

Collective Crystallization Dynamics: Field-Testing the Protodik Hypothesis

A Systems Analysis of the Turkey Case

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Protodizm: The Hidden Religion Within Us (2026) — Supplementary Study 1

Abstract

The Protodik Hypothesis (Coşar, 2026) was developed to explain the crystallization mechanism of the theogenic drive at the individual level. This paper analyzes how the same mechanism operates at the collective and institutional scale, using contemporary Turkey as its empirical frame. Turkey presents an analytically privileged case: it is one of the rare instances where state-sponsored collective theolepsia (the political monopolization of meaning), mass-scale metaxima (the transitional state in which meaning gaps remain unfilled), and a paralyzed collective MADAD (collective epistemic self-correction capacity) coexist simultaneously and in acute form. The paper's core claim is this: the processes unfolding in Turkey constitute an observable instance of the crystallization → fracture → bifurcation cycle predicted by the Protodik Hypothesis, and therefore provide living-proof evidence that tests the theory's empirical value. Structurally analogous dynamics manifest in other authoritarian-traditional societies — Russia, Iran, and elsewhere — making Turkey's case a methodologically tractable entry point into a broader comparative framework rather than a culturally specific anomaly.

Keywords: collective theolepsia, metaxima, collective MADAD, crystallization paradox, system dynamics, lateral shift, theolysis, Turkey case

1. Introduction: Why Turkey, Why Now?

The Protodik Hypothesis (Coşar, 2026; see also Coşar, 2026b) draws three foundational conceptual distinctions in explaining the mechanism of belief: the distinction between the theogenic drive and thumos; the prototype/crystallization cycle; and the epistemic function of MADAD. The analytic plane on which these concepts were developed is individual — but the theory itself predicts that the mechanism operates independently of scale. The book calls this claim the *Fractal Mechanism*: the same four variables (source of authority, threshold calculation, offering an alternative, timing) operate with the same structure from the individual reformer to collective transformation (Coşar, 2026, Chapter 18). This paper is an indirect test of that scale-independence claim at the national level.

Is this prediction testable?

Testability requires three conditions. First, the mechanism must be observable at a supra-individual level — collective, institutional, or national. Second, this

observation must be framable not merely as a culturally specific interpretation but as the local appearance of a universal mechanism. Third, the observed picture must be consistent with the structural pattern the theory predicts.

Contemporary Turkey satisfies all three conditions.

What makes Turkey analytically valuable is not its geographic or cultural specificity — it is its structural position and observational accessibility. The same dynamics — a state-managed collective monopoly on meaning, a widening meaning gap, and a paralyzed epistemic self-correction capacity — are observable in Iran, in Russia, in Afghanistan, and to some extent in Hungary. Turkey is chosen for this study for one reason: as a society carrying both a secular-modernist founding myth and a religious-conservative transformation within the same body, it displays the dynamics of crystallization and fracture with unusual clarity. This is a rare observational opportunity for theoretical claims.

This paper is not a political analysis. Its purpose is not to explain power relations or electoral dynamics, but to show how the mechanism predicted by the Protodik Hypothesis operates at the collective scale.

2. Theoretical Framework: Carrying Three Concepts to the Collective Scale

How do the three conceptual distinctions the Protodik Hypothesis establishes at the individual level carry over to the collective scale? This section briefly recalls the concepts' original definitions and identifies their collective-scale counterparts. For the concepts' full elaboration, see Coşar (2026b).

2.1 Theolepsia → Collective Theolepsia

At the individual level, theolepsia describes the state in which the theogenic drive has been seized by a particular object — an ideology, a leader, or an institutional belief system. In this state, thumos (the capacity to generate meaning) is not free; it is fixed to a single channel.

Collective theolepsia is the same mechanism carried to the societal scale: a particular political-ideological structure has monopolized society's capacity to generate meaning. The structural markers of this condition are the coordinated production and distribution of the same interpretive frame by the state, the media, the education system, and religious institutions — together with the coding of alternatives as threats.

Gentile (2006) defines this kind of regime, in which politics assumes a religious structure, as a pathological version of "civil religion." Weber (1922/1978) frames the institutionalization of charismatic authority as a similar dynamic: meaning that crystallizes around a leader gradually becomes an institutional necessity, and eventually becomes unquestionable.

2.2 Metaxima → Collective Metaxima

At the individual level, metaxima describes the intermediate state in which the

pattern has begun to be seen but has not yet been resolved: neither is the old system of meaning satisfying, nor has a new interpretive frame been established.

Collective metaxima is a society's suspension in a similar intermediate state. In the sociological literature, this condition is close to but not identical with anomie: Durkheim's (1897) anomie describes the collapse of norms, whereas collective metaxima describes norms that have not yet dissolved but have begun to be hollowed out from within. The transition process that Streib and Keller (2014) documented at the individual level in their research on deconversion can occur at the societal scale in a slow, invisible, and mass form.

2.3 MADAD → Collective MADAD

At the individual level, MADAD (Metacognitive Awareness and Doxastic Appraisal Device) is the mind's capacity to monitor its own layer of belief. Theolepsia shuts this capacity down; synaesthesia — the moment the shield becomes visible — reactivates it.

Collective MADAD describes the collective epistemic self-correction infrastructure: an independent judiciary, an autonomous academy, a pluralistic media, and civil society's capacity for critique. Together, these structures are the sum of the mechanisms that allow a society to question, recognize, and correct its own process of meaning production. Norenzayan (2013) shows that transparent, accountable institutions are a precondition for societal cooperation. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) systematically document the direct relationship between the erosion of these institutions and democratic backsliding.

3. Case Analysis: A Protodik Snapshot of Turkey

3.1 Collective Theolepsia: The Monopolization of Meaning-Production

Viewed through the Protodik lens, the process that has deepened in Turkey since the 2010s can be defined as a state-sponsored collective theolepsia.

Institutional growth and the distribution of meaning. The budget of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) grew more than tenfold between 2002 and 2023; its staff now exceeds 80,000 (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2023). This growth is not merely an expansion of religious-service provision: the Diyanet has become a broad network for producing and distributing meaning, extending from education to media, from youth organizing to family counseling. The "center-periphery" dynamic that Mardin (1989) identified in Turkish modernization has here been reversed: rather than the periphery accepting the center's interpretive frame, the periphery is now subjected to meaning-distribution by a new center.

Questioning coded as crime. Those who displayed loyalty to the pattern (the official ideology) were rewarded as the "acceptable citizen," while those who questioned it were subjected to social disablement. The dismissal of more than 125,000 people from public service after 2016 (Commission on Examination of State-of-Emergency Measures, 2022) is the institutional dimension of this mechanism. In Weberian terms this process is familiar: an extraordinary period turns into a

permanent state of exception, reinforcing political theolepsia.

The reversal of the Santa Claus Paradox. Coşar (2026) observes at the individual level: why do societies make room for children to "exit" belief in Santa Claus, yet permit no such exit from the idea of God? In the Turkish case this paradox is structurally reversed: exit from the secular-modernist pattern is encouraged, while exit from the new official frame of meaning is obstructed. The pattern has changed; the mechanism has not.

3.2 Collective Metaxima: Millions in Suspension

Against the imposed theolepsia, a significant segment of society — particularly the 18–35 age group — is in a state of mass metaxima.

The hollowing-out of ritual. The distance between religious practice and religious belief is widening in Turkey — in Uzlaner's (2025) distinction, secularization(2) (the decline of individual religiosity) and secularization(1) (religion's institutional-political centrality) are moving at independent speeds here. According to TÜSİAD-KONDA (2019), religious practice among the 15–29 age group has declined markedly since 2008; over the same period, the proportion identifying as "unbelieving" or "deist" has tripled — secularization(2) accelerating even as secularization(1) moves the opposite way, strengthened by the growth of the Diyanet. This picture is consistent with the pattern Streib and Hood (2011) describe as "disengagement from the institution alongside the liberation of the theogenic drive": exiting the pattern does not mean the end of the meaning-making capacity itself.

The "nothing matters" defense. Nihilism and a shield of irony are markedly observable in what researchers term "Generation Z." Bleidorn and colleagues' (2024) deconversion research shows that this psychological pattern represents the most critical threshold immediately preceding theolysis: when the theogenic drive goes unsatisfied, what emerges may not be a healthy search for meaning but the denial of meaning itself.

Mass lateral shift. The meaning gap produced by metaxima is filled as the theogenic drive turns to new objects — a lateral shift. In Turkey this reorientation is visible along three channels: (a) a turn toward spiritual alternatives (astrology, energy work, personal-development coaching); (b) the fixing of meaning onto geography (the ideal of "going abroad" becoming an existential project); (c) crystallization around a political figure (discussed below). All three channels are consistent with Coşar's (2026) definition of lateral shift: the theogenic drive changes its object; the mechanism remains the same.

Collective outflow of thumos as "suitcase syndrome." The rising tendency to emigrate — especially among educated young people — is not merely an economic choice. The marked increase in the number of Turkish citizens leaving the country between 2020 and 2023 (TÜİK, 2023), together with the "inability to find meaning" narrative that recurs in diaspora surveys, indicates a tendency for thumos to flow outward when it cannot find channels through which to flow domestically. This is not individual theolysis; it is a fracture in the flow-map of collective thumos.

3.3 The Paralysis of Collective MADAD

The Protodik Hypothesis's gravest warning concerns the closing of MADAD at the societal scale. Turkey has lived through this closure via documentable institutional steps.

The erosion of judicial independence. The Venice Commission (2017) and the EU's Progress Reports (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) record the systematic weakening of judicial independence in Turkey. This amounts to the dysfunction of collective MADAD's most critical component: the institution that monitors the power relations within the society itself — what Fukuyama (2014) calls *repatrimonialization*, an institution recaptured by the very elites meant to protect it, for narrow private interest. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) show that democratic backsliding typically proceeds through exactly this kind of "gradual institutional erosion"; a society tends to live through this process not at a single dramatic breaking point, but without fully noticing. The shift from merit to political loyalty as the operative criterion in judicial appointments is the concrete face of this erosion.

The narrowing of academic and media autonomy. After 2016, more than 6,000 academics were dismissed from public posts or forced to resign, and more than 150 media outlets were shut down (Platform for Independent Journalism, 2022). These figures show that society's institutional capacity to critically interrogate its own process of meaning-production has been structurally narrowed.

Polarization and epistemic bubbles. What Norenzayan (2013) identifies as a necessary condition for large-scale societal cooperation — an infrastructure of trust and a plurality of information flow — has been seriously damaged in Turkey. KONDA's (2019) research on political identity shows a society divided into mutually impermeable bubbles of meaning, in which different political identities have become effectively unable to "hear" one another. This is the collective version of Coşar's (2026) MADAD-closure mechanism: not a community's capacity to monitor its own layer of belief, but a society's capacity to cross-examine its own frames of meaning, has been paralyzed — and the paralysis is selective. In what Lalot and Abrams (2025) call *transgression credit*, voters forgive their own leader's violations while condemning the same violations in a rival: MADAD runs where identity is not at stake, and falls silent where loyalty is. The "two separate realities" perception observed in Turkey's polarized public sphere is the everyday face of this.

4. System Dynamics: Bifurcation Scenarios

The Protodik Hypothesis predicts a crystallization → synaisthesis → bifurcation cycle. Assessing where this cycle currently stands in Turkey, and in which direction it might open, is theoretically necessary from a systems-dynamics perspective.

4.1 Fracture Triggers

Collective theolepsias become unsustainable under specific structural conditions. Coşar (2026) identifies these conditions under three headings:

The meaning-welfare rupture. When an imposed system of meaning fails to produce concrete welfare — economic crisis, unemployment, insecurity about the future — the power-oriented component of the theogenic drive begins to dissolve. Diener and colleagues' (2011) research on the "religion paradox" shows that religious community can lose its protective function once subjective well-being falls below a certain threshold. Turkey's deepening economic crisis since 2018 — inflation, currency erosion, unemployment — is establishing the preconditions for

exactly this rupture.

Dissolution from within. The imposed system of meaning's greatest vulnerability begins from within the very mass that is expected to carry it. Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance explains the structure of this process: once the distance between discourse and experience crosses an unbridgeable threshold, the defense of belief becomes inadequate. Within a significant portion of what is defined as Turkey's "religious-conservative" segment, the question "were we deceived?" has now entered public circulation.

Triggers of collective synaesthesia. Major moments of societal fracture — economic collapse, state incapacity in a natural disaster, the exposure of large-scale corruption — can function as triggers of collective synaesthesia. The reactions following the 2023 earthquakes offer an observable example in this respect: the open, public discussion of state inadequacy made visible a number of questions that theolepsia had, up to that point, kept closed.

4.2 Bifurcation: Where Does Thumos Flow?

Once collective synaesthesia occurs — once the shield becomes visible — thumos flows into one of three main channels. This bifurcation is the Protodik Hypothesis's most critical prediction.

Scenario A — Lateral Shift: New Crystallization

Historically, this is the most common pattern. When large collective traumas occur and the tolerance for uncertainty is exceeded, a society swiftly veers toward a new savior figure, a new definition of the enemy, and a new pattern of identity. Neo-nationalism, a cult built around a "strong opposition leader," or hardened factional polarization are the concrete forms of this scenario.

This pattern is observable in Turkey's current opposition dynamics. The "savior" expectation invested in a particular figure amounts to nothing other than the theogenic drive being reinvested in a new personal authority. Viewed through the Protodik framework, this is not theolysis but lateral shift: theolepsia changes hands; the mechanism remains the same. The pattern changes; the mechanism is preserved. The long-term structural consequence of this scenario — consistent with the "mass movement" dynamic Hoffer (1951) describes — is a new cycle of crystallization.

Scenario B — Constitutional Residue: Deep Theolysis

If theolysis is experienced with sufficient depth, thumos turns not toward a new personal authority but toward the meaning-generating capacity itself. This is the societal-scale version of the process Coşar (2026, Chapter 46.5) calls the "Constitutional Residue Theory": following major crystallization fractures, the content of meaning dissolves, but the form — the rule of law, accountability, the separation of powers — survives, and forms the ground for a new social contract.

Turkey's historical resources for this scenario should not be dismissed. The institutional residue left by the Kemalist reforms — secular educational infrastructure, a university tradition, civil-society reflexes — can function as the minimal ground for Scenario B. Taylor's (2007) thesis that the "secular age" inherits religious values in this respect offers a hopeful framework: the residue of theolysis can function as a new channel of meaning.

Scenario C — The Desert of Nihilism: The Exhaustion of Thumos

If theolysis fails following synaisthesis and the gap in meaning goes unfilled for a prolonged period, thumos begins to flow "nowhere." At the societal scale, this is a state of exhaustion in which distrust permeates every relationship, shared projects become impossible, and atomization deepens. Yalom's (1980) conceptualization of existential emptiness defines this outcome at the individual level; Lasch's (1979) analysis of narcissism shows the cultural reflections of this state of collective exhaustion. This scenario is the Protodik Hypothesis's most serious warning: reviving thumos is far harder than breaking a pattern.

Probability weights. Assessed from a systems-dynamics perspective, Scenario A carries the highest probability in the short term: under conditions of low tolerance for uncertainty, high economic pressure, and a partially paralyzed collective MADAD, thumos turns toward the channel into which it can flow most easily — personalized authority. Scenario B can occur only where the intellectual and institutional ground that facilitates the theolysis process has been prepared. That ground does not currently exist — but it is possible. This is precisely where the Protodik Hypothesis's historical function appears: at the moment of fracture, to increase the probability weight of Scenario B by making the mechanism visible.

5. Discussion: Turkey's Theoretical Value and the Universal Lesson

5.1 Why Living Proof?

The empirical value of social-science theories is measured, to a large extent, by their post-hoc explanatory power. But a stronger form of empirical value is predictive fit: can the structural pattern the theory predicts be observed in an independent case?

The Turkey case comes close to answering this question in the affirmative. The unsustainability of collective theolepsia, dissolution from within, metaxima among the young, and lateral-shift dynamics — all are predictions derived from the Protodik Hypothesis's conceptual framework, and all manifest in Turkey in a manner consistent with independent observational data.

This predictive fit provides the theory not with proof of causation, but with grounds for validity. What Turkey has lived through does not prove the Protodik Hypothesis — but it strengthens the theory's connection to the observable world.

5.2 A Comparative Framework: Why Is Turkey Not Unique?

Turkey's selection for this study does not mean these dynamics are unique to Turkey. On the contrary, the structural parallels are striking:

Iran: The fixing of the theogenic drive onto the state apparatus following the 1979 revolution, producing a collective theolepsia, occurred earlier and more comprehensively than in Turkey. The civil resistance currently observed in Iran — especially among young women — offers a concrete example of collective metaxima crossing its threshold.

Russia: The Putin regime's instrumentalization of Orthodox Christianity and nationalist mysticism is a different cultural version of the theogenic drive being fixed onto a political apparatus to produce collective theolepsia. The legitimacy crisis that has deepened since the invasion of Ukraine shows a similarly structured fracture dynamic.

Hungary: Orbán's Christian-nationalist framework shows how collective theolepsia can be constructed within an EU-member democracy — proof that the mechanism recognizes no geographic or cultural boundary.

Turkey, in this picture, is not an exception but one of the cases in which a universal mechanism is most accessible to observation.

5.3 The Protodik Hypothesis's Original Contribution to This Case

The existing literature in political science and sociology has analyzed Turkey in depth. Diamond (2019) offers a powerful explanatory framework within the context of democratic backsliding; Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), in terms of institutional erosion; Mardin (1989), in terms of center-periphery dynamics.

What does the Protodik Hypothesis add to these?

Two things. First, it carries the mechanism's psychological layer — the theogenic drive, thumos, metaxima, MADAD — into political analysis. This moves beyond explaining institutional collapse and political polarization, toward answering why individuals experience this polarization as they do, and under what conditions they might change their behavior. Second, it offers a normative compass: which conditions facilitate theolysis, and which facilitate lateral shift instead? This question is not for political analysis, but it is critical for individuals and communities who must confront crises of meaning.

6. Limitations

This study's limitations can be grouped under three headings.

First, the problem of conceptual scale. The Protodik Hypothesis was developed for the individual level. Carrying its concepts to the collective level — "collective theolepsia," "collective MADAD" — is an analogical extension, and this extension requires theoretical justification. Whether the collective concepts fully correspond to their individual counterparts is an open question that future research must answer.

Second, causation versus correlation. The patterns observed in Turkey are consistent with the structure the Protodik Hypothesis predicts; but this consistency does not mean the theory has been confirmed. The same patterns can also be explained by alternative theoretical frameworks — political economy, identity politics, modernization theory. The Protodik Hypothesis's distinctive contribution relative to these alternative explanations is its systematic inclusion of the psychological and existential layer; but the independent empirical contribution of this addition has not yet been tested.

Third, normative position and objectivity. This study analyzes Turkey from an "insider" observational perspective. This is both an advantage — depth of access and meaning — and a risk: whether the predictions feed a confirmation bias rooted in that connection must be checked from the outside.

7. Conclusion

This study's core claim is this: the Turkey case is an observable instance of the collective crystallization → fracture → bifurcation cycle predicted by the Protodik Hypothesis.

Collective theolepsia — meaning-production monopolized through the state apparatus — is approaching a threshold of unsustainability. Mass metaxima is growing; the paralysis of collective MADAD is deepening. Under these structural conditions, where thumos will flow — toward a new lateral shift, toward a deep theolysis, or into a desert of nihilism — is an open question of system dynamics.

The Protodik Hypothesis offers no definitive answer to this question. What it offers is a structural map that predicts the possible channels. And the historical function of this map is to hold Scenario B — deep theolysis, constitutional residue, thumos turning toward its own capacity for meaning — not as a mere utopia, but as a possibility that can be realized once certain conditions are met.

Turkey's distinctiveness in this process lies in its simultaneous carrying of both a secular-modernist founding myth and a religious-conservative transformation. This dual inheritance may mean that, at the moment of major fracture, the alternative channels into which thumos can flow are relatively more diverse. But this is not a guarantee — it is a possibility.

And making these possibilities visible — understanding the mechanism the Protodik Hypothesis defines — is important enough in its own right, as a reminder that such moments of fracture can be grounds not only for destruction, but for transformation.

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