2012), which may decrease the effects of religion on deviance and crime. If so, we expect the impact of religion on deviance to be weaker in Türkiye than in some western countries, like the United States. How much institutionalized secularization or individual religious beliefs and practices affect deviant and criminal acts, however, is an empirical question which this study seeks to address.

Ascetic vs. anti-ascetic deviance

The assertion that religion deters so-called “victimless” crime and deviance forms the bedrock of ascetic theory (Burkett and White 1974). In their original work, Middleton and Putney (1962) distinguished between two kinds of ethical rules, ascetic and anti-ascetic, and thus conceptualized two types of deviance. Ascetic deviance refers to lifestyle violations—such as gambling, engaging in certain types of sexual acts (e.g., premarital sex), and the use of substances or pornography—which religion proscribes, whereas secular society condones, if not encourages, them. On the other hand, anti-ascetic deviance (e.g., theft, violence, cheating on exams, etc.) is viewed as morally wrong similarly by religion and secular society. As a result, Middleton and Putney asserted, while religious and non-religious individuals have a similar likelihood of not committing secular deviant acts, religious individuals are less likely to engage in ascetic deviance because they are more likely to see it as wrongful than their non-religious counterparts including agnostics, atheists, and deists (Miller and Vuolo 2018).

Ascetic theory has been supported by many previous studies conducted in a western context (Baier and Wright 2001; Burkett and White 1974; Miller and Vuolo 2018). For example, analyzing longitudinal data from a national sample of adolescents, Miller and Vuolo (2018) found that individual religiosity—perceived importance of religion and weekly religious service attendance—was more likely to be related inversely to the ascetic, or *mala prohibita*, deviance (marijuana use) than the secular, or *male in se*, deviance (delinquency). However, other studies found that religiosity variables

¹This number was calculated from responses to the question “Is religion important in your life?” (V9 in earlier surveys, Q6 in 2017–2022 wave). “Very important” and “rather important” responses were combined to get these statistics.

were inversely related to both types of deviance (Cochran 1988; Harris 2003; Jang 2018). For instance, based on a logistic regression analysis of cross-sectional survey data from a large sample of adolescents in three midwestern states, Cochran (1988) found that religiosity—self-reported religiousness and perceived importance of church activities—was inversely related to “secular” (e.g., vandalism, assault, and weapon use) as well as ascetic deviance (e.g., premarital sex, marijuana use, and hard drug use). Taken together, these findings indicate that religiosity is more likely to be related inversely to ascetic than anti-ascetic, or secular, deviance, while the inverse relationship is not confined to ascetic deviance.

Secularization, religion, and deviance

Building off this literature, we retrieve the terminological innovation *secular deviance*—which is present within the criminology literature implicitly and is explicitly stated in Cochran (1988). We draw and expand upon Cochran’s initial usage by linking it to the dialogue between the structural functionalist paradigms of religious economies (Stark and Bainbridge 1996) and secularization theory (Berger 1967). We define secular deviance as a general violation in which punishment is legitimated through an appeal to rationalized secularity rather than religious moralism.

One component of this dialogue is the idea of a “moral community” posited by Stark and Bainbridge (1996), adapted from Durkheim’s theories on social integration and *anomie* (Durkheim 1995). It posits that the greater the secularization of a community, the less it will conform to the set moral order due to an erosion of individual religiosity (Stark and Bainbridge 1996: Ch. 5). This leads to greater general deviance. Therefore, Stark claims that “secular” areas such as cities on the West Coast are likely higher on general deviancy than places high in religiosity, such as rural towns in southern Idaho (Stark, Kent, and Doyle 1982; Stark, Doyle, and Kent 1980). In a similar vein, Berger’s (1967) “sacred canopy” claims that as more shared ideas about meaning are introduced into a society, the traditional forms of meaning are eroded, inspiring secularity.

The moral community framework suggests that religious communities influence individual behavior including deviance. This means that individual choices are regulated through an individual’s conformity to subgroup culture, which is an inherently micro-to-meso level claim. Interestingly, the secularization paradigm posits that institutional secularization erodes the influence of moral community on individual religiosity, which is a macro-to-meso level claim. Thus, a theoretical synthesis can be drawn at a meso level between the two seemingly contradictory camps of religious economies and secularization—both agree that “secularization” should hypothetically erode the impact of the moral community on individual behavior. Although we cannot test the effect of moral communities or secularization on the relationship between individual religiosity and deviance due to a lack of aggregate-level data, the synthesis formed above implicitly claims that secularization eradicates the influence of religiosity on deviance.

We contend, however, that the religious influence can only be reduced rather than removed because of the religious roots of secular morals. An overlap between religious and secular moralities implies that religion would not override the deterrent effect of secular morals on deviance but may have value added effect for deterrence. This contention is consistent with the previous findings of religious influence on both ascetic and secular deviance (Cochran 1988; Harris 2003; Jang 2018) as well as null findings on the impact of religion on some but not all forms of deviance (Abu-Rayya et al. 2016; Baier and Wright 2001; Groves, Newman, and Corrado 1987; Helal and Coston 1991; Ozbay 2007, 2015; Sahin and Unlu 2021; Souryal 1987; Stark 2001).² Thus, our argument is that *despite*

²This is likely a byproduct of social context, in which the role of (a still salient) religion varies from place to place. Recent findings of secularization theorists have suggested that nations with high GINI-coefficients such as Türkiye exhibit higher forms of religiosity (Norris and Inglehart 2011) or pro-choice over pro-fertility norms (Inglehart 2021). This literature directly links existential insecurity to individual religiosity and religious experience (Eschler 2020). Higher inequality, then, implies higher religiosity, higher religiosity yields an inclination toward a stronger “moral community.”

secularization (which is found in Muslim countries generally or within an institutionalized setting in Türkiye), religion may still have a net effect on secular as well as ascetic deviance.

In sum, three alternative religiosity-deviance relationships are possible. First, if secularization eradicates the influence of religion, individual religiosity is unlikely to be related to deviance. Second, if there is a significant overlap between religious and secular morality (due to secular morals being derived from religious morality), religiosity is expected to be inversely and similarly related to ascetic and secular deviance, as religion would exert deterrent effects on both types of deviance. Third, if the overlap is only partial, religiosity is more likely to be inversely related to ascetic rather than secular deviance. This last relationship is more plausible for our research hypothesis than the first two because, despite institutionalized secularism, Islam remains a key source of individual identity among Turks (Keyman 2010; Yavuz 2009) and salient in contemporary Türkiye (World Values Survey 2022). Partial overlap between religious and secular moralities in Türkiye is further demonstrated by the country's secular law, which does not sanction all deviant behaviors prohibited by Islam.

Islam and deviance

Many types of deviance are directly or implicitly forbidden in the Quran. This includes acts against person (e.g., homicide, robbery, and assault), property (e.g., theft, fraud, and burglary), substance use (e.g., alcohol, marijuana, and heroin), certain sexual behavior (e.g., extramarital relations, rape, and homosexuality), and public order (e.g., gambling, prostitution, and pornography). Across the Islamic world, however, secular law does not specifically sanction deviant behavior along these lines, particularly in our Turkish case.

Research on the link between Islam and deviance is limited and has been infrequent (Groves, Newman, and Corrado 1987; Helal and Coston 1991; Junger and Polder 1993; Ozbay 2007, 2015; Serajzadeh 2002; Souryal 1987; Stark 2001). Most of previous studies were conducted at the individual level (Junger and Polder 1993; Ozbay 2007, 2015; Sahin and Unlu 2021; Stark 2001), while some used aggregate-level data (Groves, Newman, and Corrado 1987; Helal and Coston 1991; Souryal 1987).

Aggregate-level findings tend to be inconsistent. For example, Groves, Newman, and Corrado (1987) did not find any relationship between Islam and crime rates, whereas Souryal (1987) and Helal and Coston (1991) found inverse relationships between the two. Individual-level findings were not consistent, either. For instance, Stark (2001) reported negative correlations between the importance of God and some forms of deviance (e.g., purchasing stolen products and using marijuana), but no relationship between mosque attendance and deviant behavior. Also, Abu-Rayya et al. (2016) found in a youth sample of an Australian diaspora population that Islamic religious practice had a negative association with deviance, but attitudes toward Islam did not.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between religiosity and youth deviance in Türkiye. First, Ozbay (2007) found that religiosity was not significantly related to various measures of deviance among university students except for alcohol use, which was inversely related to religiosity. In a subsequent study, however, Ozbay (2015) found more positive evidence for the deterrent effect of religion on deviance. Specifically, he found inverse relationships between religiosity and secular deviance and violence as well as alcohol use among students at a public university, whereas the importance of religion was inversely related to secular deviance, though not violence, among staff members at the university. On the other hand, importance of religion was not significantly related to either violence or alcohol use among local store owners, also included in his study. More recently, using a national sample of 31,272 high school students, Sahin and Unlu (2021) found that religious beliefs (e.g., belief in God and importance of faith) and, to a lesser extent, religious social environment (i.e., whether parents were religious) had negative associations with delinquency (e.g., theft, physical violence, and vandalism). However, they found religious practice – measured by regularly reading the scriptures, attending religious services, and participating in religious activities other than services – to be *positively* related to delinquency, which they speculated might indicate religious practice was “less

likely to contribute to the internationalization of religiosity in Turkish cultural settings” (Sahin and Unlu 2021: 372) than religious beliefs.

Hypothesis

Given the inconsistent findings reviewed above as well as limited number of studies on Islam and deviance, more research is needed to examine whether ascetic theory as developed in the western, Christian context receives empirical support in an Islamic context. Thus, we test the following hypothesis, using data collected from a survey with Turkish university students.

- Religiosity is inversely related to deviance with the inverse relationship being more likely for ascetic than secular deviance.

Methods

Data

Data to test our hypothesis came from a self-administered survey conducted with a population of students attending a state university in the Eastern part of Türkiye in 2019: that is, all students enrolled in classes during the spring semester of the 2018–2019 academic year were invited to participate in the survey ($N = 31,703$).³ Students were informed that their participation was voluntary not only verbally but also in a written statement accompanying the survey. A total of 2,005 students completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 6.3%.⁴ The survey included items asking about the participants’ religiosity, deviant behaviors, family and peer relationships, and sociodemographic characteristics.

Measurement

We measured deviance in terms of ascetic versus secular deviance to test our hypothesis that religiosity is more likely to be inversely related to the former than the latter deviance. Some questions to measure the dependent variables were adopted from Elliott and Ageton (1980).

Ascetic deviance was measured by two variables, *smoking cigarette* and *drinking alcohol*. First, the respondents were asked how often they had smoked cigarette since the beginning of the academic year. The original response categories—which ranged from “never” (= 1) to “10 or more times” (= 5)—were recoded as yes (= 1) and no (= 0) because the distribution was skewed with about three quarters (76.8%) of respondents reporting no cigarette smoking. The study participants were also asked how often they had consumed alcoholic beverages during the same period. Like cigarette smoking, the original response categories—ranging from “never” (= 1) to “10 or more times” (= 5)—were dichotomized (1 = yes, 0 = no) to address its highly skewed distribution: that is, almost nine out of 10 (89.2%) respondents reported no drinking alcohol.

Secular deviance was measured by a 14-item index of *general deviance*, which included: (1) blackmailing someone, (2) taking something from someone with a threat, (3) inflicting physical harm on people, (4) inflicting psychological harm on people, (5) using force on other students, (6) being involved in gang fights, (7) carrying knife, stick, etc., (8) arguing or fighting with a guy over

³The survey was conducted with an official permission from the Rectorate of the university (Ethical Permission Certificate number: E.26986, issued on April 5, 2019).

⁴The only demographic information available about the student population was gender (47.5% male and 52.5% female), and the survey had disproportionately more female participants (65.6%) than males (34.4%), which is often the case with survey research. Besides the skewed participation with respect to gender, the extent of survey participants being representative of the student population in terms of other demographic characteristics is unknown.

a girl, (9) damaging school properties, (10) taking something (book, pen, etc.) without permission from the teacher, student, or school, (11) verbally or physically abusing teachers, (12) leaving or skipping classes without any excuse, (13) leaving or skipping school without any excuse, and (14) cheating on exams.⁵ This index measured *general deviance* in that it consisted of a variety of deviant acts, serious (e.g., inflicting physical harm on people) as well as minor forms (e.g., leaving or skipping classes without any excuse). The survey participants were asked how often they had done each of the above behaviors since the beginning of the academic year. The original response categories of deviance items—none (= 1), 1 or 2 times (= 2), 3 to 5 times (= 3), 6 to 9 times (= 4), 10 or more times (= 5)—were trichotomized to reduce its positive skew: none (= 1), 1 or 2 times (= 2), and 3 or more times (= 3).

Four measures of religiosity were constructed. First, a scale of *religious practice* was created by averaging three items asking how often survey respondents (1) prayed, (2) fasted, and (3) read or listened to the Holy Quran, while not praying. The response options were never (= 1), few times in life (= 2), a few times a year (= 3), several times a month (= 4), most of the 5 daily prayers (= 5), and five times a day or more (= 6). Exploratory factor analysis of these items generated a single-factor solution with high loadings (.605, .797, and .679, respectively), and the items had a good internal reliability ($\alpha = .721$). Second, a scale of *religious beliefs* is the average of two items asking a respondent about (1) how much religion was important in his or her life and (2) how much the respondent considered himself or herself to be religious ($\alpha = .752$). The response categories for these questions ranged from “not at all” (= 1) to “completely” (= 10).

Third, a scale of *fear of supernatural sanctions* ($\alpha = .773$) was created by averaging a respondent's answers to two questions (“How much do you fear Allah?” and “How much are you afraid of hell?”) based on a 4-point Likert scale: not at all (= 1), a little (= 2), pretty (= 3), and completely (= 4). Finally, a single item was used to measure whether a respondent had ever attended the *Quran course* in the past, using a binary response option: yes (= 1) and no (= 0).

A respondent's three sociodemographic characteristics were measured: *gender* (i.e., biological sex; 0 = female, 1 = male), *age* (biological age at the time of the survey), and social class in terms of *parental education* (the average of father's and mother's levels of education; 1 = illiterate, 2 = literate but did not go to school, 3 = primary school, 4 = secondary school, 5 = high school, 6 = two-year college, 7 = four-year college, 8 = master's or doctoral degree; $\alpha = .708$). In addition, we constructed variables measuring major micro-criminological theories to control for sources of spuriousness of the relationship between religiosity and deviance. For example, an inverse relationship between religiosity and deviance may be attributable in part to family bond being positively related to religiosity and inversely to deviance. Thus, without controlling for family bond, the direct relationship between religiosity and deviance would be overestimated.

First, a scale of *family monitoring* ($\alpha = .847$), a measure of Hirschi's (1969) social bonding element of attachment (parental/family supervision), is the average of two items: (1) My family knows where I am when I'm out and (2) my family knows who I am with when I am out. The responses varied from strongly disagree (= 1) to strongly agree (= 5). Second, to measure a respondent's peer association—a key variable of Akers' (1985, 2009) social learning theory—*peer religiosity* was created using a single item asking, “How religious do you see your friends?” The response varied from “not at all” (= 1) to “completely” (= 10). Given that parental use of cigarette and alcohol was likely to contribute to a child's smoking and drinking in part via observational learning, two additional social learning variables, *father's use of cigarette* and *alcohol*, were created with items asking whether a respondent's father had been smoking and

⁵We did not conduct factor analysis of general deviance items because they were not all expected to be highly correlated, while positive correlations among them were anticipated. For example, a respondent who cheated on exam was not necessarily expected to have engaged in other deviance such as damaging school properties and verbally or physically abusing teachers, though it would not be surprising if they were positively correlated. Thus, we called this composite measure “index” to distinguish it from “scale,” whose items were theoretically expected to be highly correlated and thus subject to factor analysis. Having said that, we still found that general deviance items had a relatively high inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .795$).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variable Used in Analysis.

Variable	<i>n</i>	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum
Gender (Male)	2005	.344	.475	0	1
Age	2005	21.840	3.098	18	51
Parental education	1968	3.710	1.317	1	8
Family monitoring	1975	4.050	.957	1	5
Peer religiosity	1964	5.900	2.334	1	10
Father's use of cigarette	1964	.400	.491	0	1
Father's use of alcohol	1955	.445	.206	0	1
Physical abuse	1973	.120	.327	0	1
Religious practice	1946	4.710	.954	1	6
Religious beliefs	1967	7.690	1.927	1	10
Fear of supernatural sanctions	1966	3.580	.684	1	4
Quran course	1973	.860	.342	0	1
General deviance	1855	17.282	3.473	14	42
Smoking cigarette	2002	.230	.422	0	1
Drinking alcohol	2002	.110	.311	0	1

drinking during the last year prior to the survey (1 = yes, 0 = no).⁶ Finally, a single item asking about *physical abuse* (“Did your mother or father ever hit you?;” 1 = yes, 0 = no) was used to measure Agnew’s (1992, 2006) concept of strain, specifically, “presentation of negative stimuli.”

Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of variables used in analysis. Our sample was 34.4% male, and the average age of survey participants was about 22 (21.840) with the youngest and oldest being 18 and 51 years old, respectively.⁷ The participants’ parents, on average, had education (3.710) somewhere between primary (= 3) and secondary school (= 4). In addition, about four out of 10 survey respondents reported that their father had smoked cigarette (40.0%) and drank alcohol (44.5%) during the last year prior to the survey, and 12% of the sample said they had been hit by their father or mother. Finally, while typical respondents said that they had committed any of the listed general deviance less than “1 or 2 times (= 2)” ($1.234 = 17.282/14$) since the beginning of the academic year, 10–20% of them reported that they had smoked cigarettes (23.0%) and/or consumed alcoholic beverages (11.0%) since the school year began.

Table 3 presents coefficients estimated from regressing secular (general deviance) and ascetic deviance (smoking cigarette and drinking alcohol) on religiosity and theoretical as well as socio-demographic control variables. Specifically, the first column shows unstandardized (*b*) and standardized coefficients (β) estimated for the secular deviance model using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, whereas the second and third columns report coefficients in log-odds unit (*B*) and the exponentiation of the coefficients ($\text{Exp}[B]$), which are odds ratios, for the predictors of ascetic deviance, estimated using logistic regression.

First, we found coefficients of two out of four religiosity variables – religious beliefs ($b = -.184$) and fear of supernatural sanctions ($b = -.317$)—were significant in the expected direction: the more respondents believed religion was important in their lives, considered themselves to be religious, and fear Allah and/or were afraid of hell; the less likely they were to report that they had committed general deviance. Religious beliefs ($\beta = -.100$) was more strongly related to the dependent variable than the fear of supernatural sanctions ($\beta = -.062$). On the other hand, how often they prayed, fasted, and read or listened to the Holy Quran ($b = .076$, $p > .05$) and whether they had ever attended the Quran course in the past ($b = .427$, $p > .05$) were not significantly related to the self-reported secular deviance.

⁶We kept these two variables separate instead of combining them into a composite measure because they were weakly correlated in the positive direction ($r = .136$) and had a poor inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .177$).

⁷Though not shown in the table, 7.9% (159) of the survey participants were older than 24: 25–29 (5.2%, 104), 30–34 (1.3%, 27), 35–39 (.8%, 17), 40–44 (.2%, 5), 45–49 (.2%, 5), and the oldest who participated in the survey at the age of 51.

Table 3. Results from Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Logistic Regression Analyses of Religiosity and Deviance.

Variable	General deviance (<i>n</i> = 1,653)		Smoking cigarette (<i>n</i> = 1,863)		Drinking alcohol (<i>n</i> = 1,776)	
	<i>b</i>	β	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)
Gender (Male)	1.077*	.147*	1.123*	3.076*	1.115*	3.049*
Age	-.090*	-.075*	.035	1.035	.029	1.029
Parental education	.036	.014	.193*	1.213*	.250*	1.284*
Family monitoring	-.561*	-.155*	-.243*	.785*	-.093	.911
Peer religiosity	-.101*	-.068*	-.088*	.916*	-.087*	.916*
Father's use of cigarette	.139	.020	.295*	1.343*	.475*	1.608*
Father's use of alcohol	.880*	.051*	-.037	.963	1.144*	3.138*
Physical abuse	1.546*	.147*	.145	1.156	.266	1.305
Religious practice	.076	.020	-.180*	.835*	-.597*	.551*
Religious beliefs	-.184*	-.100*	-.198*	.821*	-.257*	.773*
Fear of supernatural sanctions	-.317*	-.062*	.001	1.001	-.049	.952
Quran course	.427	.042	.222	1.249	-.300	.741
Constant	23.208*		.302	1.352	.994	2.703
<i>R</i> ²	.152					
Cox & Snell <i>R</i> ²			.156		.190	

Note: * $p < .05$.

Next, we found two religiosity variables were inversely related to ascetic deviance, while one of the two was religious practice, which was not significant in the general deviance model. Specifically, for each unit increase in religious practice, the odds of smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol decreased by 16.5% ($= [e^{-.180} - 1] \times 100$) and 45.0% ($= [e^{-.597} - 1] \times 100$), respectively, holding all other variables constant. Similarly, one unit increase in religious beliefs was expected to decrease the odds of smoking and drinking by a factor of .821 and .773, respectively. However, whether respondents were afraid of supernatural sanctions or had attended the Quran course in the past made no significant difference in whether they had smoked cigarettes or consumed alcoholic beverages since the beginning of school year.

In sum, these findings provide partial support for our hypothesis in that religiosity was found to be inversely related to both types of deviance rather than more strongly to ascetic than secular deviance, as hypothesized.

The odds of consuming alcoholic beverages were 2.14 times ($= e^{1.144} - 1$) greater among respondents who had a father drinking alcohol than those whose father did not drink, whereas father's use of alcohol was not significantly related to the respondent's smoking behavior ($B = -.037$, $p > .05$). On the other hand, having a father who smoked cigarettes increased the odds of the respondent drinking as well as smoking by 34.3% ($= [e^{.295} - 1] \times 100$) and 60.8% ($= [e^{.475} - 1] \times 100$), respectively. In addition, father's drinking, though not father's smoking, was positively related to general deviance ($b = .880$). However, another social learning variable—peer religiosity—was found to be inversely related to all three measures of deviance, general deviance ($b = -.101$) as well as smoking cigarette ($B = -.088$) and drinking alcohol ($B = -.087$).

Other theoretical controls were also found to be related to the dependent variables in the expected direction. For example, the social bonding of family monitoring was inversely related to general deviance ($b = -.561$) and smoking cigarettes ($B = -.243$), though not drinking alcohol ($B = -.093$, $p > .05$), while the strain measure of physical abuse was positively associated with general deviance ($b = 1.546$) only. It is worth noting that significant relationships were found between religiosity and deviance in the hypothesized direction, controlling for alternative theoretical explanations of religious influence on deviant behaviors.⁸

⁸We found practically the same results when the models were estimated without those theoretical controls (complete results are available upon request).

Finally, holding all other variables constant, males were found to report higher levels of general deviance ($b = 1.077$) than females, and the odds of smoking and drinking were about two (2.076 and 2.049, respectively) times greater among men compared to women. The respondent's age was inversely related to secular deviance ($b = -.090$), but not to ascetic deviance, whereas the social class measure—parental education—was positively related to both measures of ascetic deviance ($B = .193$ and $.250$), though not secular deviance, which may indicate the need for resources to support the habit of smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.

Discussion

Although much research has been conducted to examine relationships between religion and deviance and crime within western contexts (e.g., Johnson and Jang 2010), limited attention has been paid to this topic within the Islamic world despite an increasing interest in other issues involving Islam such as terrorism and Islamophobia (e.g., Hamm 2010; Sheridan 2006). This study sought to address this oversight by examining the Islam-deviance relationship based on survey data collected from students at a Turkish public university. We hypothesized that individual religiosity would be inversely related to deviance, as previous studies have found in predominantly Christian samples. Furthermore, the inverse relationship was hypothesized to be more likely for ascetic than anti-ascetic, or secular, deviance as ascetic theory would have predicted. As hypothesized, we found that religiosity was inversely related to deviance, both secular (general deviance) and ascetic (cigarette and alcohol use). However, we found no clear evidence of differential relationships between religiosity and the two types of deviance. While this finding did not provide full support for our hypothesis, it is consistent with a number of previous studies examining potential linkages between religion and deviance (Cochran 1988; Harris 2003; Jang 2018; Ozbay 2015; Sahin and Unlu 2021).

The inverse relationship between involvement in Islam and deviance is consistent with the Quran's prohibitions of deviant behaviors. Among our four measures of religiosity, religious practice and beliefs were more intrinsic to an individual's *involvement* in Islam compared to the other two, one of which was an *outcome* of religious involvement rather than involvement *per se* (fear of supernatural sanctions) and the other a history of religious education that might have contributed to current involvement (the Quran course).⁹ The measure of religious *beliefs* was inversely related to both types of deviance, whereas religious *practice* was related only to ascetic deviance. This observed difference, we speculate, may confirm the notion put forward by Yavuz (2004) that the Islam practiced by Turks tends to be a "ritualized Islam," which has limited moral influence on individual behavior. In other words, compared to the behavioral measure of religiosity (i.e., religious practice), the cognitive measure (i.e., religious beliefs) might have been more valid in tapping intrinsic religiosity. Sahin and Unlu (2021) made a similar speculation after they found religious beliefs had inverse relationship with delinquency among Turkish high school students, but religious practice had the opposite relationship (but see Abu-Rayya et al. 2016).¹⁰ This is a topic worthy of further research.

Next, the present finding that religiosity was inversely related similarly to both types of deviance is important, as it indicates Islam may be exerting a deterrent effect on secular as well as ascetic deviance. This finding did not support the asceticism component of our hypothesis. However, if we focus on results involving the two presumably more intrinsic measures of religiosity (i.e., religious practice and beliefs), our finding is consistent with ascetic theory in that both measures of religiosity were inversely

⁹To explore whether the Quran course had indirect effect on deviance, we estimated the regression models without the other three measures of religiosity. Results from the supplemental analysis revealed that the past religious education was inversely related to drinking alcohol ($B = -1.151$): that is, having taken the Quran course in the past decreased the odds of drinking alcohol by 68.4% ($= [e^{-1.151} - 1] \times 100$). This finding implied an indirect relationship (i.e., the Quran course \rightarrow religious practice & beliefs \rightarrow drinking alcohol). However, the Quran course was not significantly related to general deviance ($b = .134, p > .05$) or smoking cigarette ($B = -.145, p > .05$).

¹⁰Interestingly, we also found coefficient for the relationship between religious practice and general deviance to be in the positive direction ($b = .076$; see Table 3), though it failed to be significant.

related to ascetic deviance, whereas only one of them (religious beliefs) was significantly related to secular deviance. Given this indeterminacy, empirical support found for our hypothesis is partial, and the present findings are inconclusive regarding the degree of overlap between religious and secular moralities in contemporary Türkiye.

Although religionization and secularization have developed side by side in Türkiye (Yavuz 2004, 2009), the effect of secularization seems to have not taken hold as powerfully as some have suggested (Bardakoglu 2017). For example, according to Aksit et al. (2012), most Turkish people have been exposed to conflicting or mixed messages—sacred and secular, religious and scientific, and traditional and modern—about religious belief, economy, politics, and gender. Religious interpretations and practices take place in these areas and in a continuously changing and fluid manner. Thus, Turkish society can perhaps be described as neither fully traditional nor fully secular, as elements of both tradition and modernity are intertwined and able to clearly coexist. As a result, most Turkish people are not involved in creating a world of belief that tends to exclude one or the other. For instance, religious Turks are open to modern developments in economy and politics, but they prefer traditional values regarding family and gender issues. In this context, the present findings demonstrate that secularization in Türkiye does not seem to have reduced the effect of Islam on deviance.

Moreover, the data in the present study provide support for Stark's (Stark and Bainbridge 1996; Stark, Doyle, and Kent 1980) moral community framework rather than Berger's (1967) secularization thesis. Given the findings of both the impact of religion and social bonding and learning variables (family and peer relations) on the likelihood of deviance, a clear picture of the influence of moral communities begins to emerge. Even within an institutionally secular context, meso-level groups such as peer networks, religious organizations, and families have a significant impact on individual religiosity and deviance. This highlights the continued importance of family and peer socialization into a set moral order (Durkheim 1995), contrary to macrostructural trends such as secularization. Thus, to the secularization paradigm, we suggest that the Turkish context of institutional secularization did not eliminate the effect of individual religiosity on individual deviancy, perhaps confirming the continued influence of "moral communities."

Finding an inverse relationship between Islam and deviance is particularly noteworthy given that our survey was conducted when negative attitudes toward religion were on the rise after the 2016 coup attempt by Fethullah Gulen, a self-exiled cleric living in the United States (Saul 2019). When the present data were being collected from college students in 2019, arresting and detaining people associated with the "Fethullah Terrorist Organization" ("FETO") was a daily occurrence. According to Ozcan and Dogan's (2017) study of 310 Turkish university students, about 20% of them reported that they lost trust in religious groups. Similarly, Cebeci et al.'s (2019) study of 1,595 students at nine theological schools revealed that 40.2% of them considered religious groups as "not necessary" (18.5%) or "a potential danger" (21.7%), while 26.9% saw them as "necessary." Another study of 509 students enrolled in a theological school showed that 63.5% of them viewed "religious community" with "doubt," 20.4% with "hatred," and 6.7% with "fear." Also, 49.7% of the students saw "religion" with "doubt," 4.1% with "hatred," and 3.9% with "fear" (Karsli 2019). We found significant Islam-deviance relationships in such a negative religion-political climate, which might have reduced the deterrent effect of religion on deviant behaviors.

While this study provides evidence of an inverse relationship between religion and deviance in a Muslim majority country, it is necessary to acknowledge key limitations. First, our study was based on cross-sectional data and thus could not fully establish causal ordering between variables. For example, while the association between religious practice and deviance was estimated, at least, in terms of concurrent relationship between their previous measures, the *past* behavior of deviance was explained by (i.e., regressed on) the *current* measure of religious beliefs at the time of survey. Given that past deviance might have weakened the present religious beliefs, the estimated inverse relationship may not be fully interpreted as indicating the deterrent effect of religious beliefs on deviance. A second limitation concerns a lack of representativeness and a low response rate of our data, as they were collected from a small percentage (6.3%) of student population at a public university in the

eastern part of Türkiye. Thus, the present findings are not generalizable, which readers should keep in mind. Finally, we did not test gender differences in the effect of religion on deviance because it was beyond the scope of our study. Future research should examine whether religion has greater deterrent effect on deviance among females than males given that women tend to be more religiously involved and thus may be more affected by religion than men (Sherkat and Ellison 1999).¹¹

Despite these limitations, we believe that our study contributes to the literature on religion and deviance by examining whether involvement in Islam is inversely related to deviance and, if so, whether the inverse relationship is more likely for ascetic than secular deviance. We found individual religiosity was inversely related to deviance in a Muslim majority sample, as observed in prior research based on predominantly Christian samples. Involvement in Islam also tended to be inversely related similarly to secular and ascetic deviance, as previous researchers sometimes found. Scholars need to pay more attention to this understudied religious group to examine similarities and dissimilarities between the most often studied religion – Christianity—and Islam in relation to deviance.

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¹¹To explore the gender differences, a supplemental analysis was conducted by estimating the models separately for males and females. Overall results showed similarity rather than dissimilarity between the two gender groups.

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