YORDAM KİTAP 488

Political Ideologies

Edited by: Gökhan Atılgan



TITLE	**Political Ideologies**
EDITED BY	Gökhan Atılgan
TRANSLATED BY	Tunç Türel (Marxism, Fascism, Islamism)
PROOFREADING	Tunç Türel
ISBN	978-605-172-879-7
TURKISH EDITION ISBN	978-605-172-878-0
YORDAM KİTAP	488
EDITION	First Edition: September 2026
COVER AND BOOK DESIGN	Gökhan Atılgan
ILLUSTRATIONS	Portrait drawings and illustrations produced with AI assistance.

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PUBLISHER	Yordam Kitap Basın ve Yayın Tic. Ltd. Şti. (Sertifika No: 44790) Kuloğlu Mahallesi Altıpatlar Sokak, Çubukçu Çıkmazı No: 1/1 Beyoğlu - İstanbul Tel: 0212 528 19 10 • 0549 100 00 96 W: www.yordamkitap.com • E: info@yordamkitap.com www.facebook.com/YordamKitap • www.twitter.com/YordamKitap
PRINTING AND BINDING	Meral Tatar (Ceylan Matbaa) (Sertifika No: 79710) Maltepe Mah. Davutpaşa Cad. No: 83/3 İç Kapı No: 317 Zeytinburnu / İstanbul

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PREFACE

In Turkish, to say that someone "speaks ideologically" is an accusation, not a description. Introducing ideology into a matter means distorting it, bending the facts, departing from sound judgement. The virtues set against it are familiar: objectivity, neutrality, common sense. The charge comes at a cost. An argument marked as ideological loses its standing without ever being refuted, and whoever carries the mark is pushed towards the edge of the discussion, at times towards the threshold of social exclusion and punishment.

Is this peculiar to Turkey? It is not. The word turned into an insult within a generation of its coinage, and it has served ever since as the cheapest way of defeating an opponent before the opponent has spoken. The end of ideology was announced in the middle of the twentieth century. The same announcement was repeated at the close of the Cold War under the name of the end of history. The technocratic model of government now presents itself as a form of expertise that lies beyond ideology and concerns itself only with workable solutions. The gesture never varies. Ideology is what the other side has, whilst the speaker speaks in the voice of reality itself.

A book on political ideologies has to begin here, because the most effective ideology is the one that does not appear as an ideology at all. When a social arrangement looks natural, inevitable and without alternative, that appearance marks hegemony rather than neutrality. Avoiding ideology is not possible. Speaking from within one, knowingly or unknowingly, is the only available position. This book sets out to give its reader the equipment to see precisely that difference.

Why another book on political ideologies, and why now? Ideological conflict has hardened again over the past fifteen years. The radical right has reached office or its threshold in many countries, populist politics has broken up settled party systems, the climate crisis has ceased to be a technical problem and become a line of political conflict, and war and mass displacement have revived nationalist mobilisation. The language of public debate has thinned over the same period. Politics is discussed largely through leaders, polls and readings of personality. Behind the leaders, however, stand conceptual structures that precede them and outlast them. This book was prepared to render those structures legible.

Several features distinguish it. First, it does not conceal its method. Political ideologies are treated here as particular arrangements of political concepts, and the material conditions that produce and transform those arrangements are traced from the perspective of the materialist conception of history. The framework is set out openly in the Introduction rather than left between the lines. Second, all eleven chapters share a common architecture. Third, the order of the chapters makes an argument rather than a choice of convenience. Fourth, the volume states which traditions it leaves out and on what grounds. Fifth, it treats ideologies as things that work through images, anthems, novels and films as well as through propositions. Sixth, it does not hide the fact that it is written from outside the West. The concept of official ideology, developed within Turkish political science, is used here as an analytical instrument rather than a local curiosity, and what happens to political concepts as they travel between languages becomes a subject of discussion in its own right.

Three considerations lie behind publication in Turkish and English. The first is practical. English-medium instruction has spread widely in Turkey, many universities teach in English, and the standard works in this field are read mostly in English. Students working in either language should be able to reach the same framework in their own. The second concerns address. Turkey appears in this literature mostly as a case rather than as a producer of theoretical frameworks, and scholars working in Turkey have good reason to speak to the English-reading world in the language of scholarship. The weight carried here by the concept of official ideology, together with the chapter on Islamism, is an attempt to shift that balance a little. The third is that bilingualism belongs to the argument of the book. Concepts do not travel between languages unchanged. The distance between devlet and state, between hürriyet and özgürlük, between laiklik and secularism, records historical sediment rather than translation error. Preparing the two versions together made that sediment visible. For the same reason, the two versions do not correspond word for word. They cover the same ground and make the same claims, and each is meant to read as though it had been written in its own language.

The sequence of chapters is neither chronological nor alphabetical, nor does it march along a left-right axis. Chronology privileges European modernity as the default point of origin. Alphabetical order buys neutrality at the price of meaning. A left-right axis compresses a multidimensional field into a single line. This book groups ideologies instead by the relations of provocation, response and mutual constitution that bind them. Liberalism, conservatism and Marxism open the volume because these three traditions emerged within a triangle of antagonism that defined the ideological field of European modernity. Nationalism and fascism stand together because fascism represents the radicalisation of nationalist premises under conditions of crisis. Feminism is placed as an autonomous tradition that argues with all of them whilst keeping a core of its own. Anarchism and ecologism are akin in questioning the legitimacy of institutions rather than the distribution of

power within them. Populism and Islamism fit the classical forms of the category imperfectly, and it is at these two moments that the book tests its own framework. Social democracy closes the volume and returns the reader to the opening triangle, since socialism reconciled with capitalism is a direct product of the century-long argument between liberalism and Marxism. The Introduction sets out the reasoning in full.

The common architecture of the chapters is a practical convenience for the reader. Each chapter opens with a thematic entry, identifies the core concept of the ideology, and moves in turn through its diagnosis of the existing order, its vision of the good society, its strategy of transition, and its universe of values and symbols. It then follows the historical trajectory of the tradition, discusses its present condition, and ends with a closing. Two things follow from this. A reader who finishes one chapter and turns to the next knows where to find what, and does not have to work out the logic of a new text each time. The book can also be read across as well as through. Anyone who reads the sections titled Strategy one after another can compare how eleven traditions think about power and change in a single sitting. The same possibility holds for diagnosis, for the good society or for symbols. Readers who teach will find here a ready way of dividing the book into weekly sessions.

The common skeleton should not be taken to flatten the authors into a single voice. Each of the eleven has kept their own emphasis, rhythm and analytical relation to the tradition they treat. Every chapter also carries at least two boxes, a portrait and a set of recommended novels, films and music. The boxes answer directly the misunderstandings and the persistent questions that have accumulated around the ideology in question. The portraits make visible what an ideology amounts to in a single human life. The recommendations are a reminder that ideologies spread through images, sounds and stories as much as through arguments.

Many people made this book. We are grateful to Şadi Aycan for the contribution to the cover design, to Tunç Türel for translating several chapters into English and proof editing the chapters written in English, and to Arda Türkoğlu for technical support with the layout. The chapter authors deserve a different kind of thanks. Accepting a common architecture, fitting one's own text to the texts of others, and doing so without losing one's voice, is not a common disposition in multi-author volumes.

This book offers no ready list of correct positions. What it offers is a way of seeing how political positions are built and in what context, which concepts work alongside which, and where an ideology betrays its own logic. Choosing a position is left to the reader. The difference is that the choice becomes a decision rather than a reflex.

Gökhan Atılgan

Ankara, August 2026