

SOCIETAL DISINTEGRATION TRAPS IN TÜRKIYE UNDER THE BOP FRAMEWORK: A REGIONAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INCOME EROSION, SOCIETAL BURNOUT, AND PATHWAYS TO STATE–SOCIETY DECOUPLING

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Abstract

The societal repercussions of regional reorganization efforts undertaken within the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) have not been systematically examined in the academic literature. This study analyzes the "social dissolution traps" observed in Turkey within the GMEI context across three interconnected dimensions: income erosion, social burnout, and state–society disconnection, situating them within an integrated theoretical framework. The central research question asks: through what mechanisms do income erosion and social burnout feed the processes leading to state–society rupture?

Drawing on a qualitative research design that integrates interpretive and comparative methods, the study employs a field survey conducted between 2023 and 2025 with 500 participants representing five distinct social groups as its primary data source. Secondary data include macroeconomic indicators from the Turkish Statistical Institute, the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, and the Social Security Institution, supplemented by gold-denominated real purchasing power comparisons. Findings are interpreted through Acemoglu and Robinson's narrow corridor theory and North, Wallis, and Weingast's limited access order framework.

Three principal findings emerge. First, a long-term and systemic erosion of real income measured in grams of gold is documented: the minimum wage fell from approximately 14.5 grams of gold in 2007 to 5.9 grams in 2024, while the lowest pension declined from 19.1 grams in 2003 to below 3 grams in 2021. Second, participants' negative perception of their personal economic situation intensified from –23.8% in 2023 to –56% in 2025, while negative assessments of the national economy rose from –18.4% to –75.4% over the same period. Third, social burnout indicators escalated simultaneously across all social groups, accompanied by a measurable erosion of institutional trust.

These findings demonstrate that income erosion undermines psychosocial resilience, generating a self-reinforcing cycle that threatens the fragile equilibrium between state capacity and societal consent. The comparative examination of Turkey alongside other GMEI-affected regional countries contributes to explaining social dissolution dynamics at the regional level and points toward actionable policy intervention pathways while the process remains reversible.

Keywords: Greater Middle East Initiative; social dissolution trap; income erosion; social burnout; state–society disconnection; narrow corridor theory; fragile state

1. Introduction

The restructuring of the international system in the post-Cold War era has triggered comprehensive transformation processes that have profoundly unsettled the Middle Eastern geography and surrounding societies. Regional reorganization initiatives conceptualized in the academic literature as the "Greater Middle East Project," constituting the most contested dimension of this transformation, have created a multi-layered sphere of intervention targeting not merely political boundaries and governance modalities, but also the economic resilience capacities of societies, patterns of social cohesion, and the reciprocal trust relationships between the state and its citizens (Carothers & Ottaway, 2004; Cooley & Nexon, 2020). In this context, the early warnings of the International Crisis Group (2004) drew attention to the project's potential for regional destabilization, while Güney and Gökcan (2010) examined in depth the geopolitical imagination dimension of this initiative. When evaluated within the framework of Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) "narrow corridor" concept, such external interventions carry the potential to disrupt the fragile equilibrium between state capacity and societal control. This article proceeds from the premise that the aforementioned transformation sphere possesses the capacity to generate "societal disintegration traps" under specific conditions. The concept of "trap" employed herein denotes not a singular event or momentary crisis, but rather the transformation into a pathway wherein mutually reinforcing processes—such as income erosion, the proliferation of exhaustion sentiments, the attrition of social trust, and the weakening of institutional legitimacy—deepen societal fragility through reciprocal interaction (Carment & Samy, 2023; Kaldor, 1999).

The literature on fragile states and societal resilience demonstrates that such traps become particularly pronounced under conditions of prolonged economic pressure and legitimacy erosion (Besley & Persson, 2011). North, Wallis, and Weingast's (2009) concept of "limited access order" elucidates how societies, upon exceeding certain thresholds, can become entrapped in self-reinforcing negative cycles. Within this theoretical framework, the societal disintegration trap denotes a path-dependent process wherein economic losses trigger psychosocial deterioration, psychosocial deterioration triggers institutional distrust, and institutional distrust triggers the dissolution of the state-society bond. This cyclical relationship also corresponds with Fukuyama's (2022) analyses concerning the fragility of liberal democracies, demonstrating how the erosion of institutional legitimacy threatens the social contract. Türkiye, by virtue of its geographical position, historical legacy, and regional relations, constitutes one of the countries where these transformation processes have been most intensely experienced. As Zürcher (2017) emphasizes, the transformation processes in Türkiye's modern history have established a terrain upon which state-society relations have been continuously renegotiated. Original field findings from the country pertaining to the 2023-2025 period document that perceptions regarding both individual economic circumstances and the general trajectory of the national economy have rapidly deteriorated across different segments of society.

The field research encompassing five distinct social strata and conducted with a total of five hundred participants reveals the dimensions of the deterioration in economic perceptions through concrete data. This field research was conducted in one-on-one interview and conversational settings, with tables constructed by recording the responses given to questions posed during the

interviews. Although the tables were prepared based on 100 individuals from each of the five distinct strata, the actual number of individuals interviewed was at least five times greater than those indicated in the tables. The most conservative estimates of the extreme reactions, weariness, and grievance declarations identified during the interviews have been reflected in the tables. The average of responses to the question "What change has occurred in your own economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year" stood at negative 23.8 percent in 2023, rising to negative 37 percent in 2024 and negative 56 percent in 2025. An even more striking picture emerges in perceptions regarding the national economy: the average of responses to the question "What change has occurred in the economic situation of the country" was negative 18.4 percent in 2023, increasing to negative 31.4 percent in 2024 and negative 75.4 percent in 2025 (Table 1). These data exhibit parallelism with the trends of economic insecurity and institutional trust erosion identified at the global scale by the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2022). These findings demonstrate, in the manner predicted by narrow corridor theory, that economic stress generates cumulative pressure on the societal emotional climate and threatens the fragile equilibrium in state-society relations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Consequently, this study aims to generate regional lessons by examining the Türkiye case not merely as a national case, but within a comparative framework with regional countries that have previously experienced severe destabilization in the context of the Greater Middle East Project (Angrist, 2019; Ahram, 2019).

Income erosion constitutes the first and most concrete link in the societal disintegration trap. In this article, income erosion is read not merely through nominal wage increases, but through international purchasing power and "hard asset" comparisons, particularly value loss denominated in grams of gold. This approach, consonant with North et al.'s (2009) limited access order concept, aims to render visible the actual welfare changes underlying official economic indicators. Although the Turkish Statistical Institute's (2025) consumer price index data reflect nominal increases, measurement in gold terms more clearly reveals the actual purchasing power loss underlying these increases. Tracking the Turkish lira, US dollar, and gram gold equivalents of the minimum wage, lowest civil servant salary, and lowest pension in Türkiye based on September figures exposes the actual welfare loss accumulated behind nominal increases (Gürkaynak et al., 2023; Gürkaynak et al., 2015). When concrete data are examined, a striking picture emerges: while the minimum wage corresponded to 14.493 grams of gold in 2007, this value declined to 5.882 grams in 2024 (Table 2). The lowest pension, which stood at 19.13 grams of gold in 2003, fell to 3.01 grams in 2021 and managed to reach only 4.32 grams by 2024 (Table 4).

This phenomenon of "impoverishment in gold terms" constitutes one of the fundamental dynamics feeding the mechanisms of "insecuritization of daily life" and "narrowing of the future horizon" emphasized in the fragility literature (Carment & Samy, 2023; North et al., 2009). World Bank (n.d.) World Development Indicators data document how societal fragility deepens in middle-income countries during similar periods of economic pressure. Studies examining the effect of the relationship between inflation and exchange rates on societal welfare perception through the macroeconomic regime and expectation channel demonstrate that the political and social effects of income erosion accumulate rapidly under high inflation conditions (Gürkaynak et al., 2023).

For this reason, this study conceptualizes income erosion not as a mere economic indicator, but as a domain of fragility production situated at the center of the relationship between the state's protective capacity and society's consent and loyalty patterns (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; O'Donnell, 2010). When evaluated within the framework of narrow corridor theory, the weakening of the state's protective and supervisory function toward its citizens leads to the erosion of sentiments of loyalty toward the state among social segments; this situation constitutes the first link of the societal disintegration trap.

Field research data document the perceptual transformation created by income erosion across different social strata. While the negative perception of merchants and business representatives regarding their own economic situation was negative 21 percent in 2023, it rose to negative 52 percent in 2025. Among retirees, this rate increased from negative 29 percent to negative 64 percent during the same period. The most striking change is observed among youth: negative perception rose from negative 29 percent to negative 65 percent. Among academic staff and other civil servants, it increased from negative 14 percent to negative 38 percent, and among homemakers from negative 26 percent to negative 61 percent (Table 1). These data demonstrate, in the manner proposed by Besley and Persson (2011), that economic pressure creates a parallel trajectory of deterioration across all social strata, and that this situation has transformed into an environment of collective disillusionment. When evaluated within the framework of Norris and Inglehart's (2019) cultural backlash theory, such widespread environments of disillusionment can prepare the ground for populist discourses and polarizing politics. From the perspective of societal resilience theory, this finding indicates that society's shared coping mechanisms, which serve as buffers against economic shocks, have weakened (Ostrom, 2015).

The concept of societal burnout, which constitutes the second link of the societal disintegration trap, is addressed in this article not merely as an individual psychological state, but as an indicator of a collective emotional climate shaped within an environment of economic pressure, uncertainty, and institutional distrust. Moghaddam's (2018) mutual radicalization theory explains how intergroup tensions can escalate when societal burnout persists over extended periods. The burnout literature demonstrates that this condition, which emerges through the erosion of individuals' coping capacities under prolonged stress conditions, generates negative effects on social participation, productivity, and solidarity (Ayaslier et al., 2023; Doğru-Hüzmeli et al., 2021). The recent research by Dağ, Aydın, and Turan (2025) on healthcare workers in Türkiye reveals that burnout syndrome has become widespread among occupational groups and that this creates adverse effects on societal functionality. The "Societal Burnout Index" study conducted by Metropoll Research in December 2025 reveals that "high" and "very high" burnout levels have become widespread across social groups in Türkiye. Across the average of all age groups, the "high" burnout rate stands at 30.4 percent and the "very high" burnout rate at 30.5 percent (Metropoll, 2025). These rates indicate that approximately 61 percent of society is in a state of pronounced burnout.

From the perspective of gender, while the "high" burnout rate among women is 32 percent and the "very high" burnout rate is 33.8 percent, these rates among men have been determined as 28.8

percent and 27.4 percent respectively (Metropoll, 2025). This gender-based differentiation indicates that the multiple role burden of women in both domestic and public spheres increases psychological pressure. When evaluated according to income groups, the most noteworthy finding is that the "very high" burnout rate among those earning at the minimum wage level has reached 41.5 percent (Metropoll, 2025). This rate declines to 30.6 percent among those earning twice the minimum wage and to 19.9 percent among those earning more than four times the minimum wage (Metropoll, 2025). This differentiation indicates that income level determines not only material welfare but also psychological resilience capacity. As Carment and Samy (2023) emphasize within the fragile states framework, this connection between economic fragility and psychosocial deterioration concretizes the multidimensional nature of the societal disintegration trap.

Evaluating the phenomenon of societal burnout merely as a temporary effect of the pandemic period limits the analytical power of this concept. When considered within a broader framework that intersects with structural factors such as economic strain, political polarization, and institutional distrust, the burnout indicator transforms into one of the early warning signals of societal disintegration processes (Castells, 2018; Krastev & Holmes, 2019). Diamond's (2019) analyses of democratic recession demonstrate that societal burnout weakens political participation and that this situation adversely affects the functioning of democratic institutions. When evaluated from the perspective of limited access order theory, the proliferation of societal burnout indicates that the bonds of individuals and groups with the system have weakened and that collective action capacity has eroded (North et al., 2009). When burnout levels are examined according to employment type, it is observed that groups in different forms of employment face similar rates: the average "high" burnout rate is 30.4 percent and the "very high" burnout rate is 30.5 percent (Metropoll, 2025). This homogeneous distribution reveals that burnout has ceased to be specific to a particular occupational group and has transformed into a phenomenon widespread at the societal scale. Consequently, this study aims to render visible the psychological and emotional component of the societal disintegration trap by tracing the effect of income erosion on the emotional climate through the burnout indicator.

State-society decoupling constitutes the third and most complex link of the societal disintegration trap. This concept denotes a structural dissociation that emerges as a result of the accumulation of multiple processes, which cannot be explained by a single institution or singular political event. State-society decoupling is directly related to Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor metaphor: the narrowing of the "narrow corridor" between state capacity and societal consent can lead either to authoritarian tendencies or to societal disintegration. Ginsburg and Huq's (2018) analyses concerning the preservation of constitutional democracies offer important insights regarding how such decoupling processes can be prevented at the institutional level. In other words, it involves a situation wherein the state's regulatory and protective capacity weakens while society's collective action and trust resources simultaneously erode (O'Donnell, 2010). This process can be accelerated by "affective" forms of polarization, that is, the entrenchment of negative emotions toward opposing social and political identities (Aytaç et al., 2025). The recent research by Çınar, Polat, and İspir (2025) on online polarization in Türkiye documents how

affective polarization intensifies in digital environments. Field research findings concretize this dynamic: the average of responses to the question "What change has occurred in the social and humanitarian situation in the country" was negative 26.6 percent in 2023, increasing to negative 36.8 percent in 2024 and negative 58.6 percent in 2025 (Table 1).

The deterioration in social and humanitarian situation perception according to social strata displays different patterns. Among academic staff and other civil servants, this rate was negative 32 percent in 2023 and reached negative 65 percent in 2025; among homemakers from negative 23 percent to negative 62 percent; and among youth from negative 28 percent to negative 68 percent (Table 1). This sharp deterioration among youth is particularly concerning from the perspective of societal resilience theory, as the bonds of younger generations with the state and society constitute the foundation of the future social contract (Ostrom, 2015). Galston's (2018) analyses of anti-pluralism demonstrate how the disconnection of younger generations from the system can weaken democratic institutions in the long term. The proliferation of misinformation in digital environments and the strengthening of polarizing communication patterns are gaining an increasingly central position among the factors eroding social trust. The democratic resilience literature reveals that these processes weaken the fabric of social bonds and render institutional legitimacy questionable (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2020).

Recent research examining the effects of populist attitudes and misinformation on trust in the Türkiye context demonstrates that the "trust erosion-polarization-institutional legitimacy" axis can also be traced empirically (Erişen & Erişen, 2025; Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerci, 2025). The entrenchment of negative emotions toward opposing political identities obstructs channels of social dialogue and weakens the capacity to produce collective solutions to shared problems. Della Porta's (2020) studies on social movements and democratic renewal offer alternative perspectives on how such blockages can be overcome through bottom-up democratic participation mechanisms. This situation corresponds with North et al.'s (2009) limited access order concept: the erosion of trust among social groups leads to coordination failures and collective action problems. For this reason, this study tests the assumption that economic erosion and burnout not only produce welfare loss, but can also amplify the risk of dissociation in state-society relations by weakening the fabric of social bonds (Carment & Samy, 2023).

Within this framework, the fundamental research question of the article has been formulated as follows: In the context of the Greater Middle East Project, through which mechanisms do income erosion and societal burnout in Türkiye feed the processes leading to state-society decoupling, and in what respects does this pattern bear similarities to the destabilization experiences in the region? The auxiliary research questions supporting this main question are as follows: First, through which channels does income erosion adversely affect the societal emotional climate? Second, how do burnout levels differentiate according to social strata, and to which structural factors is this differentiation attributable? Third, how do the processes of income erosion and burnout articulate with the dynamics of trust erosion and polarization? These questions are of a nature that can be linked to the democratic recession indicators of the V-Dem Project (Coppedge et al., 2024) and offer a comparative framework for understanding Türkiye's regional position. These questions aim

to test the mechanisms of disruption of the state-society equilibrium predicted by narrow corridor theory in the specific case of Türkiye (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019).

The main hypothesis corresponding to the research questions has been formulated as follows: As income erosion increases, societal burnout rises; as the level of burnout increases, social trust erodes; and this combined effect amplifies the risk of state-society decoupling. This hypothesis is consonant with the concept of "fragility spiral" emphasized in the fragile states literature (Carment & Samy, 2023). Hale's (2015) analysis of patronage politics offers an additional theoretical perspective for understanding the effects of such spirals on political regimes. The first auxiliary hypothesis proposes that the loss of purchasing power in gold terms sharpens the perception of economic deterioration. Field data are supportive of this hypothesis: while the gold-denominated value of the minimum wage declined from 14.493 grams in 2007 to 5.882 grams in 2024 (Table 2), the negative perception of all strata regarding their own economic situation rose from negative 23.8 percent to negative 56 percent during the same period (Table 1). The second auxiliary hypothesis advances that high and very high burnout levels strengthen the negative emotional climate that feeds polarization. According to Metropoll data, the presence of approximately 61 percent high or very high burnout levels in society establishes a robust foundation for testing this hypothesis (Metropoll, 2025).

The first of the fundamental concepts employed in this study, "societal disintegration trap," denotes a cyclical and self-reinforcing process that forms when a particular society simultaneously approaches thresholds across multiple domains of fragility. This conceptual framework consciously avoids monocausal explanations, centering instead on the reciprocal interaction of income loss, burnout, and trust erosion (Carment & Samy, 2023; North et al., 2009). The "trap" metaphor, as Besley and Persson (2011) emphasize, points to path-dependent processes that deepen not only through external shocks or interventions but also through the weakening of internal adjustment mechanisms. Collier's (2007) concept of "development traps" offers a complementary framework for understanding the economic and social dimensions of such self-reinforcing negative cycles. From the perspective of limited access order theory, the societal disintegration trap describes a vicious cycle that emerges through the erosion of society's coordination capacity and progressively deepens (North et al., 2009). In the Türkiye context, the sharp deterioration in economic perceptions during the 2023-2025 period strengthens the applicability of this conceptual framework.

The second fundamental concept of the study, "income erosion," denotes the actual purchasing power loss that emerges through the erosion of nominal wage increases in the face of inflation and exchange rate movements. In this article, income erosion is evaluated through "hard asset" comparison, distinct from traditional consumer price index-based measurements. Measurement of purchasing power in grams of gold offers an evaluation opportunity relatively independent of potential deviations in inflation calculations and more clearly reveals the change in actual welfare levels across social strata (Gürkaynak et al., 2023; Gürkaynak et al., 2015). This approach, as emphasized by limited access order theory, renders visible the actual social costs underlying official discourses (North et al., 2009). Drezner, Farrell, and Newman's (2021) analyses concerning

the weaponization of economic interdependence offer an additional perspective for understanding the effects of global economic pressures on national welfare. Field data support this conceptualization: while the lowest pension corresponded to 19.13 grams of gold in 2003, it fell to 3.01 grams in 2021 (Table 4); this situation indicates an approximately 84 percent loss of purchasing power. In the minimum wage, an approximately 59 percent value loss in gold terms from 2007 to 2024 (Table 2), and in the lowest civil servant salary, an approximately 67 percent value loss from 2003 to 2021 (Table 3) have been experienced.

The third fundamental concept, "societal burnout," denotes emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, and loss of motivation that has become widespread at the societal scale, distinct from occupational burnout defined at the individual level. This concept describes a collective state of mind shaped under conditions of economic pressure, political uncertainty, and institutional distrust. From the perspective of societal resilience theory, burnout is an indicator that society's capacity to demonstrate resistance and adapt to shocks has eroded (Ostrom, 2015). According to Metropoll data, the prevalence of societal burnout in Türkiye has reached noteworthy dimensions: while the "very high" burnout rate among those earning at the minimum wage level is 41.5 percent, this rate declines to 19.9 percent among those earning more than four times the minimum wage (Metropoll, 2025). When this income-based differentiation is evaluated together with Chayes's (2020) analyses concerning the relationship between corruption and social trust, it demonstrates how the perception of economic injustice deepens burnout. This differentiation concretizes the causal link between income erosion and societal burnout and supports the main hypothesis of the study.

The fourth fundamental concept, "state-society decoupling," denotes the erosion of society's trust, loyalty, and attribution of legitimacy toward the state concurrent with the weakening of the state's capacity for protection, regulation, and service provision toward its citizens. This concept directly corresponds with Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor metaphor: the disruption of the equilibrium between state capacity and societal control can lead to the dissolution of the social contract. Within the framework of O'Donnell's (2010) theory of the democratic state, state-society decoupling is concretized through the de facto dysfunctionalization of citizenship rights and the state's exclusion of certain social strata from the scope of protection. Donno's (2013) comparative analysis of irregularities in electoral processes offers a complementary perspective for understanding the political dimensions of state-society decoupling. The fragile states literature emphasizes that such decouplings generally follow a gradual process and that detection in early stages is critically important for preventive interventions (Carment & Samy, 2023). The study aims to assess at which stage of this decoupling process the current dynamics in Türkiye are situated.

The fundamental aim of this study is to reveal how the processes of income erosion, societal burnout, and state-society decoupling mutually reinforce each other in Türkiye, and to evaluate these dynamics within a comparative framework with the experiences of regional countries that have undergone destabilization in the context of the Greater Middle East Project. The study carries the aim of generating regional lessons rather than examining the Türkiye case merely as a national case (Angrist, 2019; Ahram, 2019). Gerges's (2018) historical analysis concerning the formation of the Arab world offers an important background for understanding the historical roots of regional

destabilization processes. In pursuit of this aim, the study envisions accomplishing three fundamental objectives: First, to document the effect of income erosion on the societal emotional climate through original field data and purchasing power comparisons in gold terms. Second, to reveal the inter-strata distribution of societal burnout and its relationship with economic fragility in light of Metropoll data. Third, to analyze how these two processes articulate with trust erosion and polarization dynamics in state-society relations within the framework of narrow corridor and limited access order theories.

The scope of the study has been determined within geographical, temporal, and thematic boundaries. Geographically, the study takes Türkiye as its focal case; however, within the comparative framework, it also addresses the experiences of countries such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen that have undergone destabilization in the context of the Greater Middle East Project (Dodge, 2013; Lacher, 2020; Mazur, 2021; Manea, 2024). Partrick's (2025) recent analysis concerning state failure in the Middle East offers important conceptual tools for this comparative framework. How drought-induced migration and economic contraction escalated social tensions in the Syria case; how sectarian polarization fragmented state-society relations in the Iraq case; and how the dissolution of central authority dispersed the social fabric in the Libya and Yemen cases constitute the fundamental reference points of the comparative analysis (Orkaby, 2021). Malkasian's (2021) comprehensive analysis of the Afghanistan experience and Manchanda's (2020) regional imagination analysis offer complementary perspectives for understanding the effects of external interventions on social structures. Temporally, the study covers the 2003-2025 period; however, original field data focus on the 2023-2025 years, while wage and salary data focus on the 2003-2024 period. Thematically, the study addresses economic, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions together; excluding military conflict or direct political violence processes from its scope, it examines forms of "invisible fragility."

Methodologically, the study is positioned within the qualitative research tradition and adopts an interpretive approach. The research design has been configured as case-based comparative analysis. Schubiger's (2023) study on state violence and insurgent adaptation demonstrates the power of comparative case analysis methodology in such research. Data sources consist of three main components: First, original field research findings encompassing five different social strata (merchants and business, academic staff and other civil servants, retirees, homemakers, youth) and conducted with a total of five hundred participants. Second, a secondary dataset containing the Turkish lira, US dollar, and gram gold equivalents of the minimum wage, lowest civil servant salary, and lowest pension for the 2003-2024 period (Table 2, Table 3, Table 4). Third, the Societal Burnout Index data conducted by Metropoll Research in December 2025 (Metropoll, 2025). While preparing the tables presenting the results of three years (2023-2025) comparatively, the fact that Metropoll Research's November 2025 research results presented a picture that confirms the findings of this study has rendered the data upon which the article rests considerably more valuable. For this reason, some of the Metropoll Research data have also been included in this study text. The regional conflict data of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Högbladh, 2025; Sundberg & Melander, 2013) are evaluated as an additional data source for comparative analysis.

The analytical framework of the study has been constructed at the intersection of North, Wallis, and Weingast's (2009) limited access order concept, Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor metaphor, and Carment and Samy's (2023) fragile states framework. These theoretical sources situate descriptive findings within an explanatory framework and provide conceptual consistency for comparative analysis.

The anticipated contributions of this study are concretized at three levels. At the theoretical level, the study contributes an original perspective to the literature on fragile states and societal resilience concerning the forms of "invisible fragility" in middle-income countries. While existing literature generally addresses fragility and disintegration processes in post-conflict or extreme poverty conditions, this study examines how these processes operate in a country possessing relatively strong state capacity. Lewis's (2017) compilation on the relationship between religion and terrorism and Nye's (2019) analysis of the moral problematic in foreign policy enrich the normative dimensions of this study. At the methodological level, the study offers new measurement instruments for similar research through the measurement of income erosion in gold terms and the documentation of the inter-strata distribution of societal burnout. At the applied level, the study provides concrete indicators for the early detection of societal disintegration risks and the design of preventive interventions. When evaluated within the framework of narrow corridor theory, this study offers an analytical framework for assessing Türkiye's capacity to maintain the state-society equilibrium and the risks of disruption to this equilibrium (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). In conclusion, the study aims to contribute to the extraction of regional lessons from Türkiye's own experience and to the establishment of a comparative reference point for countries confronting similar processes.

2. Literature Review

Academic interest in understanding processes of societal disintegration has increased markedly, particularly in conjunction with waves of regional instability following the post-Cold War era. The body of knowledge produced within the fields of fragile states and conflict studies focuses on comprehending under what conditions societies tend toward disintegration, through which mechanisms these processes advance, and which interventions can reverse such trajectories (Carment & Samy, 2023; Besley & Persson, 2011). In this context, Kaldor's (1999) conceptualization of "new wars" has provided a pioneering framework for understanding forms of disintegration that differ from classical interstate conflicts—forms that are identity-based, intertwined with economic destruction, and directly targeting civil society. The fundamental assumption of this literature is that societal disintegration does not occur as a sudden collapse but rather materializes through the gradual deepening of interacting domains of fragility. Processes such as economic contraction, loss of institutional legitimacy, erosion of social trust, and collective exhaustion may appear individually manageable, yet when they operate in concert, they can produce a compound effect that fractures the social fabric (North et al., 2009). Castells' (2018) analysis concerning the crisis of liberal democracy reveals how this compound effect operates at the global scale; it demonstrates how economic insecurity, identity politics, and loss of institutional legitimacy mutually reinforce one another. The experiences of countries undergoing

destabilization within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project provide a rich dataset for empirically testing these theoretical propositions. The disintegration processes experienced across the geography extending from Iraq to Syria, from Libya to Yemen, exhibit similar patterns despite different initial conditions and historical contexts; this circumstance establishes both the legitimacy and necessity of comparative analysis (Dodge, 2013; Mazur, 2021; Lacher, 2020; Manea, 2024). Partrick's (2025) recent study on state failure in the Middle East systematically elucidates the theoretical foundations of this comparative perspective.

The fragile states literature positions the concept of state capacity at the center of understanding disintegration processes. State capacity refers to a state's ability to maintain order within its territory, deliver basic services, collect taxes, and protect its citizens; the weakening of this capacity is regarded as the first harbinger of the dissolution of the social contract (Besley & Persson, 2011). The comparative data provided by the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2024) empirically document how erosion in state capacity runs parallel to democratic backsliding; how these two processes mutually reinforce one another. However, current research reveals that state capacity alone does not provide a sufficient explanation; trust relations among social segments, capacity for collective action, and perceptions of legitimacy are equally determinative (Ostrom, 2015). Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor metaphor offers a powerful framework for conceptualizing this multidimensional relationship. According to this approach, societies are in perpetual pursuit of equilibrium between state power and societal control; disruption of this balance leads either to oppressive state structures or to disorder and chaos. The narrow corridor concept emphasizes that the societal disintegration trap may stem not merely from state weakness but also from the erosion of mechanisms of mutual trust and cooperation between state and society. When read in conjunction with Zürcher's (2017) comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's modern history, this theoretical framework offers an in-depth perspective for understanding how historical tensions in the country's state-society relations articulate with contemporary dynamics. This theoretical perspective provides a critical conceptual tool for understanding the Turkish case; for the country experiences serious tensions in state-society relations despite possessing relatively strong state capacity.

The destabilization processes experienced in the Middle Eastern geography have both validated and expanded the predictions of the fragile states literature. In the case of Iraq, the dissolution of state institutions following the 2003 intervention, the deepening of sectarian polarization, and the destruction of economic infrastructure constituted a classic example of the societal disintegration trap (Dodge, 2013). The Iraqi experience concretely demonstrated how external interventions can deepen societal divisions while weakening state capacity; how economic collapse feeds an environment of insecurity; and how these processes mutually reinforce one another. Malkasian's (2021) comprehensive analysis of the American war in Afghanistan enriches the comparative perspective by revealing how similar dynamics operate in a different geography. In the Syrian case, the post-2011 process has revealed how societal disintegration can be triggered by the combined effect of economic contraction, internal migration caused by climate change-induced drought, and mechanisms of political repression (Mazur, 2021). The Syrian case presents an

example that underscores the importance of the concept of societal burnout; for the erosion of the collective resilience capacity of social segments under conditions of prolonged economic pressure and political uncertainty played a determinative role in triggering conflict dynamics. Gerges' (2018) historical analysis of the making of the Arab world provides an indispensable background for understanding the origins of these contemporary disintegration processes. The Libyan experience has shown how, with the dissolution of central authority, the institutional framework holding the social fabric together can be fragmented; how local identity and loyalty foci can supplant national unity (Lacher, 2020). The Yemeni case has demonstrated how disintegration processes deepen at the intersection of economic fragility and societal divisions; how regional power competition accelerates this process (Manea, 2024; Orkaby, 2021). The systematic data provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Sundberg & Melander, 2013; Höglbladh, 2025) objectively document the intensity and prevalence of these regional conflicts. These four cases, despite different historical and structural conditions, point to a common pattern: under conditions where economic pressure, loss of institutional legitimacy, and erosion of social trust operate in concert, the risk of disintegration increases dramatically.

The literature on economic fragility and the societal consequences of income erosion constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of this study's conceptual framework. The effects of macroeconomic instability, high inflation, and exchange rate fluctuations on societal welfare have been comprehensively examined in the political economy literature (Gürkaynak et al., 2023). This research reveals that the erosion of nominal wage increases against inflation not only produces material welfare loss but also engenders deeper psychosocial consequences by constricting future expectations, feeding perceptions of insecurity, and weakening belief in social mobility. The comparative data provided by the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2022) document the effects of economic insecurity on societal values and institutional trust at the global scale; they reveal how this relationship is shaped in different cultural contexts. The limited access order concept of North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) offers an important perspective for understanding the institutional consequences of economic fragility. According to this approach, while the contraction of economic resources strengthens elites' control over resource distribution mechanisms, it erodes social segments' trust in equality of opportunity and social mobility. The World Development Indicators of the World Bank (World Bank, n.d.) provide a systematic data infrastructure for monitoring these processes at the comparative level. The measurement of income erosion in terms of gold offers an original methodological contribution for rendering this process visible. Under conditions where official inflation data are contested, change in purchasing power against gold—a universal store of value—can more reliably reflect the actual welfare status of social segments. This approach renders visible the actual welfare loss behind nominal wage increases in the specific case of Türkiye and concretizes the role of income erosion in the societal disintegration trap.

The concept of societal burnout is employed in this study to express a collective emotional state and societal climate, distinct from occupational burnout defined at the individual level. The burnout literature has comprehensively documented that individuals and communities under

prolonged stress conditions develop symptoms of emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, and hopelessness (Ayaslıer et al., 2023; Doğru-Hüzmeli et al., 2021). The validity and reliability study of the burnout syndrome assessment scale in Türkiye by Dağ, Aydın, and Turan (2025) provides a methodological foundation for the measurement of this concept. The transposition of these individual-level findings to the societal scale becomes possible through the concepts of collective resilience and social capital. Ostrom's (2015) theory of common-pool resources and collective action reveals that communities' capacity to resist shocks rests upon patterns of trust, cooperation, and mutual aid among members. Societal burnout expresses the erosion of this collective capacity; it indicates that with the spread of individual exhaustion at the societal level, society's ability to cope with problems and produce common solutions weakens. Moghaddam's (2018) concept of mutual radicalization explains how tensions between groups escalate under conditions of societal burnout; how this process feeds dynamics of extremism. The polarization literature points to an important consequence of societal burnout: exhausted social segments become more susceptible to simplifying and enemy-creating discourses against complex problems; this situation feeds polarization (Aytaç et al., 2025; Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerci, 2025). Research examining the polarizing effects of the digital environment reveals that disinformation and hate speech spread more rapidly under conditions of burnout; that critical thinking capacity weakens (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2020). These findings demonstrate that societal burnout is not merely an outcome but also a mechanism that accelerates the disintegration process.

The literature on the dissolution of state-society relations constitutes the third conceptual pillar of this study. O'Donnell's (2010) theory of the democratic state emphasizes that the relationship between state and citizen is not limited merely to functional dimensions such as service provision and tax collection; it also encompasses normative dimensions such as mutual recognition, commitment to protection, and attribution of legitimacy. From this perspective, state-society decoupling is concretized when the state's capacity or will to protect its citizens begins to be questioned; when the feelings of allegiance and obedience of social segments toward the state erode. Donno's (2013) study on the defense of democratic norms reveals the role of international actors in these processes; how external pressures interact with internal dynamics. The concept of legitimacy holds central importance in understanding this process. The legitimacy literature extending from Weber's classical typology to the present reveals that power can be sustained not merely through coercive capacity but through societal acceptance. During periods of economic crisis, the weakening of the state's capacity to protect its citizens undermines the foundations of legitimacy; this situation leads social segments to reevaluate their expectations and allegiances toward the state (Fukuyama, 2022). The fragile states literature emphasizes that loss of legitimacy is generally a gradual and initially invisible process; however, once certain thresholds are crossed, it can deepen rapidly (Carment & Samy, 2023). Schubiger's (2023) analysis of the relationship between state violence and rebel cohesion concretely demonstrates how loss of legitimacy can trigger spirals of violence. This theoretical prediction provides a critical framework for assessing the potential consequences of the rapid deterioration of economic perceptions in the Turkish case.

Polarization dynamics constitute an important component of the state-society decoupling process. Contemporary political science literature reveals that polarization encompasses not only divergence in political views but also the sharp differentiation of social identities from one another and the entrenchment of negative sentiments toward opposing groups. Aytaç et al.'s (2025) concept of affective polarization provides an important tool for conceptualizing the emotional dimensions of this process. Affective polarization denotes the proliferation and normalization of negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and distrust toward political rivals; this situation constricts the possibilities for social dialogue and compromise. Çınar, Polat, and İspir's (2025) research examining affective polarization in online reactions to Türkiye's 2024 stray animals law concretely reveals a current example of these dynamics. Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerci's (2025) research specific to Türkiye demonstrates with concrete data how affective polarization erodes democratic citizenship virtues; how values such as tolerance of different views and mutual respect weaken. These findings demonstrate that the societal disintegration trap is directly connected not only to material conditions but also to emotional climate and social psychology. In polarized societies, the capacity to produce collective solutions to common problems weakens; this situation deepens tensions in state-society relations.

The effects of disinformation and digital communication environments on social trust constitute an important focal point of contemporary literature. The comprehensive research of Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018) documents the polarizing dynamics of the digital environment; how misinformation spreads and how the perception of reality becomes fragmented. Bennett and Livingston (2020) examine the destructive effects of this process on democratic institutions; they reveal how the transformation in the media ecosystem erodes social trust. Lewis' (2017) compilation on the relationship between religion and terrorism comprehensively addresses the role of the digital environment in radicalization processes; how extremist discourses spread. In the Turkish context, Erisen and Erisen's (2025) research empirically demonstrates the relationship between populist attitudes and susceptibility to misinformation; how this compound effect weakens institutional trust. These findings support the theoretical proposition that disinformation spreads more easily and leaves deeper effects under conditions of societal burnout. Exhausted individuals and communities, with the weakening of their capacities to evaluate complex information and think critically, become more susceptible to simplifying and enemy-creating discourses. This dynamic provides an important intervening mechanism for understanding how income erosion and societal burnout lead to state-society decoupling.

Democratic backsliding and authoritarian tendencies stand in a complex relationship with societal disintegration processes. Researchers such as Diamond (2019), Krastev and Holmes (2019), and Galston (2018) have comprehensively documented the weakening of democratic institutions at the global scale; the strengthening of populist and authoritarian tendencies. This literature reveals that democratic backsliding can be both an outcome of societal disintegration and a factor that deepens it. In an environment of economic crisis and societal insecurity, citizens may become more receptive to promises of strong leadership and order; this situation prepares the ground for the weakening of democratic oversight mechanisms. The democratic backsliding data provided by the

V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2024) systematically reveal how this process has proliferated at the global scale; how patterns in different countries resemble one another. On the other hand, the erosion of democratic institutions constricts the channels through which social segments can voice their grievances and seek solutions; this situation accumulates societal tension (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018). The cultural backlash theory of Norris and Inglehart (2019) examines the combined effect of economic insecurity and cultural anxieties; it explains how populist movements gain strength under these conditions. In the Turkish case, this theoretical perspective provides an important framework for assessing the political consequences of economic erosion. How the confidence of social segments in democratic processes is affected under increasing economic pressure; how this situation shapes state-society relations constitutes one of the fundamental questions of this study. The literature on the societal consequences of external interventions carried out within the scope of the Greater Middle East Project forms the foundation of this study's regional comparative framework. Carothers and Ottaway's (2004) early assessment anticipated the structural problems and potential negative consequences of the project; subsequent developments have largely confirmed these predictions. The International Crisis Group's (2004) report titled "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperilled at Birth" carries the character of an early warning supporting these predictions. Cooley and Nexon (2020) examine how regional interventions produce unexpected outcomes in the process of the dissolution of American hegemony; how interaction with local dynamics creates complex patterns. Güney and Gökcan's (2010) study offering an analysis of the "Greater Middle East" concept as modern geopolitical imagination in American foreign policy provides an important perspective for comprehending the ideological background of these interventions. Angrist (2019) and Ahram (2019) present a comparative analysis of social movements and destabilization processes in Arab geography; they distinguish between common and unique dynamics in different countries. Manchanda's (2020) study on the imagination of Afghanistan reveals how external interventions interact with local knowledge and perceptions; the unexpected consequences of this interaction. This literature emphasizes that external interventions can trigger but cannot determine societal disintegration processes; internal dynamics and local conditions are of critical importance in shaping outcomes. In the Turkish case, this perspective provides a conceptual framework for understanding how the country is affected by regional instability; yet how its own internal dynamics transform these effects in specific ways. Although the country has not experienced a direct external intervention, it has been intensely affected by the economic, societal, and political reflections of regional instability.

The concept of societal resilience is gaining an increasingly central position in the literature as the antithesis of disintegration processes. Resilience refers to a society's capacity to resist economic shocks, political crises, and social tensions, to adapt, and to recover (Ostrom, 2015). This capacity rests upon multiple components such as the robustness of institutional arrangements, the level of social trust, patterns of collective action, and the ability to unite around shared values. The fragile states literature emphasizes that resilience is directly related not only to state capacity but also to the strength of civil society, ties between communities, and coping mechanisms at the local level

(Carment & Samy, 2023). Della Porta's (2020) study on social movements and democratic renewal examines how bottom-up resilience mechanisms operate during periods of crisis; how social organizations can resist tendencies toward disintegration. This perspective aligns with the "shackled Leviathan" idea in Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor concept; it emphasizes the role of civil society in maintaining the balance between state power and societal control. This perspective demonstrates that the societal disintegration trap is not inevitable; that under certain conditions societies can find exit paths from this trap. However, resilience capacity itself must be considered as a resource that can erode. Under conditions of prolonged economic pressure, institutional distrust, and societal burnout, resilience mechanisms weaken; this situation renders society more vulnerable to the disintegration trap.

Corruption and patronage dynamics constitute an important dimension of societal disintegration processes. Chayes' (2020) comprehensive research reveals that corruption signifies not merely the maldistribution of economic resources but the violation of the social contract and the erosion of legitimacy foundations. Hale's (2015) concept of patronal politics explains how social trust erodes in systems where resource distribution is based on political loyalty; how citizens' expectations toward the state are transformed. These patronal dynamics directly overlap with North et al.'s (2009) concept of limited access order; they reveal how elites shape social order through resource control. This literature emphasizes that perception of corruption produces particularly destructive effects during periods of economic crisis. The perception that scarce resources are being distributed unjustly deepens the disillusionment created by economic pressure; it feeds distrust toward the state. In the Turkish context, the interaction between income erosion and perceptions regarding resource distribution constitutes an important component of the societal disintegration trap. The perception of social segments that certain groups are protected or favored while they experience economic difficulties produces a deep sense of injustice beyond mere material loss; this situation weakens social bonds.

The effects of international relations and geopolitical dynamics on internal societal processes constitute an important component of this study's regional framework. Drezner, Farrell, and Newman's (2021) concept of weaponized interdependence examines how economic relations can be used as political instruments; the societal consequences in target countries of this situation. International sanctions, trade restrictions, and financial pressures directly affect economic conditions in target countries; the societal reflections of these effects often concentrate among the most vulnerable segments. Nye's (2019) study on the relationship between foreign policy and morality discusses the tension between intended and unintended consequences of international interventions; how the effects on local societies should be calculated. Cooley and Nexon's (2020) concept of exit from hegemonic order provides a critical perspective for understanding the regional reflections of these international dynamics; it reveals how the transformation of the American global order can trigger local instabilities. Türkiye's position within the scope of the Greater Middle East Project presents a complex example of these dynamics. On the one hand, the country bears the economic and societal costs of regional instability; on the other hand, it confronts

international economic and political pressures. These multiple sources of pressure must be considered as external factors feeding income erosion and societal burnout processes.

The existing literature, while providing a rich conceptual framework for understanding societal disintegration processes, also contains certain gaps and limitations. First, the fragile states literature generally focuses on disintegration processes in societies under conditions of extreme poverty or post-conflict settings; it does not adequately address more nuanced forms of fragility observed in middle-income countries. How societal disintegration traps operate in countries like Türkiye, which possess relatively strong state capacity and developed economic infrastructure, is an insufficiently examined area in the literature. This gap indicates that the theoretical possibilities offered by Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor concept have not yet been sufficiently tested at the empirical level. Second, research on the societal consequences of income erosion is generally conducted through macroeconomic indicators and general welfare measurements; it cannot adequately differentiate the specific effects in different social segments. Alternative approaches such as measurement of purchasing power in terms of gold provide an important methodological contribution for overcoming this limitation. The differences between the official data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (n.d.) and alternative measurements concretize the importance of this methodological debate. Third, while the concept of societal burnout has been comprehensively examined at the individual level, how collective burnout operates at the societal scale, through which mechanisms it spreads, and how it articulates with societal disintegration processes have not been sufficiently researched.

This study aims to provide original contributions toward addressing the gaps in the existing literature. First, the study expands the geographical and structural scope of the fragile states literature by examining how societal disintegration traps operate in a middle-income country. The Turkish case holds theoretical importance in demonstrating how societal disintegration risks can accumulate even in the absence of open conflict or extreme poverty conditions. In this context, the study expands Besley and Persson's (2011) theoretical framework on the relationship between state capacity and development by adapting it to the specific conditions of middle-income countries. Second, by employing the measurement of income erosion in terms of gold, the study renders visible the actual welfare changes behind nominal indicators and differentiates the specific effects in different social segments. This methodological approach provides an applicable measurement tool for countries in similar conditions. Third, by treating societal burnout as a collective phenomenon, the study conceptualizes the role of this concept in societal disintegration processes. The inter-segment burnout distribution provided by Metropoll data supplies an empirical foundation for this conceptualization (Metropoll, 2025). Fourth, by addressing regional experiences within the scope of the Greater Middle East Project in a comparative framework, the study contributes to drawing regional lessons from the Turkish case. This comparative perspective is of critical importance for understanding both specific dynamics and common patterns.

In conclusion, the literature on societal disintegration processes provides a rich body of knowledge at the intersection of multiple conceptual frameworks including fragile states, societal resilience, economic fragility, polarization, and democratic backsliding. This literature reveals that societal

disintegration cannot be understood through monocausal explanations; the mutual interaction of economic, psychosocial, institutional, and political dimensions must be taken into account. This multidimensional approach aligns with Castells' (2018) analysis of the crisis of liberal democracy; it emphasizes the complexity of the crisis that cannot be reduced to a single source. Regional experiences within the scope of the Greater Middle East Project provide concrete examples where these theoretical propositions are empirically validated. The Turkish case occupies a unique position within this regional context: although the country has not experienced direct conflict, it exhibits certain dynamics of the disintegration trap in terms of income erosion, societal burnout, and tensions in state-society relations. When this unique position is evaluated in light of Zürcher's (2017) comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's modern history, it provides an in-depth perspective for understanding how the country's historical legacy articulates with contemporary dynamics. This study aims both to understand the specific conditions of the country and to provide theoretical contributions to the fragile states and societal resilience literature by applying the conceptual tools of the existing literature to the Turkish case. In the following section, the conceptual framework set forth in this literature review will be systematically structured to form the theoretical foundations of the study.

3. Theoretical Framework

The corpus of literature delineated in the preceding section unequivocally demonstrates that processes of societal disintegration cannot be apprehended through monocausal explanatory frameworks; rather, the mutual interaction of economic, psychosocial, institutional, and political dimensions must be accorded due consideration. The theoretical framework advanced in this section integrates three foundational theoretical approaches to systematically elucidate this multidimensional interaction: Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor theory, North, Wallis, and Weingast's (2009) concept of limited access order, and Besley and Persson's (2011) framework concerning the relationship between state capacity and development. These three theoretical approaches are examined not as independent constructs but within a relationship of mutual complementarity; for processes of societal disintegration constitute the product of interpenetrating dynamics such as the disruption of state-society equilibrium, the inequitable distribution of resources, and the erosion of institutional legitimacy (Fukuyama, 2022). These three theoretical approaches furnish a common set of mechanisms elucidating the relationship among income erosion, societal burnout, and state-society decoupling. The narrow corridor theory explicates how the fragile equilibrium between state capacity and societal oversight may be disrupted; the limited access order framework illuminates how societies, upon transgressing certain thresholds, may become entrapped in self-reinforcing negative cycles; and the state capacity framework explains how economic pressures erode institutional performance and perceptions of legitimacy. This integrated theoretical foundation provides an analytical framework for explicating the dynamics of societal disintegration observed in Türkiye within the context of the Greater Middle East Project.

The narrow corridor theory constitutes the primary theoretical foundation of this study. Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) posit that for societies to progress along the path of sustainable development

and liberty, a "narrow corridor" must exist between state capacity and societal oversight. Within this corridor, the state fulfills its functions of protection and regulation vis-à-vis its citizens, while society simultaneously maintains oversight mechanisms that prevent the state from becoming excessively powerful and forfeiting its autonomy. The narrowing of this corridor occurs when the protective capacity of the state weakens or when societal oversight mechanisms erode. Within the context of this study, income erosion is evaluated as a concrete indicator that the state's expected function of providing economic security and welfare protection to its citizens has attenuated. Indeed, the regression of the minimum wage from the equivalent of 14,493 grams of gold in 2007 to 5,882 grams in 2024, and the decline of the lowest pension from 19.13 grams of gold in 2003 to 3.01 grams in 2021, constitute objective indicators of the erosion in the state's protective capacity (Table 2, Table 3, Table 4). The deterioration in economic perception revealed by the field research findings indicates that the perception that expectations regarding the protective role of the state remain unfulfilled has become widespread across diverse segments of society. The loss of purchasing power denominated in gold, as an objective indicator of this expectation rupture, concretizes the economic dimension of the narrow corridor (Gürkaynak et al., 2023; Gürkaynak et al., 2015).

The concept of limited access order constitutes the second theoretical pillar complementing the narrow corridor theory. North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) demonstrate that societies have developed different forms of order throughout historical processes, and that in limited access orders, elites ensure societal stability through control over resources. In this order, access to economic and political opportunities is restricted to certain groups; while this circumstance provides stability in the short term, it deepens societal vulnerabilities over the long term. During periods of economic duress, the perception of injustice generated by the limited access order intensifies; grievances concerning the distribution of resources nourish societal distrust. This dynamic, which converges with Hale's (2015) concept of patronage politics, attenuates state-society relations under conditions where the perception that resource distribution occurs on the basis of political loyalty becomes widespread. This theoretical perspective is concretized by the regression of the lowest civil servant salary from approximately 29-30 grams of gold during the 2003-2007 period to 9.79 grams in 2021; this parallel decline across different income groups demonstrates that the structural vulnerabilities created by the limited access order affect not merely specific segments but society in its entirety (Table 2, Table 3, Table 4). In the Turkish context, the generation of similarly negative perceptions across different societal segments by income erosion indicates that the structural vulnerabilities created by the limited access order have proliferated throughout society at large. This theoretical perspective elucidates that economic duress not only produces material loss but also erodes the foundations of the social contract.

The third theoretical framework, which focuses on the relationship between state capacity and development, draws upon the work of Besley and Persson (2011). This framework emphasizes that state capacity is related not merely to institutional structures but also to the manner in which these structures are perceived by society. The state's capacity for taxation, regulation, and redistribution is directly correlated with the trust and loyalty that citizens hold toward the state.

When the perception that the state cannot fulfill its protective functions becomes widespread during periods of economic crisis, these foundations of trust and loyalty are shaken. The field research findings substantiate this theoretical proposition: the mean response to the question "What change has occurred in the economic situation of the country" rose from minus 18.4 percent in 2023 to minus 75.4 percent in 2025; this precipitous deterioration demonstrates that societal perception regarding state capacity has rapidly become more adverse (Table 1). The concept of societal resilience emphasized in the literature review elucidates the relationship between state capacity and societal cohesion in this context (Ostrom, 2015). Resilience denotes the collective coping mechanisms that serve as a buffer against economic shocks for societies; however, under prolonged economic duress, these mechanisms weaken. The fact that the deterioration in economic perception revealed by the field findings generates a parallel trend of negativity across all societal segments constitutes a significant indicator that societal resilience capacity has eroded. This circumstance converges with the "silent erosion" processes emphasized in Carment and Samy's (2023) fragile states framework.

The integration of these three theoretical approaches constitutes the fundamental analytical framework of this study. The narrow corridor theory explicates how the state-society equilibrium may be disrupted; the limited access order framework elucidates the structural foundations of this disruption; and the state capacity framework explains the dynamic operation of the process. From this integrated perspective, the societal disintegration trap may be defined as follows: a path-dependent process wherein economic duress triggers societal burnout, societal burnout engenders the erosion of trust, and the erosion of trust in turn precipitates state-society decoupling. This process is not independent of external interventions; yet within the context of the Greater Middle East Project, regional restructuring initiatives present a terrain that may deepen existing internal vulnerabilities (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). Gerges's (2018) historical analysis of the making of the Middle East reveals how regional interventions have transformed local societal structures, demonstrating that the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of this transformation are intertwined. The theoretical framework, for this reason, treats the Greater Middle East Project not as a singularly determinative cause but as a multiplier that interacts with internal societal vulnerabilities. As Acharya and Buzan (2019) emphasize, regional dynamics shape national processes; yet this shaping is filtered through local conditions and societal structures.

The fourth component of the theoretical framework rests upon approaches that conceptualize societal burnout as a collective phenomenon. As underscored in the literature review, the concept of burnout was initially developed at the individual level within the domains of work life and health; however, it has recently been reconsidered as an emotional state shared at the societal scale (Castells, 2018; Krastev & Holmes, 2019). In this study, societal burnout is positioned as the psychosocial reflection of income erosion on the psychological plane. Under conditions of economic duress, uncertainty, and institutional distrust, individuals constrict their expectations for the future; this constriction transforms over time into a shared sentiment of fatigue and helplessness at the societal scale. The Societal Burnout Index data from Metropoll dated December 2025 indicates that high and very high burnout rates in Türkiye have reached approximately sixty

percent on average across age groups (Metropoll, 2025). When examined according to income group distribution, it is observed that the very high burnout rate reaches 41.5 percent among those earning at the minimum wage level, and that this rate decreases as income level rises; however, the fact that even in the highest income group the high burnout rate remains at 34.6 percent reveals that burnout has proliferated across all strata of society (Metropoll, 2025). This level indicates that burnout has ceased to be a marginal phenomenon and has transformed into an emotional climate encompassing society in its entirety. From the perspective of the theoretical framework, societal burnout functions as an intermediary mechanism between income erosion and state-society decoupling; it is posited that rather than economic duress directly producing political outcomes, it first transforms the societal emotional climate, and subsequently this transformation affects perceptions of institutional trust and legitimacy.

The concept of path dependence constitutes the fifth component of the theoretical framework. As North et al. (2009) emphasize, path dependence denotes that small deviations formed in early periods may transform over time into major structural consequences. This concept elucidates that processes of societal disintegration are shaped by long-term accumulation processes rather than instantaneous crises. Income erosion and societal burnout may, in this context, create societal pathways that become increasingly difficult to reverse. The regional case literature demonstrates that in the instances of Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, these pathways were initially perceived as temporary economic difficulties; yet over time they produced permanent insecurity and political decoupling (Dodge, 2013; Lacher, 2020; Manea, 2024). Mazur's (2021) analysis of the Syrian revolution reveals how the process whereby economic pressures transform into societal discontent, discontent into trust erosion, and trust erosion into a crisis of institutional legitimacy deepened over years; Partrick's (2025) comparative study of state failure in the Middle East demonstrates that these pathways exhibit similar patterns at the regional scale. Within the Turkish context, the theoretical framework rests upon the assumption that these pathways have not yet reached a lock-in point. The rapid deepening of the deterioration in economic perception revealed by the field research findings during the 2023-2025 period indicates that the process is in its early stages; yet it has not yet reached an irreversible point. This assumption is directly related to the study's objective of developing preventive policy recommendations; the path dependence approach emphasizes the critical importance of early intervention.

The sixth component of the theoretical framework focuses on the role of trust and legitimacy concepts as intervening variables. The trust literature emphasizes that the relationship between economic performance and political stability is most frequently established through trust (Ostrom, 2015; Ginsburg & Huq, 2018). While income erosion frustrates individuals' expectations of the state, societal burnout causes this disappointment to transform into a persistent emotional state. In this process, trust erosion manifests as a broad dynamic of disintegration that encompasses perceptions not only of the state but also of other members of society. The polarization literature demonstrates that collective problem-solving capacity weakens in contexts where mutual distrust increases (McCoy et al., 2022). Findings of increasing affective polarization in Türkiye indicate that this mechanism is operative (Aytaç et al., 2025; Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerci, 2025). Çınar,

Polat, and İspir's (2025) study examining affective polarization in online reactions reveals how polarizing discourse has proliferated in digital environments and how it deepens societal fragmentation; Erisen and Erisen's (2025) research analyzing the effect of populist attitudes and misinformation on trust demonstrates how this polarization erodes institutional trust. The proliferation of disinformation and polarizing communication in digital environments is evaluated as an additional factor accelerating trust erosion (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2020). The theoretical framework defines trust erosion as the critical threshold on the path to state-society decoupling; it positions trust not as a dependent or independent variable but as a transformative intervening variable. This positioning emphasizes that the relationship between economic indicators and political outcomes is not linear but is filtered through perceptions of trust and legitimacy.

The regional comparative analysis approach constitutes the seventh component of the theoretical framework. The comparative politics literature contends that the emergence of different outcomes in countries with similar structural conditions can only be comprehended through the comparison of processes and mechanisms (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). This study proposes comparing Türkiye with countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya not through direct outcomes but through the early stages of disintegration pathways. This approach focuses on the question "which indicators deteriorated prior to conflict" rather than "why did conflict emerge." The regional case literature reveals that in the aforementioned countries, income loss, societal fatigue, and trust erosion became visible years before conflict (Malkasian, 2021; Manchanda, 2020; Orkaby, 2021). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's georeferenced event dataset demonstrates that violent events in these regional cases exhibit a pattern following deterioration in economic and societal indicators (Sundberg & Melander, 2013; Höglbladh, 2025); similarly, World Values Survey data reveal that institutional trust levels decline systematically in pre-conflict periods (Haerpfer et al., 2022). The fact that Türkiye has not yet experienced these outcomes strengthens the cautionary and preventive dimension of the theoretical framework. From this perspective, Türkiye is positioned not as an exception in the comparative literature but as an early-stage case. Thus, comparison is conducted on the basis of mechanism matching rather than outcome equation; this approach eschews the discourse of inevitability and foregrounds the perspective of preventive analysis and early warning (Carment & Samy, 2023; Schubiger, 2023).

The early warning and preventive theory perspective constitutes the eighth component of the theoretical framework. The conflict literature reveals that while instability is generally perceived as sudden eruptions, underlying it are long-term silent erosion processes (Schubiger, 2023). In this study, income erosion and societal burnout are treated as measurable indicators of this silent erosion. Early warning theories argue that such indicators may generate critical signals for policymakers (Carment & Samy, 2023). The data employed in the Turkish case offer an original contribution in terms of demonstrating how these indicators may be monitored at the societal level. According to the field research findings, the mean negative perception regarding one's own economic situation rose from minus 23.8 percent in 2023 to minus 56 percent in 2025; this approximately 32-point deterioration over a three-year period concretely reveals that early warning

indicators are approaching critical thresholds (Table 1). The precipitous deepening of the deterioration in economic perception revealed by the field research findings over the three-year period concretizes the functionality of early warning indicators. This approach enables the theoretical framework to assume not merely an explanatory but also a predictive function. Thus, the study adopts a position focused on understanding the antecedent rather than the post-hoc analyses frequently encountered in the literature. The early warning approach enhances the practical value of the theoretical framework, strengthening its potential to generate applicable implications for policymakers beyond academic contribution.

The ninth component of the theoretical framework rests upon a multi-level analysis approach. The multi-level governance literature emphasizes that processes of societal disintegration are shaped not solely by national policies but in conjunction with global and regional dynamics (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). In this context, the Greater Middle East Project is treated as a superordinate framework generating interaction among global norms, regional power balances, and national political-economic structures. The processes of income erosion and societal burnout in Türkiye are conceptualized as the national-level manifestations of this multi-level interaction. Drezner, Farrell, and Newman's (2021) concept of weaponized interdependence explains how economic relations may be employed as political instruments and the societal consequences thereof in target countries. Zürcher's (2017) comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's modern history reveals the historical origins of the country's interaction with regional and global dynamics, providing an in-depth perspective for understanding how this interaction shapes contemporary societal processes. International sanctions, trade restrictions, and financial pressures directly affect economic conditions in target countries; the societal repercussions of these effects most frequently concentrate in the most vulnerable segments. Cooley and Nexon's (2020) concept of exit from hegemonic order provides a critical perspective for understanding the regional ramifications of these international dynamics, revealing how the transformation of the American global order may trigger local instabilities. This multi-level approach enables the analysis of internal and external factors without reducing one to the other, allowing the evaluation of both the particular conditions of the Turkish case and its regional context in conjunction.

The tenth component of the theoretical framework aims to establish an analytical balance that eschews normative claims. Numerous studies conducted within the context of the Greater Middle East Project carry the risk of employing either conspiracy-centered or excessively normative language (Güney & Gökcan, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2004). This study treats the Greater Middle East Project not as a direct causal agent but as a contextual framework that interacts with internal societal vulnerabilities. Thus, the theoretical framework avoids reductionist explanations. As Diamond (2019) emphasizes in his analysis of threats to liberal democracy, processes of societal disintegration cannot be reduced to a single external factor; the complex interaction of internal vulnerabilities, institutional weaknesses, and external pressures shapes these processes. Galston's (2018) work on anti-pluralism and the populist threat similarly emphasizes the multidimensional nature of societal disintegration. The processes of income erosion and societal burnout observed in Türkiye are analyzed within this framework as internal dynamics; the Greater

Middle East Project provides a background explicating how these dynamics acquire meaning in the regional context. This approach constrains causality claims and concentrates on correlation and mechanism analysis. The structure-agent interaction emphasized in the international relations literature theoretically supports this analytical balance; external structural pressures do not directly determine societal outcomes but are filtered through local agents and institutions (Nye, 2019). This perspective strengthens the academic legitimacy of the study while enabling it to present an evidence-based analysis distant from political polemics.

The original contribution of the theoretical framework resides in its provision of systematic integration among data, concept, and theory. The conceptual instruments delineated in the literature review are related to the theoretical approaches presented in this section; the field research findings in turn constitute the ground for the empirical testing of these theoretical propositions. The concept of income erosion is directly related to the state capacity dimension of narrow corridor theory; the concept of societal burnout to the societal consequences of limited access order; and the concept of state-society decoupling to the trust and legitimacy literature. This integrated approach treats societal disintegration traps as an ensemble of mutually reinforcing mechanisms rather than fragmented variables. Chayes's (2020) analysis of the relationship between corruption and the social contract constitutes a significant dimension of this integration; perceptions regarding the inequity of resource distribution play a critical role in the transformation of economic duress into societal distrust. Della Porta's (2020) analysis of how social movements may rescue democracy also reveals the normative dimension of this integrated approach, discussing the conditions under which processes of societal disintegration may be reversed. Donno's (2013) study on the defense of democratic norms analyzes the role of international actors in these processes. The generation of similarly negative perceptions across different societal segments by income erosion in the Turkish context indicates that this mechanism is operative. The theoretical framework, for this reason, does not remain confined to the conceptual instruments of a single discipline but is positioned at the intersection of political science, economics, sociology, and psychology.

The relationship of the theoretical framework to the hypotheses ensures the analytical coherence of the study. The main hypothesis formulated in the introduction section posits that as income erosion increases, societal burnout will increase; as burnout rises, societal trust will erode; and this combined effect will magnify the risk of state-society decoupling. This hypothesis directly corresponds with the mechanism chain presented in the theoretical framework. The narrow corridor theory explicates how income erosion affects perceptions of the state's protective capacity; the limited access order framework elucidates how this deterioration in perception proliferates at the societal scale; and the trust and legitimacy literature explains the political consequences of the process. The first auxiliary hypothesis, "loss of purchasing power denominated in gold sharpens the perception of economic deterioration," is tested with the long-term decline pattern revealed by Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 data; the second auxiliary hypothesis, "high and very high burnout levels strengthen the negative emotional climate that feeds polarization," is tested with the inter-segment burnout distribution presented by Metropoll data. The auxiliary hypotheses are similarly

related to the theoretical framework: the hypothesis that loss of purchasing power denominated in gold will sharpen the perception of economic deterioration is supported by the findings of the political economy literature concerning the relationship between real income loss and societal consequences (Gürkaynak et al., 2023); the hypothesis that high and very high burnout levels will strengthen the negative emotional climate that feeds polarization is grounded in the literature on psychosocial stress and political attitudes (Moghaddam, 2018; Krastev & Holmes, 2019). This theoretical grounding provides guidance not only for the empirical testing of hypotheses but also for the interpretation of findings.

The synthesis of the theoretical framework presents an integrated model explaining societal disintegration traps. This model comprises four fundamental components: first, income erosion frustrating expectations regarding the state's protective capacity; second, this disappointment finding a psychosocial reflection in the form of societal burnout; third, burnout feeding trust erosion and thereby weakening collective problem-solving capacity; and fourth, trust erosion increasing the risk of rupture in state-society relations. These four components are conceptualized as a dynamic process containing mutual interaction and feedback loops rather than a linear causal chain. This dynamic process also converges with Norris and Inglehart's (2019) cultural backlash theory; this theory, which explains how societal values and political attitudes transform under conditions of economic insecurity, also renders visible the cultural dimension of the relationship between income erosion and societal burnout. The concept of path dependence explains how this process may deepen over time; the early warning approach elucidates at which stages of the process intervention is possible. The regional comparative perspective determines Türkiye's position within this model; it is posited that the country is still in the early stages of the disintegration pathway and that space exists for preventive policies. This synthesis enables the study to assume both an explanatory and predictive function.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework presented in this section develops a multidisciplinary and multi-level approach to explicate societal disintegration traps. The narrow corridor theory, limited access order, and state capacity framework constitute the theoretical foundation explaining the relationships among income erosion, societal burnout, and state-society decoupling. The concepts of trust and legitimacy are positioned as intervening variables; the path dependence and early warning approaches explain the temporal dimension of the process. The regional comparative perspective determines the position of the Turkish case within the regional context; the multi-level analysis approach permits the apprehension of the interaction between internal and external factors. The comparative democracy data provided by the V-Dem Project strengthen the empirical foundation of this multi-level analysis, enabling the evaluation of Türkiye's position within the regional context through objective indicators (Coppedge et al., 2024). This theoretical framework guides the design of the research methodology to be presented in the subsequent section, determining which variables will be examined through which data sources and with which analytical techniques. It simultaneously provides a conceptual map for the interpretation of results to be obtained in the findings section and for relating them to the literature in the discussion section.

Thus, the theoretical framework assumes a central function ensuring analytical coherence throughout the entirety of the article.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to elucidate the mechanisms underlying societal disintegration traps. The research design is constructed upon an interpretive and comparative methodology within the framework of an analytical perspective article. Qualitative research constitutes a methodological approach that endeavors to comprehend how individuals make sense of the events they experience and how they respond to these phenomena; it is concerned with words and narratives rather than numerical data. The research question articulated in the introduction seeks to understand through which mechanisms income erosion and societal burnout nourish the processes leading to state-society decoupling, and in what respects this pattern resembles destabilization cases observed in the broader region. The narrow corridor theory and the limited access order concept presented in the literature review and theoretical framework constitute the theoretical foundation of this methodological preference. The qualitative research approach enables a profound comprehension of the layers of meaning, experiences, and perceptions underlying social phenomena, transcending mere numerical measurement (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Carment & Samy, 2023). The interpretive perspective adopted in this study aims to understand the economic and societal vulnerabilities in Türkiye not solely through quantitative indicators, but through an examination of how different social strata experience and perceive these processes. In other words, this study endeavors to answer not merely the question of "what transpired," but also "how did people feel about it and how did they interpret it." The research design thus possesses an exploratory character aimed at revealing the internal logic and mechanisms of a particular social process, rather than hypothesis testing.

The population of the study comprises adult individuals situated across different segments of Turkish society. Drawing from this extensive population, the study group consists of participants selected from five distinct social strata: tradespeople and business sector representatives, faculty members and other civil servants, retirees, homemakers, and youth. Interviews were conducted with a total of five hundred participants, comprising one hundred individuals from each stratum. It should be emphasized that while the tables were constructed on the basis of one hundred persons from each of the five strata, the actual number of individuals interviewed was at least five times the number indicated in the tables. This circumstance demonstrates that the tables reflect merely a representative cross-section, and that the actual scope of the research rests upon a considerably more extensive sample. Participants were selected from diverse geographical regions of Türkiye, with individuals from metropolitan cities, medium-sized urban centers, and districts incorporated into the study; thereby, the study sought to amplify the voices not merely of a specific segment, but of people with different living conditions across the nation. Purposive sampling methodology was employed in the selection of participants; this method denotes the deliberate inclusion of individuals possessing specific characteristics appropriate to the research objectives (Ostrom, 2015). The rationale for selecting five different social strata is to reveal how income erosion and changes in economic perceptions manifest across the broader society, and to demonstrate the

similarities or differences between these strata. Faculty members and civil servants represent the fixed-income group; tradespeople and business representatives represent the variable-income group; retirees constitute the segment receiving transfer income; homemakers provide the household economy perspective; and youth represent the dimension of future expectations. Each stratum reflects a different dimension of the societal disintegration trap: those with fixed incomes demonstrate the direct effects of inflation; those with variable incomes exhibit market fluctuations; retirees reveal the adequacy of state support; homemakers illustrate intra-household economic pressure; and youth manifest hope or hopelessness regarding the future. This diversity enables the tracking of distinct layers of the societal disintegration trap emphasized in the theoretical framework.

The data collection instruments comprise three principal sources, aligned with the objectives and theoretical framework of the research. The first source consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with the five different social strata. The semi-structured interview is a flexible method that, while containing predetermined questions, permits the interviewer to pose additional questions according to the respondent's answers; this approach enables both the acquisition of comparable data and the profound understanding of participants' unique experiences. In these interviews, participants were posed three fundamental questions: first, what change had occurred in their own economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year; second, what change had occurred in the country's economic situation during the same period; and third, what change had occurred in the social and humanitarian situation in the country. These questions are directed toward understanding how economic perception is shaped at both the individual and societal levels, and how it transforms over time. The questions were designed as open-ended, enabling participants to freely express their own experiences and perceptions. The same questions were repeated in 2023, 2024, and 2025, thereby obtaining a three-year comparative opportunity. This three-year monitoring aims to capture not a momentary situation, but a trend that deepens or changes over time; analogous to how a patient's fever is evaluated not through a single measurement, but through daily monitoring. This approach enables the empirical tracking of the path dependence concept emphasized in the theoretical framework; whether the change in economic perceptions reflects a momentary condition or a cumulative process can be assessed through this comparison.

The second data source comprises comparative economic indicators designed to track the real purchasing power of wages and salaries. These indicators reveal the changes in the minimum wage, the lowest civil servant salary, and the lowest pension between 2003 and 2024, expressed in Turkish lira, US dollars, and grams of gold. Tracking salaries solely in Turkish lira terms can be misleading; because due to inflation, nominal figures increase each year, yet this increase does not reflect real purchasing power; therefore, comparison with a measure such as gold, which preserves its value, enables us to perceive the actual situation. The concept of "impoverishment in gold terms" explained in the theoretical framework is concretized through this dataset. Gold, as a measure that maintains its value in international markets and is relatively independent of inflation, renders visible the real welfare changes behind nominal increases (Gürkaynak et al., 2023). These

data were compiled from the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye Electronic Data Delivery System, Ministry of Family and Social Services minimum wage tables, Ministry of Treasury and Finance public personnel salary data, and Social Security Institution pension regulations. September values were adopted for all three salary types to establish a consistent basis for comparison. The rationale for selecting September is that this month falls in the middle of the year and is relatively unaffected by seasonal fluctuations; moreover, using the same month each year enables us to compare like with like. This methodological preference minimizes the effect of seasonal fluctuations and enhances the reliability of inter-annual comparisons.

The third data source comprises research findings revealing levels of societal burnout. Societal burnout refers to the condition of fatigue, hopelessness, and loss of motivation experienced by individuals under prolonged stress, uncertainty, and economic pressure; this concept describes not merely an individual state of mind, but a collective emotional climate felt throughout society. The "Societal Burnout Index" study conducted by Metropoll Research in December 2025 provides an empirical foundation for the psychosocial dimension of this study (Metropoll, 2025). The aforementioned research was designed to monitor the emotional climate prevailing in Turkish society, revealing burnout levels according to different variables such as gender, age groups, income levels, and employment type. This dataset presents the empirical counterpart of the "societal burnout" phenomenon conceptualized in the theoretical framework. The hypothesis formulated in the introduction—that "high and very high burnout levels strengthen the negative emotional climate that feeds polarization"—is tested through these data. The Metropoll research measures burnout levels in four categories: "low," "moderate," "high," and "very high"; thereby enabling concrete observation of which segments of society experience what level of burnout. The strength of the Metropoll research lies in its having been conducted with standardized measurement instruments on an extensive sample and in enabling comparison of burnout levels across different social segments. This study analyzes the different components of the societal disintegration trap within an integrated framework by bringing together the aforementioned data with original field research findings and economic indicators. A point requiring particular emphasis is that while the results of three years (2023–2025) were reflected in the article text through comparative tables, Metropoll Research's November 2025 research results presented a table constituting a continuation of the results evaluated in this study, thereby corroborating our field work; this circumstance has rendered the data upon which the article is based considerably more valuable.

The data collection process was conducted systematically to ensure the reliability of the research. The field research was carried out during the same periods in 2023, 2024, and 2025, thereby obtaining a three-year monitoring opportunity. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with one hundred participants selected from each social stratum, with interviews lasting an average of fifteen to twenty minutes. The field research was conducted in one-on-one interview and conversational settings; responses to questions posed during interviews were recorded in notes and subsequently organized into tables. Interviews were conducted in settings where participants would feel comfortable: with tradespeople at their places of business; with civil servants in their

work environments or nearby cafés; with retirees at their homes or neighborhood coffeehouses; with homemakers at their residences; and with youth at university campuses or youth centers. Although the questions posed to participants were prepared in advance, in accordance with the nature of the semi-structured interview technique, probing questions were also asked according to participants' responses. This flexibility enabled participants to express economic and social changes in their own words. Notes taken during interviews were organized on the same day following each interview and systematically recorded. The purpose of organizing notes on the same day is to record the emotional tone, emphases, and important details captured during the interview while memory is fresh. Consistency was ensured by using the same questions throughout the three-year data collection period; this enabled the tracking of change over time. Data pertaining to economic indicators were compiled at regular intervals from open-access databases of official institutions and updated accordingly.

The analysis of data was conducted within an interpretive framework consistent with the qualitative research approach. Findings obtained from the field research were evaluated separately for each social stratum, followed by inter-stratum comparisons. Participants' responses were grouped into three main categories—positive, negative, and no change—and percentage rates were calculated for each category. For example, if sixty-four out of one hundred retirees indicated that their economic situation had deteriorated, this was recorded as minus sixty-four percent; this simple calculation method facilitates comparison across different strata and different years. A critical point requiring emphasis is that the minimum of extreme reactions, exasperation, and victimization declarations identified in the interviews were reflected in the tables; this circumstance indicates that the findings presented constitute a conservative reflection of the actual societal emotional climate. These ratios reveal how social strata perceive economic change and how this perception has transformed over the years. The analysis of economic indicators was conducted using a comparative approach: changes in the minimum wage, the lowest civil servant salary, and the lowest pension in Turkish lira, dollar, and gold terms were juxtaposed, rendering visible the real welfare changes behind nominal increases. The Metropoll burnout data were disaggregated by gender, age, and income groups to examine the societal distribution of burnout. The integration of three different data sources enables the findings to corroborate one another; when people saying "it got worse" in the field research corresponds with declining salaries in gold terms and increasing burnout rates, the findings become more reliable. The findings obtained from these three data sources were integrated through the mechanism chain presented in the theoretical framework, revealing the relationships between income erosion, deterioration of economic perception, and societal burnout (Besley & Persson, 2011; North et al., 2009).

The validity and reliability of the research were ensured in accordance with qualitative research criteria. Validity and reliability are two fundamental criteria indicating the quality of research; validity addresses the question "are we measuring the right thing," while reliability addresses "are our measurements consistent." Validity concerns whether the research actually measures what it intends to measure. In this study, validity was strengthened through the combined use of multiple data sources: field research findings, official economic indicators, and data from an independent

research organization mutually support and corroborate one another. This method is termed "triangulation" in scientific research (Castells, 2018); when data obtained from different sources point to the same conclusion, the probability of that conclusion reflecting reality increases. For instance, participants' perceptions that their economic situations had deteriorated correspond with the decline in salary values expressed in gold terms. Reliability concerns the replicability and consistency of the research. Interviews conducted over three years using the same questions provided an opportunity to test the consistency of findings. The observation of similar patterns across different social strata indicates that the findings are not coincidental. Furthermore, the derivation of economic indicators from official sources and the explicit specification of the calculation methodology enable these findings to be independently verified. The congruence between the theoretical framework and empirical findings (Carment & Samy, 2023) also strengthens the internal consistency of the research.

The regional comparative dimension of the research situates the Turkish case within a broader context. Countries in the region that have experienced destabilization within the Greater Middle East Project, as explained in the theoretical framework, constitute a reference point for comparison. This comparison does not claim that Türkiye will share the same fate as these countries; it merely assists in understanding how similar processes operate in different countries and in anticipating potential risks. This comparison offers an analytical framework oriented toward understanding how similar mechanisms operate in different contexts, rather than a direct case-matching exercise. Societal disintegration processes observed in countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq harbor common dynamics including income loss, institutional distrust, and societal polarization (Angrist, 2019; Ahram, 2019). The processes in these countries have been documented in detail by Mazur (2021), Lacher (2020), Manea (2024), and Dodge (2013), offering important lessons on how economic crises transform into social conflicts. The fundamental difference between Türkiye and these countries is that it has not yet reached the threshold of conflict and its institutional structures have relatively maintained their functionality. This comparative perspective contributes to understanding the regional significance of the findings in Türkiye and to fulfilling an early warning function. Data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and findings from the World Values Survey (Högbladh, 2025; Haerpfer et al., 2022) strengthen the empirical foundation of this comparative analysis.

The limitations of the research delineate the framework that must be taken into consideration in interpreting the findings. Every research study has limitations, and their explicit acknowledgment is a requirement of scientific integrity; readers should evaluate the findings with awareness of these limitations. The first limitation pertains to the sample size of the field research: five hundred participants does not claim to represent the entirety of Turkish society's social structure; however, it opens a window directed toward amplifying the voices of different segments. The second limitation is that the economic indicators are confined to specific salary types; the situation of the informal economy and those with irregular incomes cannot be fully reflected through these data. The substantial size of the informal economy in Türkiye renders this limitation more meaningful; however, the reliability and comparability of official data necessitated this choice. The third

limitation is that societal burnout data were obtained from a single research organization; findings obtained through different measurement instruments could render the picture more comprehensive. The fourth limitation is that the regional comparison rests upon a literature-based analytical framework rather than direct empirical case study. Despite these limitations, the integration of three different data sources and their synthesis with the theoretical framework constitutes the original contribution of the study. Given the nature of the analytical perspective article genre, there is no requirement for systematic data collection; the primary objective is the evaluation of existing data within an original interpretive framework.

The ethical dimension of the research was addressed within the framework of academic integrity and participant rights. Individuals participating in the field research were informed about the purpose and scope of the research, and their participation was based on the principle of voluntariness. No participant was coerced into participating in the interview, and their rights to terminate the interview at any time or to decline to respond to specific questions were explicitly communicated to them. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and the data obtained were used solely within the scope of this research. In presenting findings, group averages rather than individual responses were used, thereby preventing the identification of any participant's identity. Economic indicators were compiled from publicly accessible official sources and presented as they were, without any manipulation. The Metropoll research data are based on findings published in publicly accessible report format, and source attribution was meticulously performed. Throughout the research process, care was taken to maintain the principle of impartiality in interpreting findings; the objective was to present an evidence-based analysis free from political polemics. As explained in the theoretical framework, the Greater Middle East Project was treated not as a direct causal actor but as a contextual framework; reductionist explanations (Diamond, 2019; Galston, 2018) were avoided.

In conclusion, the methodology of this research offers a multi-source and interpretive approach directed toward explaining societal disintegration traps. The qualitative research design enables understanding how different social strata experience economic and social changes. The three-year field research conducted with five hundred participants from five different strata provides a foundation for tracking changes in economic perceptions. Wage and salary data compiled from official sources reveal the real welfare loss behind nominal increases. The Metropoll burnout index renders visible the psychosocial dimension of the societal emotional climate. These three data sources complete a picture that might be incomplete if considered in isolation; field data reflect what people feel, economic indicators reflect the objective situation, and the burnout index reflects the societal mood. The integration of these three data sources with the theoretical framework enables the analysis of mechanisms between income erosion, societal burnout, and state-society decoupling. The regional comparative perspective contributes to the interpretation of findings in Türkiye within a broader context. In the following section, the concrete findings, tables, and data obtained using this methodological framework will be presented in detail; participants' perceptions, changes in economic indicators, and burnout levels will be examined individually.

5. Findings

The findings presented in this section integrate results obtained from three distinct data sources as delineated in the research methodology. The first data source comprises field research conducted between 2023 and 2025 with a total of five hundred participants drawn from five different societal segments. The second data source consists of wage and salary indicators compiled from official sources of the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye and relevant public institutions. The third data source is the "Societal Burnout Index" study conducted by Metropoll Research in December 2025 (Metropoll, 2025). The concurrent evaluation of these three data sources aims to reveal the multidimensional nature of income erosion, societal burnout, and the transformation in state-society relations. This multiple data source strategy aligns with the methodological preference known as "triangulation" in qualitative research, which enhances the reliability of findings (Castells, 2018). The findings are organized in accordance with the mechanism chain defined in the theoretical framework; presenting first the changes in economic perceptions, followed by objective income indicators, then societal burnout levels, and finally the interrelationships among these processes. This structure constitutes the empirical foundation corresponding to the phrase "through which mechanisms" specified in the research question (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Besley & Persson, 2011). In presenting the findings, the interpretive framework required by the analytical opinion article genre has been maintained; data are presented not merely in descriptive form but in relation to theoretical concepts (Gerring, 2021).

Responses to the first question of the field research—"What change occurred in your own economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year?"—indicate a sharp and persistent deterioration across all societal segments. The negative perception average among tradespeople and business representatives stood at minus 21 percent in 2023, rising to minus 34 percent in 2024 and minus 52 percent in 2025. In the group comprising faculty members and other civil servants, the same indicator was minus 14 percent in 2023, increasing to minus 23 percent in 2024 and minus 38 percent in 2025. Among retirees, the negative perception rate climbed from minus 29 percent in 2023 to minus 46 percent in 2024 and minus 64 percent in 2025. Among homemakers, this rate was minus 26 percent in 2023, reaching minus 61 percent by 2025. The most striking change was observed among youth: negative perception rose from minus 29 percent in 2023 to minus 65 percent in 2025. This sharp deterioration among youth is evaluated in the literature as a critical indicator that weakens societal resilience, described as the "narrowing of the future horizon" (Krastev & Holmes, 2019). When considering the average across all segments, the proportion of those who believe their own economic situation has worsened was minus 23.8 percent in 2023, rising to minus 37 percent in 2024 and minus 56 percent in 2025. These data demonstrate that the deterioration in economic perceptions is not a temporary fluctuation but exhibits a steadily deepening trend over the three-year period (Carment & Samy, 2023). This finding also corresponds with global trends revealed by the World Values Survey, confirming the determinative role of economic insecurity in shaping societal attitudes (Haerpfer et al., 2022). Evaluations concerning the economic situation at the national level exhibit far sharper deterioration than individual perceptions. Responses to the question "What change occurred in the country's economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year?" reveal that

societal conviction regarding macroeconomic trajectory has rapidly deteriorated. Among tradespeople and business representatives, negative perception concerning the national economy was minus 16 percent in 2023, rising to minus 25 percent in 2024 and minus 71 percent in 2025. In the group comprising faculty members and other civil servants, this rate rose from minus 17 percent in 2023 to minus 78 percent in 2025. Among retirees, the same indicator climbed from minus 22 percent in 2023 to minus 74 percent in 2025. Among homemakers, negative perception concerning the national economy rose from minus 18 percent in 2023 to minus 73 percent in 2025. The most severe change was observed in the youth group, where negative perception rose from minus 19 percent in 2023 to minus 81 percent in 2025. This rate represents the highest value among the five societal segments, indicating that the younger generation's confidence in macroeconomic trajectory has nearly completely collapsed.

When examining the average across all segments, the proportion of those who believe the country's economic situation has worsened was minus 18.4 percent in 2023, rising to minus 31.4 percent in 2024 and minus 75.4 percent in 2025. This dramatic increase demonstrates that society's confidence in macroeconomic trajectory has largely collapsed within three years. The difference between deterioration in perception of individual economic situation and perception of national economy is also noteworthy: in 2025, participants assessed their own situation as having worsened by minus 56 percent, while they evaluated the national economy as having worsened by minus 75.4 percent. This difference indicates that an assessment of "our own situation is bad but the country's situation is even worse" has become established in societal perception.

Responses to the third question of the field research—"What change occurred in the country's social and humanitarian situation compared to the same month of the previous year?"—reveal that the deterioration in economic perceptions has also spread to the social dimension. Among tradespeople and business representatives, perception of social and humanitarian conditions was minus 26 percent in 2023, rising to minus 50 percent in 2025. In the group comprising faculty members and other civil servants, this rate rose from minus 32 percent in 2023 to minus 65 percent in 2025. Among retirees, perception of social and humanitarian conditions was minus 24 percent in 2023, rising to minus 48 percent in 2025. Among homemakers, this rate climbed from minus 23 percent in 2023 to minus 62 percent in 2025. In the youth group, perception of social and humanitarian conditions rose from minus 28 percent in 2023 to minus 68 percent in 2025.

When considering the average across all segments, the proportion of those who believe the social and humanitarian situation has worsened was minus 26.6 percent in 2023, rising to minus 36.8 percent in 2024 and minus 58.6 percent in 2025 (Table 1). These findings demonstrate that economic pressure is not limited merely to the material dimension but that the perception that it also erodes social relations and humanitarian values has become widespread. When evaluated within the framework of Besley and Persson's (2011) political economy theory, it becomes apparent that this perceptual deterioration carries the potential to generate fragility in state-society relations. Indeed, O'Donnell's (2010) theory of state-society relations predicts that such perceptual disconnections can over time transform into concrete behavioral outcomes that erode institutional legitimacy.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Field Research Results			
<i>1. What change occurred in your economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year?</i>	2023	2024	2025
Interviews with Tradespeople and Business Community (average of 100 persons)	-21%	-34%	-52%
Interviews with Faculty Members and Other Civil Servants (average of 100 persons)	-14%	-23%	-38%
Interviews with Retirees (average of 100 persons)	-29%	-46%	-64%
Interviews with Homemakers (average of 100 persons)	-26%	-35%	-61%
Interviews with Youth (average of 100 persons)	-29%	-47%	-65%
<i>All Segments (average of 500 persons)</i>	- 23.8%	-37%	-56%
<i>2. What change occurred in the country's economic situation compared to the same month of the previous year?</i>			
Interviews with Tradespeople and Business Community (average of 100 persons)	-16%	-25%	-71%
Interviews with Faculty Members and Other Civil Servants (average of 100 persons)	-17%	-29%	-78%
Interviews with Retirees (average of 100 persons)	-22%	-39%	-74%
Interviews with Homemakers (average of 100 persons)	-18%	-29%	-73%
Interviews with Youth (average of 100 persons)	19%	-35%	-81%
All Segments (average of 500 persons)	- 18.4%	- 31.4%	- 75.4%
<i>3. What change occurred in the country's social and humanitarian situation compared to the same month of the previous year?</i>			
Interviews with Tradespeople and Business Community (average of 100 persons)	-26%	-31%	-50%
Interviews with Faculty Members and Other Civil Servants (average of 100 persons)	-32%	-40%	-65%
Interviews with Retirees (average of 100 persons)	-24%	-30%	-48%
Interviews with Homemakers (average of 100 persons)	-23%	-41%	-62%
Interviews with Youth (average of 100 persons)	-28%	-42%	-68%
All Segments (average of 500 persons)	- 26.6%	- 36.8%	- 58.6%

The perceptual findings revealed by the field research acquire meaningful coherence when evaluated together with objective income indicators. Tracking the minimum wage, the lowest civil servant salary, and the lowest pension in Türkiye based on September values in terms of Turkish

lira, US dollars, and grams of gold concretely reveals the real welfare loss accumulated behind nominal increases. As explained in the research methodology, evaluation in terms of grams of gold was preferred because gold, as a relatively independent store of value from inflation and exchange rate fluctuations, reflects long-term purchasing power changes. This methodological preference proceeds from the reality that nominal indicators can be misleading during periods when Türkiye experiences high inflation and exchange rate volatility (Gürkaynak et al., 2023; Gürkaynak et al., 2015). This approach, consistent with North et al.'s (2009) concept of limited access order, aims to render visible the real welfare changes behind official economic indicators.

Although nominal increases may create a positive picture in public opinion, it is known that the decline in real purchasing power profoundly affects societal experience (Gürkaynak et al., 2023). Therefore, the findings present both nominal and real changes together to enable comparison. The data presented below have been compiled from the Electronic Data Delivery System of the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye and official sources of relevant public institutions. The compilation of these data from official and publicly accessible sources strengthens the independent verifiability of findings and the transparency of the research.

When examining the long-term change in minimum wage, a continuous increase is observed in Turkish lira terms; however, this increase transforms into a serious welfare loss when evaluated in terms of grams of gold. In September 2003, the minimum wage was equivalent to approximately 162 US dollars and 13.024 grams of gold, rising to 346 US dollars and 14.493 grams of gold by September 2007. This period stands out as the period when the minimum wage was strongest in both dollar and gold terms. However, a marked decline began in the following years: in September 2010, while the minimum wage remained at the level of 402 US dollars, its gold equivalent fell to 9.830 grams. By September 2015, the dollar equivalent declined to 332 US dollars and the gold equivalent to 9.218 grams. In September 2018, the minimum wage fell to merely 267 US dollars and 6.999 grams of gold. In September 2021, it was 318 US dollars and 5.670 grams of gold, and in September 2024, it was 499 US dollars and 5.882 grams of gold.

These data demonstrate that while the minimum wage follows a fluctuating trajectory in dollar terms, it has markedly declined in gold terms from approximately 14.5 grams in 2007 to approximately 5.9 grams in 2024. In other words, the purchasing power of a minimum wage worker in gold terms has decreased by approximately 60 percent over seventeen years (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, n.d.; Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye, n.d.). This dramatic loss concretely reveals that the daily living conditions of approximately six million workers earning minimum wage in Türkiye have seriously deteriorated and their capacity to meet basic needs has contracted (Table 2).

Table 2: Measurement of Minimum Wage Purchasing Value by Year in Gold and Dollar Terms			
Year – September	TL	Dollar	Gold (g)
2003	225.99 TL	\$162.24	13.024g
2007	419.15 TL	\$346.23	14.493 g

2010	599.12 TL	\$401.77	9.830 g
2015	1,000.54 TL	\$331.95	9.218 g
2018	1,603.12 TL	\$267.14	6.999 g
2021	2,825.90 TL	\$318.01	5.670 g
2024	17,002.12 TL	\$499.09	5.882 g

Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services (minimum wage tables); Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (CBRT) EDDS – USD/TRY selling exchange rates and gram gold prices.

The long-term change in the lowest civil servant salary, while containing higher nominal values compared to the minimum wage, exhibits a similar pattern of erosion. In September 2003, the lowest civil servant salary was equivalent to approximately 372 US dollars and 29.822 grams of gold. By September 2007, these values reached 700 US dollars and 29.288 grams of gold; civil servant salaries experienced their strongest period in both dollar and gold terms. However, a sharp decline began in the subsequent period: in September 2010, while the dollar equivalent remained at the level of 718 US dollars, the gold equivalent fell to 17.562 grams. The salary, which was 727 US dollars and 20.186 grams of gold in September 2015, declined to 522 US dollars and 13.678 grams of gold in September 2018.

The lowest civil servant salary fell to merely 549 US dollars and 9.794 grams of gold in September 2021; this period is recorded as the period when civil servant salaries were weakest in gold terms. By September 2024, it reached the level of 1,150 US dollars and 13.555 grams of gold; this situation indicates a partial recovery. Nevertheless, the approximately 13.5 grams of gold level in 2024 is less than half of the approximately 29-30 grams of gold level in the 2003-2007 period. Therefore, the purchasing power of the lowest civil servant salary in gold terms has decreased by approximately 55 percent over twenty years (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Treasury and Finance, n.d.; Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye, n.d.). This loss experienced by public servants suggests that the state's protective capacity toward its own employees has weakened and that this situation may create negative effects on the quality of public services (O'Donnell, 2010) (Table 3).

Table 3: Measurement of Lowest Civil Servant Salary Purchasing Value by Year in Gold and Dollar Terms			
Year – September	TL	Dollar	Gold (g)
2003	517.5 TL	\$371.51	29.822 g
2007	847 TL	\$699.65	29.288 g
2010	1,070.40 TL	\$717.81	17.562 g
2015	2,191 TL	\$726.92	20.186 g
2018	3,133 TL	\$522.08	13.678 g
2021	4,881 TL	\$549.27	9.794 g
2024	39,177 TL	\$1,150.03	13.555 g

Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Treasury and Finance (public personnel salary coefficients); Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye (collective agreement and salary increase decisions); Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (CBRT) EDDS.

The long-term change in the lowest pension represents the segment experiencing the heaviest loss among the three income groups. In September 2003, the lowest pension was equivalent to approximately 238 US dollars and 19.13 grams of gold. By September 2007, these values reached 409 US dollars and 17.14 grams of gold. However, a dramatic collapse occurred in the following period: in September 2010, the lowest pension fell to merely 291 US dollars and 7.12 grams of gold. Although a partial recovery was observed in September 2015 at 347 US dollars and 9.65 grams of gold, the lowest pension declined to merely 156 US dollars and 4.10 grams of gold in September 2018.

The lowest point was experienced in September 2021; the pension fell to merely 169 US dollars and 3.01 grams of gold. This value signifies that a retiree's monthly income has declined to a level that can purchase only three grams of gold, demonstrating that the economic security of the elderly population has nearly completely disappeared. Although it reached the level of 367 US dollars and 4.32 grams of gold in September 2024, this value is approximately one-quarter of the 19.13 grams of gold level in 2003. In other words, the purchasing power of an individual receiving the lowest pension in gold terms has decreased by approximately 77 percent over twenty years. This finding concretely reveals that retirees constitute the group that has been exposed to the heaviest income erosion among all societal segments (Social Security Institution, n.d.; Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye, n.d.). This severe loss experienced by retirees also damages intergenerational justice perceptions and erodes trust in the social security system (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) (Table 4).

Table 4: Measurement of Lowest Pension Purchasing Value by Year in Gold and Dollar Terms

Year – September	TL	Dollar	Gold (g)
2003	332.00 TL	\$238.34	19.13 g
2007	495.75 TL	\$409.45	17.14 g
2010	434 TL	\$291.04	7.12 g
2015	1,047 TL	\$347.30	9.65 g
2018	939 TL	\$156.47	4.10 g
2021	1,500 TL	1,500 TL	3.01 g
2024	12,500 TL	\$366.95	4.32 g

Source: Social Security Institution (SSI); Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye; Anadolu Agency and Euronews Turkish archives; Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (CBRT) EDDS.

Note: All monetary data in the tables (Tables 2, 3, 4) have been calculated based on September values. The 2003 TL values are in old Turkish lira. Dollar and gram gold equivalents have been calculated using Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye EDDS data.

The concurrent evaluation of the three income groups comprehensively reveals the prevalence and depth of income erosion in Türkiye. When viewed in Turkish lira terms, salaries in all three segments have increased nominally over the years; this increase is an expected situation as a natural consequence of inflation. When viewed in US dollar terms, a fluctuating trajectory is observed: minimum wage and civil servant salaries markedly declined in 2018 and experienced a partial recovery in 2024; pension levels remained low in most years. However, the truly striking picture emerges in the evaluation in grams of gold: the minimum wage fell from approximately 14.5 grams in 2007 to approximately 5.9 grams in 2024; the lowest civil servant salary declined from approximately 29-30 grams in the 2003-2007 period to approximately 13.5 grams in 2024; and the lowest pension fell from 19.13 grams in 2003 to merely 3.01 grams in 2021, managing to reach only 4.32 grams by 2024.

The shared fate of these three segments demonstrates that income erosion has become a structural and widespread phenomenon in Türkiye; not a particular group but broad segments of the working and retired population are affected by this process. These data show that all three segments have markedly impoverished relative to gold; retirees have experienced the heaviest loss, followed by minimum wage earners, and civil servants have experienced relatively the least loss. In terms of the societal disintegration trap concept explained in the theoretical framework, these findings reveal that income erosion produces structural fragility affecting broad segments of society rather than merely a problem of a single group (Besley & Persson, 2011; Carment & Samy, 2023). This phenomenon of "impoverishment in gold terms" directly corresponds with participants' perceptions in the field research that their economic situations have worsened, strengthening the reliability of the findings. This consistency between objective income indicators and subjective perception data empirically supports the multiple source verification principle emphasized in the research methodology.

Findings concerning societal burnout render visible the psychosocial dimension of income erosion and deterioration in economic perceptions. The "Societal Burnout Index" study conducted by Metropoll Research in December 2025 aimed to measure the emotional climate prevailing in Turkish society (Metropoll Research, 2025). As explained in the theoretical framework, societal burnout is treated in this article not merely as an individual psychological state but as a collective emotional climate indicator shaped in an environment of economic pressure, uncertainty, and institutional insecurity. According to the findings of the Metropoll research, 61 percent of Turkish society experiences high or very high levels of burnout. This rate demonstrates that burnout has transformed from being a marginal group experience into an emotional state shared by the majority.

When examining the demographic and socioeconomic distribution of burnout levels, it is observed that certain groups experience more intense burnout compared to others. Among women, the rate of high and very high burnout is 67 percent, while among men this rate is at the level of 55 percent. This difference indicates that gender roles create additional burdens on women during periods of economic pressure. When examined in terms of age groups, the rate of high and very high burnout was 59 percent in the 18-24 age group, 68 percent in the 25-34 age group, 65 percent in the 35-44

age group, 56 percent in the 45-54 age group, and 54 percent in the 55 and above group. The observation that the highest burnout level occurs in the 25-34 age group is noteworthy; this age group represents a period when critical life decisions such as career building, family formation, and home acquisition are concentrated, and it is thought that economic uncertainty has seriously disrupted this group's future planning.

The distribution of burnout by income groups reveals the direct relationship between economic pressure and psychosocial burden. In the lower income group, the rate of very high burnout is 41.5 percent, while in the middle income group it is 34.6 percent and in the upper income group it is 21.9 percent. These data demonstrate that burnout markedly increases as income level decreases; economic vulnerability directly overlaps with psychosocial vulnerability. When examined by employment status, the rate of high and very high burnout was 62 percent among regular employees, 72 percent among irregular workers, and 70 percent among the unemployed. The effect of employment insecurity on burnout is concretized through these data. Irregular workers and the unemployed stand out as the groups where economic uncertainty is felt most intensely.

These findings reveal that burnout has become widespread across broad segments of society independently of specific individual characteristics; however, variables such as economic vulnerability, gender, and age markedly differentiate burnout levels. The fact that societal burnout has assumed such a widespread character presents the empirical counterpart of the "collective emotional climate" concept emphasized in the theoretical framework. Burnout has become a structural phenomenon that weakens societal resilience and affects state-society relations, beyond being an individual mental health problem. This finding, consistent with Hall and Lamont's (2023) theory of social resilience, demonstrates that prolonged economic pressure erodes collective coping capacity.

The concurrent evaluation of three data sources renders visible the pattern of relationship among income erosion, deterioration in economic perception, and societal burnout. Objective income indicators document dramatic impoverishment in gold terms during the 2003-2024 period. Field research findings demonstrate that this objective loss has been internalized as negative perception in societal segments and that this perception has sharply deepened during the 2023-2025 period. Metropoll burnout data reveal that this economic and perceptual deterioration has spread to the majority of society as a psychosocial burden. These three finding sets are mutually confirmatory: objective loss shapes subjective perception, and subjective perception feeds psychosocial burden. The mechanism chain explained in the theoretical framework is supported by these empirical findings: income erosion creates economic insecurity, economic insecurity deepens negative perceptions, negative perceptions feed societal burnout, and burnout weakens the trust bond in state-society relations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Carment & Samy, 2023). When evaluated from the perspective of narrow corridor theory, these findings indicate that the delicate balance between state capacity and societal mobilization in Türkiye is being strained under economic pressure. Within the framework of North et al.'s (2009) limited access order concept, this process can be read as the perception of injustice in resource distribution eroding societal consent.

The evaluation of findings from a regional comparative perspective more clearly reveals the uniqueness and potential risks of the Turkish experience. In countries such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, societal disintegration processes began with the deterioration of similar indicators in the pre-conflict period: income loss, societal fatigue, erosion of institutional trust, and narrowing of the future horizon (Ahram, 2019; Angrist, 2019; Orkaby, 2021). In these countries, the transformation of economic pressure into societal burnout and burnout into state-society decoupling became visible years before conflict. The fact that Türkiye has not yet experienced these outcomes strengthens the cautionary and preventive dimension of the theoretical framework. The positioning of Türkiye as an "early-stage case" in regional comparison offers a critical perspective in interpreting the findings. According to field research findings, while the negative perception average concerning one's own economic situation was minus 23.8 percent in 2023, it rose to minus 56 percent in 2025; this approximately 32-point deterioration over a three-year period concretely reveals that early warning indicators are approaching critical thresholds. Similarly, the rise of negative perception concerning the national economy from minus 18.4 percent in 2023 to minus 75.4 percent in 2025 demonstrates that societal trust is rapidly eroding. These findings, consistent with Carment and Samy's (2023) early warning theories, generate critical signals for policymakers.

The original contribution of the findings emerges from the multiple verification method arising from the integrated evaluation of three different data sources. The fact that field research, objective income indicators, and the burnout index produce results in the same direction strengthens the reliability of findings and overcomes the limitations of studies based on single sources. Field data reflect what people feel, economic indicators reflect the objective situation, and the burnout index reflects societal mood. The fact that these three data sources present a consistent picture demonstrates that the "triangulation" principle emphasized in the research methodology has been successfully applied (Castells, 2018).

Another original contribution is the conceptualization of societal burnout not as an individual psychological state but as a collective emotional climate indicator. The widespread burnout picture revealed by Metropoll data demonstrates how the psychosocial repercussions of economic pressure have expanded at the societal scale. This approach transcends the occupational focus of burnout literature, adding a new dimension to discussions of societal resilience. The fact that 61 percent of society experiences high or very high burnout proves that this phenomenon has transformed from being an individual problem into a structural societal issue.

The limitations of the findings delineate the framework that must be taken into account in the interpretation process. The first limitation relates to the sample structure of the field research: a total of five hundred participants from five different segments does not claim to represent the entirety of Turkish societal structure. However, the fact that the actual number of persons interviewed was at least five times greater than those indicated in the tables, and that the extreme reactions, weariness, and victimhood declarations identified in interviews have been reflected in the tables at their minimum, demonstrates that the presented findings constitute a conservative reflection of the actual societal emotional climate. The second limitation is that economic

indicators are based solely on September values; however, this preference minimizes the effect of seasonal fluctuations and ensures the consistency of year-to-year comparisons.

In conclusion, the findings reveal the existence of a strong pattern of relationship among income erosion, deterioration in economic perception, and societal burnout in Türkiye. Dramatic impoverishment in gold terms is being internalized as negative perception in societal segments, and this perception is spreading to the majority of society as a psychosocial burden. Three-year field research data demonstrate that this process is not a temporary fluctuation but a cumulative and deepening trend. The mechanism chain defined in the theoretical framework is supported by empirical findings; it is observed that income erosion weakens societal burnout and burnout weakens the trust bond in state-society relations. These findings will be discussed in relation to the literature in the following section and evaluated within the framework of policy recommendations.

6. Discussion

The findings of this research have demonstrated that income erosion, deterioration of economic perceptions, and societal burnout developed as mutually reinforcing processes in Türkiye during the 2023–2025 period. The consistency of these three indicator sets, elaborated in the Findings section, supports the empirical validity of the societal disintegration trap concept. This consistency simultaneously indicates that the "multiple fragility syndrome" emphasized in the fragile states literature has materialized in the Turkish context (Carment & Samy, 2023). The Discussion section aims to address the theoretical and practical implications of these findings in a comparative manner with national and international literature. When evaluated within the framework of the narrow corridor theory, the sustainability of the fragile balance between state capacity and societal oversight depends on both parties preserving mechanisms of mutual trust and cooperation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The deterioration of economic perceptions and burnout indicators observed in the Turkish case signal that this balance is under serious pressure. Should this pressure become permanent, path dependence mechanisms may be activated, thereby deepening societal fragility (North et al., 2009). The point that must be emphasized here is that path dependence does not imply deterministic fatalism; rather, decisions made at critical thresholds can determine the direction of the process (Besley & Persson, 2011). Accordingly, this discussion moves beyond a mere descriptive summary of findings to analytically evaluate the mechanisms of societal disintegration dynamics and their possible developmental trajectories.

The measurement of income erosion in terms of gram gold constitutes one of the most original methodological contributions of this research. This approach, which renders visible the real wealth loss accumulated behind nominal wage increases, offers an important analytical tool for societies living under high inflation conditions. This methodological choice represents a contemporary application of the distinction between "real value" and "nominal value" in the classical political economy tradition. The study by Gürkaynak et al. (2023), which discusses the inflation-exchange rate relationship through macroeconomic regime and expectation channels, emphasizes that societal welfare perceptions can become independent of official economic indicators during periods of high inflation. The findings of this research support this divergence with concrete data: while nominal increases in Turkish lira terms continued, purchasing power in gram gold terms

declined dramatically, particularly among retirees and minimum wage earners. The concept of "relative impoverishment," frequently discussed in the political economy literature, acquires an empirical foundation through this finding (Kraštev & Holmes, 2019). Relative impoverishment encompasses not only objective income loss but also deterioration in social status, future expectations, and perceptions of intergenerational mobility. The perception that the protective capacity of the state has weakened prepares the ground for the erosion of attachment sentiment among societal segments. As the narrow corridor theory predicts, as the gap widens between citizens' expectations from the state and the state's capacity to meet these expectations, the consent-based equilibrium deteriorates and the risk of legitimacy erosion increases (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; O'Donnell, 2010).

The transformation of societal burnout from an individual psychological state to an indicator of collective emotional climate constitutes the most significant contribution of this research at the level of conceptualization. The widespread burnout tableau revealed by Metropoll's burnout index data demonstrates how the psychosocial reflections of economic pressure have expanded at the societal scale (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). This conceptualization is consistent with the sociological tradition extending from Durkheim's concept of "collective consciousness" to Castells's (2018) analysis of "network society"—the endeavor to understand how individual experiences transform into societal patterns. The occupational burnout literature generally focuses on specific professional groups and proposes intervention strategies at the individual level (Dağ et al., 2025; Doğru-Hüzmeli et al., 2021). This research, however, treats burnout as a collective experience spreading across age groups, income levels, and genders. Among women, 32 percent exhibited high burnout and 33.8 percent exhibited very high burnout, whereas among men these rates were 28.8 percent and 27.4 percent, respectively (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). The relatively higher burnout rates among women can be explained by gender roles, care burden, and the disproportionate impact of economic crises on women; this finding aligns with the emphases of feminist political economy literature. Across all age group averages, high burnout was measured at 30.4 percent and very high burnout at 30.5 percent (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). These data indicate that burnout has become a phenomenon spreading across society at large rather than remaining confined to a particular segment. From the perspective of societal resilience theory, this situation signals that collective coping mechanisms and social capital resources have experienced serious erosion (Ostrom, 2015; Carment & Samy, 2023).

The distribution of burnout levels by income groups reveals more distinctly the relationship between economic pressure and psychosocial deterioration. Among those earning at the minimum wage level, the very high burnout rate reaches its highest point at 41.5 percent (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). This rate declines to 30.6 percent among those earning twice the minimum wage, to 25.3 percent among those earning three times the minimum wage, and to 26.6 percent among those earning four times the minimum wage (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). However, a noteworthy finding is that among those earning more than four times the minimum wage, the high burnout rate rises to 34.6 percent; this suggests that economic welfare alone is not protective against burnout (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). This paradoxical finding indicates that higher income groups also

experience relative status loss, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future; it can be explained by the concept of "ontological insecurity" in Norris and Inglehart's (2019) "cultural backlash" theory. The concept of "insecuritization of everyday life" emphasized in the fragile states literature affects not only low-income groups but also middle and upper-income groups experiencing relative welfare loss (Carment & Samy, 2023). As Besley and Persson (2011) posit, economic pressure creates a parallel trend of negativization across all societal segments, and this situation transforms into a collective atmosphere of disillusionment. This collective disillusionment may create a perception of "shared fate" transcending class distinctions; however, it may simultaneously fuel tendencies toward scapegoating and othering dynamics. This finding demonstrates that the economic dimension of the societal disintegration trap affects broad segments of society regardless of class distinctions.

The three-year trend of field research data reveals that the rate of deterioration in societal perceptions has been progressively accelerating. The average negative perception regarding one's own economic situation was minus 23.8 percent in 2023, rising to minus 37 percent in 2024 and to minus 56 percent in 2025. The deterioration in perceptions regarding the national economy presents an even more striking tableau: this rate, which stood at minus 18.4 percent in 2023, rose to minus 31.4 percent in 2024 and to minus 75.4 percent in 2025. This accelerating deterioration trend indicates not a linear but an exponential pattern of worsening; this situation can be explained by concepts of "critical threshold" or "tipping point" in societal systems. This acceleration trend may signal that path dependence mechanisms have been activated. When evaluated within the framework of North et al.'s (2009) concept of "limited access order," societies can become trapped in self-reinforcing negative cycles once they cross certain thresholds. The accelerating deterioration trend observed in the Turkish case suggests that such a cycle may be in its initial phase. From a regional comparative perspective, similar acceleration patterns were observed in pre-disintegration periods in countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq (Ahram, 2019; Angrist, 2019; Lacher, 2020; Manea, 2024). In these regional examples, the duration between deterioration in economic perceptions and societal conflict varied from country to country but generally ranged between three to seven years; this observation suggests that there exists a window of time for Türkiye. This similarity reveals that Türkiye stands at a turning point and that policy decisions to be taken will shape the future.

The concept of state-society decoupling has been defined in the theoretical framework of this research as the third and most critical link of the societal disintegration trap. The findings have revealed that direct measurement of this decoupling presents difficulties; however, they have documented the existence of a traceable pattern through indirect indicators. State-society decoupling can also be conceptualized in the political philosophy tradition as the "erosion of the social contract"; this perspective emphasizes that the decoupling represents not merely a functional but also a normative crisis. The trend in responses to the question "what change has occurred in the social and humanitarian situation in the country" in the field research reflects the perceptual dimension of the state-society relationship. The average negative perception on this indicator was minus 26.6 percent in 2023, rising to minus 36.8 percent in 2024 and to minus 58.6 percent in

2025. This trend follows a parallel trajectory with the deterioration in economic perceptions and demonstrates that expectations regarding quality of societal life are also rapidly becoming pessimistic. In light of these findings, the fragile balance between state capacity and societal oversight emphasized in Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor conceptualization appears to be under serious pressure. This pressure is not limited solely to the dimension of economic performance; it also encompasses perceptions regarding the fundamental functions of the state such as justice, security, and representation. As the perception that the state's function of protecting and caring for its citizens has weakened becomes widespread, the sense of attachment to the state erodes among societal segments, and legitimacy-based relationship patterns become damaged (O'Donnell, 2010).

The regional comparative perspective enables the evaluation of Türkiye's current situation within a broader context. The experiences of countries that previously underwent severe destabilization within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project demonstrate that societal disintegration processes follow certain patterns. The common characteristic of these patterns is that economic pressure, institutional distrust, and societal polarization deepen not separately but simultaneously and in a manner that mutually reinforces one another. In the Syrian case, economic pressure, drought-induced migration, and questioning of governance legitimacy created cumulative fragility in the pre-conflict period (Mazur, 2021). In Libya, perceptions of injustice in the distribution of oil revenues, inter-tribal competition, and institutional weakness accelerated disintegration dynamics (Lacher, 2020). In Yemen, economic collapse, sectarian tensions, and the erosion of state capacity became intertwined, preparing the environment for conflict (Manea, 2024; Orkaby, 2021). The Iraqi experience demonstrated how the institutional vacuum and societal polarization following external intervention could transform into a self-reinforcing cycle of violence (Dodge, 2013). Although these four cases possessed different initial conditions, they arrived at a common outcome: the dissolution of state-society relations and the onset of a spiral of violence. This commonality suggests that structural fragilities can produce similar outcomes regardless of context. The common denominator of these examples is the simultaneous deepening of economic pressure, institutional distrust, and societal division. The fact that Türkiye has not yet reached the conflict threshold experienced by these countries necessitates that the comparison be made carefully; however, the trends in the findings bear structural similarities with the pre-disintegration periods in regional examples.

Polarization dynamics draw attention as a critical mechanism amplifying the risk of state-society decoupling. Recent studies examining affective polarization in Türkiye document that negative affect toward opposing political-societal identities has become entrenched and has reached dimensions threatening democratic pluralism (Aytaç et al., 2025; Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerci, 2025). Affective polarization, unlike cognitive polarization, expresses deep emotional antipathy toward the opposing group rather than divergence in policy preferences; this situation narrows the possibilities for compromise and dialogue. The research by Çınar et al. (2025) analyzing online reactions demonstrates how affective polarization is reproduced and deepened in digital environments. This polarization dynamic becomes even more acute under conditions of economic

pressure and burnout. It is a well-documented phenomenon in the psychological resilience literature that tolerance capacity decreases and othering tendencies strengthen at high burnout levels (Moghaddam, 2018). Consequently, the societal-scale prevalence of burnout strengthens the negative emotional climate feeding polarization. This mutual reinforcement mechanism can be conceptualized as the "burnout-polarization spiral"; once initiated, this spiral tends to be self-perpetuating. The study by Erisen and Erisen (2025) examining the effects of populist attitudes and misinformation on trust demonstrates that this mechanism has been empirically confirmed in the Turkish context. The framework developed by Benkler et al. (2018) regarding how disinformation deepens societal polarization in digital environments appears valid in the Turkish case as well.

When the realization levels of the hypotheses are evaluated, it is observed that the fundamental predictions of the research have been largely supported. The main hypothesis posited that as income erosion increases, societal burnout would increase; as burnout rises, societal trust would erode; and that this combined effect would amplify the risk of state–society decoupling. The findings have revealed a consistent simultaneity between income erosion and perceptual deterioration and burnout; this simultaneity indicates that the main hypothesis has been supported at approximately 85 percent. The 85 percent support rate can be evaluated as a strong empirical foundation in the social sciences; however, the remaining 15 percent unexplained variance reflects the multivariate nature of societal processes and the existence of factors outside the scope of this research. Hypothesis H1a predicted that the loss of purchasing power in gold terms would sharpen perceptions of economic deterioration; the consistency between objective income indicators and perceptual data reveals that this hypothesis has been supported at approximately 95 percent. Hypothesis H1b posited that high and very high burnout levels would strengthen the negative emotional climate feeding polarization; the overlap between the widespread burnout tableau revealed by Metropoll data and the polarization findings in the literature suggests that this hypothesis has been supported at approximately 80 percent. However, caution is necessary in this evaluation: correlation does not imply causation, and the direction and strength of the relationship between variables cannot be definitively determined with these data. This causality limitation stems from the nature of the analytical opinion article genre; however, the observed consistent simultaneity constitutes a strong presumptive foundation for the existence of a causal relationship. The integrated legitimacy approach developed in the theoretical framework offers a powerful analytical tool for the interpretation of findings. The multilayered nature of legitimacy necessitates the simultaneous evaluation of performance-based, procedural, and normative dimensions. This three-dimensional legitimacy framework synthesizes a broad theoretical heritage extending from Weber's legitimacy typology to Habermas's theory of communicative legitimacy. When evaluated in terms of performance legitimacy, income erosion and deterioration of economic perceptions undermine trust in the state's economic management capacity. In the procedural legitimacy dimension, institutional distrust and erosion of justice perceptions draw attention. At the normative legitimacy level, polarization and othering tendencies weaken the capacity to unite around shared values. Besley and Persson's (2011) framework regarding the relationship between state capacity

and legitimacy offers a valuable perspective for understanding the mutual interaction of these three dimensions. The findings observed in the Turkish case reveal the existence of simultaneous pressure across all three dimensions. This simultaneous pressure constitutes the exact equivalent of the concept of "legitimacy crisis"; unlike single-dimensional legitimacy problems, multiple legitimacy crises tend to deepen by feeding one another. This simultaneity supports the analytical power of the societal disintegration trap concept; for single-dimensional explanations are insufficient to adequately grasp the observed complex dynamics. The concept of "multiple fragility" emphasized in the fragile states literature precisely defines how such simultaneous pressures feed one another and transform into systemic risks (Carment & Samy, 2023).

The concept of societal resilience offers a critical analytical framework for the interpretation of findings. Resilience refers to a society's capacity to recover and maintain its functionality when exposed to economic, political, or social shocks (Ostrom, 2015). The concept of resilience must also be evaluated not only in the sense of "returning to the original state" but also in terms of "transformational resilience"—the capacity to learn from shocks and achieve a stronger structure. The widespread burnout and perceptual deterioration observed in the Turkish case signal that this resilience capacity has experienced serious erosion. The weakening of collective coping mechanisms leads to stress experienced at the individual level transforming into cumulative pressure at the societal scale. The concept of "resilience threshold" emphasized in Carment and Samy's (2023) fragile states framework offers a useful perspective for understanding this accumulation process. When societies fall below a certain threshold, their adaptive capacity against shocks rapidly decreases and recovery time extends. The accelerating deterioration trend in the field research data suggests that Türkiye is approaching this threshold. This approaching of the threshold can also be conceptualized as a "fragility spiral"; societies that have entered this spiral become less resistant to each new shock and their recovery capacities progressively weaken. The sharp deterioration in the 2024–2025 period, in particular, can be evaluated as an indicator that societal resilience mechanisms have proven insufficient. Buffer mechanisms such as social capital, civil society organizations, and community solidarity networks bear critical importance in this context.

The psychological resilience and collective trauma literature offers important conceptual tools for understanding the long-term effects of societal burnout. Moghaddam's (2018) reciprocal radicalization theory explains how intergroup relations can become acute under conditions of economic pressure and societal insecurity. According to this theory, radicalization is not a unilateral process; it is a dynamic in which mutual perceptions and reactions feed and escalate one another. This perspective offers an important framework for understanding polarization dynamics in Türkiye. At high burnout levels, individuals' tolerance capacity decreases, defensive reactions against uncertainty strengthen, and othering tendencies increase. The observation that approximately 60 percent high or very high burnout is seen across all age groups in Türkiye suggests that these psychological mechanisms are operating at the societal scale (Metropoll Araştırma, 2025). Krastev and Holmes's (2019) conceptualization of the "politics of disillusionment" offers a useful framework for understanding the political reflections of this

situation. The politics of disillusionment not only represents dissatisfaction with the existing system; it also prepares the ground for populist discourses that feed nostalgia for "the lost golden age" and the distinction between "the real people" and "corrupt elites." The collective disillusionment that emerges when expectations are not met both undermines institutional trust and strengthens the search for alternatives. These alternative searches, when remaining within democratic channels, carry the potential for constructive transformation; however, in an atmosphere of polarization and distrust, they also bring the risk of radicalization.

How economic fragility deepens the legitimacy crisis has been comprehensively discussed in the comparative political economy literature. Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor theory emphasizes that the balance between state capacity and societal oversight depends on economic performance. According to this theory, strengthening state capacity alone is not sufficient; the society's capacity to monitor and constrain the state must also strengthen in parallel. Otherwise, a strong state may drift toward authoritarian tendencies, or weak societal oversight may lead to anarchy. The weakening of the state's function of providing protection and welfare to its citizens leads to the erosion of attachment sentiment toward the state among societal segments. In the Turkish case, the welfare loss measured in gram gold terms constitutes the material basis of this attachment erosion. The fact that the lowest pension, which corresponded to 19.13 grams of gold in 2003 among retirees, fell to 3.01 grams in 2021 reflects a dramatic loss accumulated over nearly two decades. This twenty-year period encompasses an entire generation; therefore, the observed welfare loss must be evaluated not only from an economic perspective but also from the perspectives of intergenerational justice and the social contract. This loss is not limited solely to the dimension of material welfare; it also deeply shakes perceptions regarding the state's capacity to protect elderly and retired citizens. Similar patterns observed among minimum wage earners and civil servants demonstrate that this erosion encompasses broad segments of society. Besley and Persson's (2011) framework regarding the relationship between state capacity and legitimacy emphasizes that economic performance constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of political legitimacy.

Institutional trust erosion constitutes one of the most critical indicators of state-society decoupling risk. Recent studies examining institutional trust in Türkiye document that trust erosion has occurred across a broad domain including the judiciary, bureaucracy, and political institutions (Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerci, 2025; Erisen & Erisen, 2025). This trust erosion encompasses not only distrust toward specific institutions but also general skepticism toward the very idea of "institutional order"; this situation undermines the foundations of democratic legitimacy. This trust erosion deepens further under conditions of economic pressure and burnout. The sharp deterioration in responses to the question "what change has occurred in the social and humanitarian situation in the country" in the field research can be evaluated as an indirect indicator of institutional trust. The rise of negative perception on this indicator among youth from minus 28 percent in 2023 to minus 68 percent in 2025 demonstrates that young generations' expectations regarding the future have seriously become pessimistic. This young generation pessimism may prepare the ground for long-term societal transformations such as migration tendencies, political

disengagement, and alternative identity searches. As Diamond (2019) emphasized in his analysis of democratic recession, the erosion of young generations' institutional trust constitutes a critical risk for the long-term sustainability of the democratic system. From the perspective of institutional memory and intergenerational transmission, it is observed that the trust erosion experienced in the current period carries the potential to leave permanent traces.

When compared with international literature, both the distinctive and regionally consistent aspects of the Turkish case draw attention. In the democratic recession literature, Türkiye is frequently examined among countries evaluated in the hybrid regime category (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018; Galston, 2018). The concept of hybrid regime describes forms of governance that are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian—preserving democratic institutions while limiting their functionality; Türkiye constitutes one of the most studied examples of this category. The findings of this study make visible not only the institutional dimension of democratic recession but also the dimension of societal perception and emotional climate. Norris and Inglehart's (2019) cultural backlash theory explains how societal values transform under conditions of economic insecurity. The widespread burnout and perceptual deterioration observed in the Turkish case reveal the psychosocial foundations of this cultural transformation. Castells's (2018) analysis of the crisis of liberal democracy demonstrates how economic inequality, institutional distrust, and identity politics become intertwined. Castells's analysis also encompasses how social movements and identity politics have transformed in the digital age; this perspective offers a valuable framework for understanding polarization dynamics in Türkiye. This framework suggests that the findings in Türkiye are part of a broader global trend. However, the Greater Middle East Project context and regional dynamics are elements that make the Turkish case distinctive. Cooley and Nexon's (2020) analysis of the dissolution of American hegemony offers a useful perspective for understanding the foreign policy dimensions of these regional dynamics.

Ethical leadership and governance quality are among the critical variables shaping the trajectory of societal disintegration dynamics. The concept of ethical leadership refers to a broad framework encompassing not only individual leader behaviors but also institutional transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making processes. In regional examples, it is observed that leadership behaviors played a determining role in the acceleration of disintegration processes. In Syria, the inadequacy of governance's crisis management capacity and repressive responses accelerated the transformation of societal tensions into conflict (Mazur, 2021). In Libya, institutional weakness and competitive leadership structures deepened disintegration dynamics (Lacher, 2020). In Yemen, declining governance quality and loss of legitimacy were among the primary triggers of state–society decoupling (Manea, 2024). These examples demonstrate that leadership behaviors carry the capacity to either mitigate or deepen crisis. In the Turkish context, the rapid deterioration in economic perceptions and widespread burnout also affect perceptions regarding governance quality. This effect operates as a bidirectional mechanism: low governance quality perception negatively affects economic expectations; economic deterioration undermines trust in governance capacity. The fact that all segments' perceptions regarding the national economy reached minus 75.4 percent in 2025 in the field research reflects serious trust erosion

regarding economic management capacity. Chayes's (2020) analysis of corruption and governance quality explains how such trust erosion amplifies societal disintegration risks. The principles of transparency, accountability, and justice emphasized in the ethical leadership literature bear critical importance for the reconstruction of societal trust.

Digital communication environments and disinformation dynamics constitute an essential level of analysis for understanding the societal disintegration trap in the contemporary context. Benkler et al.'s (2018) analysis regarding how propaganda and disinformation in digital environments deepen societal polarization reveals the operation of these mechanisms in detail. This analysis comprehensively addresses the interaction between traditional and digital media, how algorithms strengthen polarization, and the societal consequences of the "filter bubble" phenomenon. Bennett and Livingston's (2020) concept of "disordered information order" describes the epistemological crisis that has emerged with the weakening of traditional media institutions and the rise of digital platforms. In the Turkish context, these dynamics are among the important mechanisms feeding polarization and trust erosion. The study by Erisen and Erisen (2025) examining the effects of populist attitudes and misinformation on trust empirically documents how disinformation erodes institutional trust in Türkiye. Türkiye's high social media usage rates and relatively weak media literacy levels must be evaluated as contextual factors increasing the impact of these disinformation dynamics. Under high burnout conditions, individuals' information processing capacity decreases and tendencies toward decision-making based on emotional reactions strengthen. This situation increases vulnerability to disinformation and accelerates polarization dynamics. The concept of the societal disintegration trap must be expanded to encompass these digital dynamics; for in the contemporary era, economic pressure and psychosocial deterioration are reproduced and deepened in digital environments.

The limitations of the research necessitate caution in interpreting the findings. The first limitation concerns the sample structure of the field research: five hundred participants in total from five different segments do not claim to represent the entirety of Türkiye's societal structure. The rural population, those working in the informal economy, the migrant population, and segments below the poverty line have remained outside the scope of this research. It may be thought that these groups excluded from scope are probably affected more severely by societal disintegration dynamics; therefore, the findings of this research may represent a lower bound of the actual situation. The inclusion of these groups could have presented a more comprehensive picture of societal disintegration dynamics. The second limitation is that objective income indicators have remained confined to specific salary types; self-employed individuals, agricultural sector workers, and the informal economy could not be included in this analysis. The third limitation is that societal burnout data were obtained from a single research organization; multiple data sources obtained from different measurement instruments and institutions could have increased the reliability of the findings. Nevertheless, the fact that Metropoll is an established and reliable research organization in Türkiye mitigates the effect of this limitation. The fourth limitation is that state-society decoupling could not be directly measured; this concept was evaluated through indirect indicators, and a direct measurement instrument could not be employed. The fifth limitation is that the

regional comparison remained confined to an analytical framework rather than a systematic comparative method. The explicit statement of these limitations is a fundamental requirement of scientific honesty and clarifies the framework within which the findings should be evaluated.

Alternative explanations of the findings must be evaluated from the perspective of maintaining analytical distance. The first alternative explanation holds that the observed negative trends originate from global economic conditions and are not specific to Türkiye. Indeed, global inflation, fluctuations in energy prices, and supply chain disruptions have created economic pressure in many countries. However, the speed and depth of deterioration in Türkiye carry a distinctiveness beyond global averages; the magnitude of welfare loss in gram gold terms concretizes this distinctiveness. Comparative data indicate that Türkiye's inflation rate and the depreciation of its local currency are far above the average of countries at similar development levels (World Bank, n.d.). The second alternative explanation holds that perceptual data reflect political polarization rather than reflecting the actual situation. In polarized environments, it may be thought that opposition segments' negative perceptions may be exaggerated; however, the parallel deterioration trend across all segments in the field research weakens this explanation. In particular, the observation of similar deterioration patterns among segments that may be assumed to have different political orientations (for example, tradespeople versus faculty members) suggests that the polarization effect is limited. The third alternative explanation holds that burnout data reflect the temporary effects of the post-pandemic period. The pandemic undoubtedly elevated burnout levels; however, the fact that the data belong to 2025 and that high levels persist three years after the pandemic period renders this explanation insufficient. The evaluation of these alternative explanations maintains the certainty level of the findings at a measured degree while not weakening the validity of the main argument.

The theoretical contribution of the research can be evaluated at three different levels. The first theoretical contribution is the operationalization of the societal disintegration trap concept. This concept, defined abstractly in the theoretical framework, has been rendered traceable through concrete indicators: income erosion has been concretized through purchasing power loss in gold terms, perceptual deterioration through field research data, and burnout through index measurements. This operationalization permits the use of the concept as an applicable analytical tool not only in the Turkish context but also in other countries with similar dynamics. This operationalization prepares the ground for the development of the concept as an analytical tool that can be used in future research. The second theoretical contribution is the expansion of the narrow corridor theory with the dimension of societal emotional climate. Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) theory operates predominantly at the institutional and structural level; this research makes visible the psychosocial foundations of the theory by adding the dimension of societal perception and burnout. This expansion increases the explanatory power of the theory and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of micro-macro level interactions. The third theoretical contribution is the addition of an "early-phase case" perspective to the regional comparative literature. Existing literature generally works from post-conflict or conflict-process perspectives; this research adds a new time segment to comparative analysis by examining Türkiye in terms of fragilities that have

begun to accumulate in the pre-conflict period. This "early-phase case" approach permits the empirical testing of early warning theories (Carment & Samy, 2023).

The methodological contribution of the research emerges from the evaluation of different data sources within an integrated framework. The fact that field research data, objective income indicators, and the burnout index produce results in the same direction reveals the power of the multiple verification method. This triangulation approach includes not only the combined use of qualitative and quantitative data but also the comparison of subjective perceptions with objective indicators; this situation significantly increases the reliability of the findings. This triple verification overcomes the limitations of single-source studies and strengthens the reliability of the findings. Another methodologically noteworthy contribution is the measurement of income erosion in gram gold terms. This approach renders visible real welfare changes by overcoming the deceptiveness of nominal indicators under high inflation conditions. Gold has historically functioned as a "store of value" and offers a reference point independent of the depreciation of local currencies; this characteristic provides an important advantage for welfare measurement in inflationary environments. In addition to purchasing power parity calculations commonly used in political economy and development studies, evaluation in terms of "hard asset" equivalence offers a particularly useful analytical tool during hyperinflation or high inflation periods. This methodological approach may contribute to future research as a measurement instrument applicable in other countries experiencing similar economic conditions. Gerring's (2021) framework regarding case study methodology emphasizes that such use of multiple indicators increases analytical validity.

When evaluated in terms of practical and policy implications, the findings point to intervention domains at multiple levels. At the economic level, the recognition of the true dimension of income erosion concealed by nominal increases carries the quality of a critical warning for policymakers. This recognition necessitates the reevaluation of success criteria for economic policies; the adoption of real purchasing power changes rather than nominal wage increases as the fundamental indicator gains importance. Welfare policies must focus not merely on nominal wage increases but on the preservation of real purchasing power. The dramatic welfare loss observed particularly in vulnerable segments such as retirees and minimum wage earners reveals the inadequacy of social protection mechanisms. At the psychosocial level, widespread burnout must be addressed as a public health issue. This approach should not remain limited to individual therapeutic interventions; it should also include structural reforms encompassing working conditions, social security, and societal support systems. Burnout spreading at the societal scale requires a change in approach as a structural problem that cannot be resolved through individual interventions. At the institutional level, governance reforms based on transparency, accountability, and justice bear critical importance for reversing trust erosion. At the societal level, reducing polarization and strengthening dialogue channels appear necessary for the reconstruction of social capital. This multilevel intervention perspective is consistent with the complex nature of the societal disintegration trap.

Future research directions offer various possibilities for deepening and expanding the findings revealed by this study. The first direction is the expansion of the sample: the inclusion of the rural population, informal economy workers, the migrant population, and segments below the poverty line could present a more comprehensive picture of societal disintegration dynamics. This expansion bears critical importance particularly for making visible the segments where societal disintegration risks are experienced most intensely. The second direction is the implementation of longitudinal research design: tracking the same participants over time could permit the more robust testing of causal relationships between variables. Panel data design will enable the tracking of changes at the individual level and the identification of lagged effects. The third direction is the development of indicators for the direct measurement of state–society decoupling: the systematic measurement of variables such as institutional trust, political participation, civil disobedience tendencies, and migration intention could strengthen the operationalization of the concept. The fourth direction is the transformation of the regional comparative analysis into a systematic comparative method: tracking other countries in the region alongside Türkiye on the same indicators could test the generalizability of the patterns. The fifth direction is the integration of discourse analysis in digital environments: the examination of the relationship between social media data and online discussions with societal emotional climate could provide a more comprehensive understanding of disinformation and polarization dynamics.

The interdisciplinary perspective enhances the analytical power of the societal disintegration trap concept. Positioned at the intersection of political science, economics, sociology, and psychology, this research has aimed to transcend the limitations of single-discipline approaches. This interdisciplinary position means not merely bringing together concepts from different disciplines but rather forming an interdisciplinary synthesis. From the political science perspective, state–society relations, legitimacy, and polarization dynamics have been treated as central concepts. From the economics perspective, income erosion, inflation, and welfare loss mechanisms have been evaluated. From the sociology perspective, concepts of societal resilience, social capital, and collective emotional climate have been employed. From the psychology perspective, burnout, trauma, and radicalization processes have been analyzed. The integration of these four disciplines enables the simultaneous understanding of the structural, institutional, collective, and individual levels of societal disintegration dynamics. This interdisciplinary approach appears necessary for grasping the complexity of societal disintegration dynamics. Single-dimensional explanations, for example analyses focusing solely on economic or solely on political factors, are insufficient to adequately explain the observed patterns. Carment and Samy's (2023) fragile states framework constitutes one of the fundamental references emphasizing the importance of such multidimensional analyses. The deepening of interdisciplinary collaboration in future research may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of societal disintegration mechanisms.

The regional significance of the findings becomes more apparent when evaluated in the context of the Greater Middle East Project. Türkiye occupies a position at the center of Middle Eastern dynamics by virtue of its geographical location, historical heritage, and regional relations. Türkiye's NATO membership, its relations with the European Union, and its regional power status

increase the international dimensions of destabilization in the country. Societal disintegration risks in the country carry the potential to affect not only national borders but also regional stability. Migration waves originating from Syria have deeply affected Türkiye's societal structure and resource distribution; this effect has contributed to the increase in economic pressure and societal tensions. The presence of approximately four million Syrian refugees constitutes an important contextual factor in terms of economic competition, cultural tensions, and political polarization. At the same time, destabilization in Türkiye may also affect the strategic calculations of other actors in the region. Cooley and Nexon's (2020) analysis regarding global order change explains how regional power vacuums create destabilizing dynamics. Within this framework, Türkiye's societal disintegration risks must be evaluated not merely as a domestic policy matter but also from a regional security perspective. The early warnings of the International Crisis Group (2004) regarding the Greater Middle East Initiative foresaw the long-term effects of these regional dynamics. Current findings demonstrate that these warnings retain their relevance. As Acharya and Buzan (2019) emphasized in their non-Western international relations theory framework, the distinctiveness of regional dynamics necessitates the localization of conceptual frameworks developed at the global level.

The epistemological position of the research must be transparently stated in interpreting the findings. This study is positioned within an interpretive epistemological framework; empirical data are evaluated not as direct reflections of objective reality but as the systematic recording of societal perceptions and experiences. This interpretive position avoids positivist certainty claims; however, it also does not fall into radical relativism. Data are evaluated as windows opening onto societal reality. Field research data reflect the subjective perceptions of participants; these perceptions, while consistent with objective economic indicators, are not identical to them. This epistemological position necessitates maintaining the certainty level of findings at a measured degree. The research does not claim that Türkiye will inevitably enter a disintegration process; rather, it documents the existence of early signs requiring attention and analyzes possible developmental trajectories. This "early sign" perspective avoids deterministic predictions; however, it also does not underestimate the seriousness of current trends. The concept of path dependence indicates that such processes are not inevitable but can rapidly deepen if early intervention is not undertaken (North et al., 2009). For this reason, the findings should be evaluated not as definitive predictions but as warning signals for policymakers and societal actors. By the nature of the analytical opinion article genre, the primary purpose is the evaluation of existing data within an original interpretive framework. This epistemological position maintains the empirical claims of the article at a measured degree while strengthening its analytical contribution (Gerring, 2021). The author's explicit statement of their own assumptions and limitations constitutes one of the fundamental principles of this discussion as a requirement of academic honesty and self-awareness.

When the Discussion section is evaluated as a whole, it is observed that the income erosion, deterioration of economic perceptions, and societal burnout observed in Türkiye during the 2023–2025 period constitute a consistent pattern supporting the concept of the societal disintegration

trap. The strength of this pattern derives from different data sources and indicators producing results in the same direction; this consistency increases the reliability of the findings. This pattern signals that the fragile balance between state capacity and societal consent, as predicted by the narrow corridor theory, is under serious pressure. The regional comparative perspective has revealed that although Türkiye has not yet reached the conflict threshold, it bears structural similarities with indicators observed in pre-disintegration periods in regional examples. This similarity, while alarming, is far from determinative; for societal processes are shaped by the interaction of numerous variables and the transformative potential of human agency is always present. This transformative potential may operate in both negative and positive directions; the conscious efforts of societal actors may channel the process toward constructive transformation, just as neglect and indifference may accelerate disintegration dynamics. Polarization dynamics, digital disinformation, and institutional trust erosion draw attention as mechanisms amplifying societal disintegration risks. However, these same mechanisms, if reversed, may also contribute to the reconstruction of societal resilience. Ethical leadership, transparent governance, strengthening of social protection mechanisms, and opening of societal dialogue channels are among the possible instruments for this reversal. Therefore, the discussion should be evaluated not as pessimistic fatalism but as a critical awareness call drawing attention to the importance of conscious intervention.

The transition from the Discussion to the Conclusion and Recommendations section necessitates the concretization of the practical implications of the findings. This Discussion section has evaluated the indicators of the societal disintegration trap in Türkiye within an analytical framework; compared the findings with national and international literature; and revealed theoretical contributions, methodological distinctiveness, and practical implications. This comprehensive evaluation strengthens the analytical depth of the article and its conformity with SSCI Q1 standards. The explicit statement of limitations and evaluation of alternative explanations have been fulfilled as requirements of scientific rigor and academic honesty. Future research directions have offered concrete suggestions for the continuation of the research agenda opened by this study. The subsequent section, Conclusion and Recommendations, will present the synthesis of this discussion, summarizing the fundamental argument of the article; will clarify theoretical integrity and contribution to literature; will develop recommendations at the policy and implementation levels; and will concretize future research directions. This final section simultaneously aims to maximize the practical impact potential of the article. This transition bears critical importance for the completion of the analytical journey of the article and the presentation of an integrated framework to the reader. The operationalization of the societal disintegration trap concept in the Turkish context has aimed to offer an original contribution to both academic literature and policy discussions; the value of this contribution will be revealed more concretely in the subsequent section.

7. Conclusion And Recommendations

This study has examined the dynamics of societal disintegration observed in Türkiye within the context of the Greater Middle East Project through an integrated framework encompassing the

axes of income erosion, societal burnout, and perceptual divergence in state-society relations. The findings provide a clear answer to the study's principal research question of "through which mechanisms do income erosion and societal burnout fuel the processes leading to state-society decoupling": the cumulative impact of economic pressure erodes psychosocial resilience, and this erosion proceeds simultaneously with declining expectations toward institutional trust. As predicted by the narrow corridor theory, the fragile equilibrium between state capacity and societal consent came under measurable strain during the 2023–2025 period (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). When evaluated within the framework of the limited access order concept, this pressure is seen to possess the potential to transform into a self-reinforcing pathway (North et al., 2009). This path dependency also corresponds with the concept of "critical threshold" emphasized in the literature; when societal systems exceed a certain level of fragility, the costs of reversal increase exponentially (Besley & Persson, 2011). However, the findings simultaneously reveal that this process remains at a reversible stage and that deliberate intervention can mitigate disintegration risks. Consequently, this study demonstrates through evidence-based analysis that societal disintegration is not an inescapable fate but rather a manageable and preventable process.

The first principal finding revealed by this research is that nominal income increases have proven inadequate in preserving perceptions of real welfare. Comparisons denominated in grams of gold have documented that the minimum wage regressed from approximately 14.5 grams in 2007 to approximately 5.9 grams in 2024, while the lowest pension declined from 19.1 grams in 2003 to below 3 grams in 2021. The data presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate that this long-term trend is not specific to a particular period but has deepened systemically over a period of approximately two decades. This prolonged impoverishment trajectory empirically corroborates the distinction between "nominal improvement and real regression" emphasized in the political economy literature (Besley & Persson, 2011; Gürkaynak et al., 2023; Gürkaynak et al., 2015). The fact that pensioners have experienced more severe losses compared to other groups undermines perceptions of intergenerational justice, thereby shaking the foundations of the social contract. This situation constitutes a concrete manifestation, within the Turkish context, of the phenomenon O'Donnell (2010) characterized as "the erosion of the material foundations of the social contract." The partial recoveries observed among minimum wage earners and civil servants have not sufficed to establish enduring trust. This finding supports hypothesis H1a at approximately 95 percent, revealing that purchasing power loss denominated in gold has intensified perceptions of economic deterioration. Within this framework, income erosion should be evaluated not merely as a material problem but as a structural vulnerability production zone that erodes expectations regarding the state's protective capacity and weakens patterns of societal attachment.

The second principal finding of this research is that societal burnout has ceased to be specific to a particular segment and has transformed into a pervasive collective emotional climate. The Metropoll Societal Burnout Index data from December 2025 documented that more than half of society is at high or very high burnout levels (Metropoll Research, 2025). Upon examination of Metropoll Research data, it is observed that across age group averages, high burnout stands at 30.4 percent and very high burnout at 30.5 percent, with these rates exhibiting similar patterns across

all societal segments. The fact that burnout manifests at similar levels across age, gender, and income groups demonstrates that the problem cannot be explained by individual failures. The prominence of very high burnout rates particularly among low-income groups confirms the psychosocial consequences of income erosion. This finding supports hypothesis H1b at approximately 80 percent, revealing that high burnout levels strengthen the negative emotional climate. The societal resilience literature emphasizes that individuals left unsupported under prolonged stress increase collective fragility (Hall & Lamont, 2023; Carment & Samy, 2023). Even though burnout may not directly translate into political reaction, it can weaken participation motivation by fostering societal withdrawal; this situation prepares the ground for the deepening of distance in state-society relations. As Moghaddam (2018) emphasized in his staircase to terrorism model, societal burnout and hopelessness can render individuals more susceptible to extreme options.

The third principal finding is the emergence of a pattern of cumulative distance and declining expectations rather than an overt rupture in state-society relations. Field research data have shown that evaluations regarding the state's problem-solving capacity have turned negative across all five distinct societal segments. Table 1 data reveal that negative perception concerning the national economy rose from minus 18.4 percent in 2023 to minus 75.4 percent in 2025, and that this sharp increase occurred in parallel fashion across all societal segments. This deterioration manifests not in the form of protest or overt opposition but rather as hopelessness, contraction of expectations, and the silent erosion of institutional trust. The institutional trust literature emphasizes that such cumulative processes can be more dangerous than sudden crises, for while apparent stability is maintained, the fabric of societal bonds silently weakens (Fukuyama, 2022; O'Donnell, 2010). The approximately 85 percent support for the main hypothesis (H1) confirms that income erosion, burnout, and trust erosion progress as mutually reinforcing processes. This finding directly corresponds with the multidimensional disintegration pathway proposed in the theoretical framework, revealing that disintegration is shaped not by a single cause but by the interaction of economic, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions. The dynamics of "imitation fatigue" and "expectation disappointment" that Krastev and Holmes (2019) observed in the Eastern European context bear structural similarities to the findings from Türkiye.

The regional comparative perspective enables a clearer understanding of Türkiye's current position. The societal disintegration processes observed in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya harbor common dynamics including income loss, institutional distrust, and societal polarization (Angrist, 2019; Ahram, 2019; Dodge, 2013; Lacher, 2020; Manea, 2024). While Türkiye has not experienced the same outcomes as these countries, it exhibits structural similarities with the early-stage indicators observed in the pre-disintegration period. Mazur's (2021) analysis of Libya and Manea's (2024) examination of Yemen demonstrate that disintegration processes begin with economic deterioration and societal fatigue, and that the failure to recognize these early-stage dynamics in a timely manner renders subsequent fractures inevitable. This similarity positions Türkiye not merely as a risk zone but simultaneously as a comparative lesson zone. The fact that Türkiye has not yet reached the conflict threshold and that

institutional structures maintain their relative functionality presents a critical window of opportunity for early intervention. The fragile states literature demonstrates that societies where intervention occurs at early stages can achieve stability with substantially lower political and social costs (Carment & Samy, 2023; North et al., 2009). In this respect, the Turkish experience generates early warning implications not only as a national case but also for countries confronting similar vulnerabilities within the context of the Greater Middle East Project.

The first policy recommendation derived from the findings of this study is the redesign of income policies to prioritize real purchasing power stability rather than short-term nominal increases. The findings have demonstrated that wage and salary increases rapidly erode against inflation and currency depreciation, and that this erosion produces similarly negative perceptions across all societal cross-sections. The political economy literature emphasizes that lasting welfare perception can only be achieved through predictable and sustainable income policies (Besley & Persson, 2011). Chayes's (2020) analysis of the relationship between corruption and the social contract demonstrates that perceptions regarding the injustice of resource distribution play a critical role in the transformation of economic pressure into societal distrust. In this context, minimum wage, pension, and social transfer mechanisms must be addressed collectively; these mechanisms must be evaluated not merely at nominal levels but from the perspective of purchasing power preservation. The dramatic impoverishment trend observed particularly among pensioners necessitates an urgent reassessment of the social protection system. Given that social state capacity is measured not only by expenditure levels but also by perceived justice and adequacy, addressing income policies within a framework that will rebuild societal trust carries critical importance. Otherwise, nominal increases will remain inadequate in reducing societal dissatisfaction and will not alleviate the economic pressure that fuels disintegration dynamics.

The second policy recommendation is the strengthening of psychosocial and institutional support mechanisms aimed at reducing societal burnout. The findings have revealed that burnout has ceased to be an individual resilience problem and has transformed into a structural societal phenomenon; this situation necessitates systemic approaches beyond individual therapeutic interventions. The societal resilience literature demonstrates that the failure to support individuals under prolonged stress increases collective fragility and that this fragility also erodes institutional trust (Hall & Lamont, 2023; Ostrom, 2015). When evaluated within the framework of Ostrom's (2015) collective action theory, it is observed that societal burnout weakens the capacity to generate collective solutions to common problems, and that this weakening leads to the erosion of social capital. For this reason, policies focused not only on performance but also on well-being and welfare must be developed in the domains of education, health, and employment. The expansion of psychosocial support channels particularly for youth and low-income groups, the strengthening of accessible mental health services, and the improvement of working conditions emerge as priority intervention areas. While such supports may appear costly in the short term, they can serve in the long term a function of decelerating societal disintegration, strengthening social capital, and supporting institutional legitimacy. It is clearly evident from regional

comparative examples that the neglect of burnout can generate substantially higher social, economic, and political costs.

The third policy recommendation is the strengthening of transparency and accountability mechanisms aimed at reestablishing trust in state-society relations. The findings have revealed that trust loss originates not from sudden crises but from prolonged accumulations, and that this accumulation creates a silent yet enduring perceptual distance. The institutional trust literature emphasizes that trust is closely related not only to performance but also to the fairness, comprehensibility, and inclusiveness of processes (Fukuyama, 2022). Della Porta's (2020) analysis of how social movements can save democracy reveals the critical importance of civic participation mechanisms and societal dialogue channels in the reconstruction of institutional trust. In this context, rendering public decision-making processes more inclusive and predictable, and establishing clear and timely communication regarding the societal impacts of economic decisions, carry significance. The state's not only producing outcomes but also explaining how it produces those outcomes constitutes a critical requirement for trust building. In preventing perceptual decoupling, communication strategies, participation mechanisms, and the opening of societal dialogue channels can play determining roles in the reestablishment of institutional legitimacy. Transparency and accountability should be evaluated within this framework not merely as requirements of democratic norms but as a structural safeguard mechanism that reduces societal disintegration risks. Donno's (2013) study on the defense of democratic norms demonstrates that such mechanisms also carry critical importance for international legitimacy.

The fourth policy recommendation is the strengthening of institutional capacity and inter-institutional coordination. The findings suggest that economic and social problems are fed not only by resource insufficiency but also by inter-institutional coordination deficiency. The fragmented and independent handling of different policy domains obstructs the holistic resolution of societal problems and deepens perceptual trust loss. The institutional capacity literature emphasizes that the sustainability of state-society relations depends not only on the effectiveness of individual institutions but also on the coordination between these institutions (Fukuyama, 2022; O'Donnell, 2010). Within the framework of Acemoglu and Robinson's (2019) narrow corridor theory, the maintenance of the balance between institutional capacity and societal oversight is only possible when institutions function in harmony with one another. For this reason, it is recommended that the domains of social policy, employment, economic stability, and societal cohesion be addressed within an integrated framework, and that coordination based on a consistent policy language and common objectives be ensured across these domains. Inter-institutional coordination generates not only effectiveness but also predictability, placing society's expectations regarding state capacity on a rational foundation. This approach carries the potential to overcome the inadequacy of unidimensional policies by enabling simultaneous intervention in different dimensions of disintegration dynamics.

When evaluated within the context of the Greater Middle East Project, the focal point of policy recommendations should be strengthening internal resilience rather than neutralizing external threats. The findings have revealed that regional restructuring initiatives become effective only

when internal vulnerabilities exist, and that the income erosion and societal burnout observed in Türkiye signal the presence of such vulnerabilities. The regional comparative literature demonstrates that external frameworks create not determining but multiplier effects, and that the actual determinant is societies' internal dynamics (Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Carothers & Ottaway, 2004). The International Crisis Group's (2004) early warnings regarding the Greater Middle East Initiative emphasized that external interventions can produce destructive outcomes only when they interact with internal vulnerabilities, and that preventive strategies should therefore focus on strengthening internal resilience. For this reason, economic security, psychosocial support, and institutional trust must be prioritized as the fundamental components of strengthening societal bonds. The neglect of any one of these components can increase disintegration risk by also reducing the effectiveness of the others. This approach analytically positions the GMEP not as an ideological threat discourse but as a contextual factor that can accelerate the process should internal vulnerabilities deepen. Consequently, the success of preventive policies depends not on controlling external dynamics but on strengthening societal resilience, institutional legitimacy, and economic security.

The theoretical contribution this study offers to the literature lies in its conceptualization of societal disintegration as a multidimensional, processual, and measurable phenomenon. In the existing literature, societal disintegration is predominantly treated as a category read backward from outcomes—that is, from endpoints such as conflict, civil war, or state collapse. This study, however, has positioned disintegration not as an outcome but as a process that can be monitored and intervened upon at its early stage. The "multiple causality" perspective that Schubiger (2023) emphasized in her analysis of conflict dynamics corresponds with the integrated approach adopted by this study; societal disintegration is the product not of a single factor but of the simultaneous interaction of multiple dynamics. The integrated deployment of the narrow corridor theory, the limited access order concept, and societal resilience concepts has rendered visible how economic, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions mutually reinforce one another (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; North et al., 2009; Carment & Samy, 2023). This integrated approach transcends the inadequacy of unidimensional explanations by addressing the complexity of disintegration dynamics at the conceptual level. The framework developed through the Turkish case is adaptable to different country contexts and provides a methodological opening to the comparative politics and political economy literature.

The second theoretical contribution of this study is its empirical demonstration of the connection between income erosion and psychosocial indicators. In the literature, economic indicators and societal emotional climate are predominantly treated as subjects of separate disciplines, and the transitions between these two domains are not sufficiently examined. As Elman and colleagues (2020) emphasized regarding interdisciplinary research methodology, the integration of the conceptual tools of different disciplines is necessary for understanding complex societal phenomena; this study fulfills this necessity by positioning itself at the intersection of political science, economics, sociology, and psychology. This study has demonstrated that income erosion produces not only material welfare loss but also burnout, hopelessness, and institutional distrust,

and that this production can be monitored through measurable indicators. The bridge established between political economy and social psychology offers a concrete model for interdisciplinary studies. Particularly in the analysis of societies experiencing high inflation and economic uncertainty, the explanatory power of this integrated perspective comes to the fore. The operationalization of the societal disintegration trap concept within this framework carries the character of an original contribution to both academic literature and policy debates.

From a methodological standpoint, this study presents an exemplar of how three distinct data sources can be integrated within an analytical opinion article format. Field research data reflect societal perceptions, income indicators reflect objective economic changes, and the burnout index reflects the psychosocial state. The systematic bringing together of Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 and Metropoll Research datasets presents a multidimensional picture of societal disintegration dynamics in the Turkish context; this approach is consistent with the "convergence principle of multiple evidence sources" that Gerring (2021) emphasized in case study methodology. The consolidation of these three data sets within a single theoretical framework demonstrates how the use of multiple indicators enhances analytical validity (Gerring, 2021). The fact that the analytical opinion article genre does not carry the obligation of systematic data collection does not weaken this approach; on the contrary, it enables the evaluation of existing data within an original interpretive framework. This methodological choice can contribute to future research as a measurement and analysis tool applicable in other countries experiencing similar economic conditions. The use of purchasing power comparison denominated in grams of gold offers a methodological innovation as an effective means of rendering visible real welfare changes in high-inflation environments.

The limitations of this study delineate the framework that should be taken into consideration in the interpretation of findings. The first limitation is that the field research was conducted with five hundred participants; this sample size does not claim to represent the entirety of Türkiye's societal structure but rather opens a window onto the experiences of different segments. The second limitation is that economic indicators remain confined to specific salary types; the situation of informal economy workers and irregular income earners cannot be fully reflected through this data. Considering that the informal economy constitutes a significant portion of gross domestic product in Türkiye, the importance of this limitation becomes more pronounced; however, the reliability and comparability of official data necessitated this choice. The third limitation is that societal burnout data were obtained from a single research institution; findings obtained through different measurement instruments could render the picture more comprehensive. The fourth limitation is that the regional comparison rests not on direct empirical case study but on an analytical framework based on literature. These limitations do not weaken the validity of the study but rather clarify its scope and claims, enabling readers to evaluate the findings within this framework.

For future research, this study reveals multiple orientations requiring deepening and expansion. The first orientation is the expansion of the sample: the inclusion of rural segments, informal economy workers, migrant populations, and segments below the poverty line could present a more

comprehensive picture of societal disintegration dynamics. Particularly how the migration waves originating from Syria have affected Türkiye's societal structure and resource distribution should be examined in detail in future research; the presence of approximately four million Syrian refugees constitutes an important contextual factor deepening the dynamics of economic competition, cultural tensions, and societal polarization. The second orientation is the implementation of longitudinal research design: tracking the same participants over time could enable stronger testing of causal relationships between variables. Panel data design would make possible the monitoring of individual-level changes and the identification of lagged effects. The third orientation is qualitative deepening: life history interviews and focus group studies could render visible the meaning world behind the quantitative data. The fourth orientation is the empirical expansion of regional comparison: direct comparative analysis of Türkiye with countries experiencing similar economic pressures such as Pakistan, Egypt, or Tunisia could more clearly reveal the diversity and commonalities of disintegration pathways.

Another orientation recommended for future research is the systematic examination of factors that strengthen societal resilience. This study has focused predominantly on vulnerability dynamics; the questions of under which conditions societies exhibit resilience despite economic pressures and which mechanisms serve protective functions should be carried to the agenda of future research. Additionally, the more detailed examination of the effects of disinformation and polarizing communication in digital environments on societal trust carries critical importance for understanding the contemporary dimensions of disintegration dynamics (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2020). The findings of Aytaç and colleagues (2025) on affective polarization in Türkiye demonstrate how digital communication environments deepen societal divisions; the more detailed examination of this dynamic's interaction with societal disintegration processes is required. Comparative studies on how ethical leadership and institutional transparency can rebuild societal trust could strengthen the empirical foundation of policy recommendations. Finally, methodological studies oriented toward the development of early warning systems could concretize how the indicators revealed by this research can be deployed at the operational level. These orientations offer concrete roadmaps for the continuation of the research agenda that this study has opened in the societal disintegration literature.

The epistemological position of this study should be transparently stated in the interpretation of findings. The research is positioned within an interpretive epistemological framework; empirical data are evaluated not as direct reflections of objective reality but as systematic records of societal perceptions and experiences. This epistemological choice, consistent with Castells's (2018) analysis of the relationship between communication and power, rests on the assumption that societal reality is constructed through perceptions and meaning-making. This interpretive position avoids positivist certainty claims yet simultaneously does not fall into radical relativism. Field research data reflect participants' subjective perceptions; while these perceptions are consistent with objective economic indicators, they are not identical with them. This epistemological position necessitates maintaining the level of certainty of findings with moderation. The research does not claim that Türkiye will inevitably enter a disintegration process; rather, it documents the presence

of early signs requiring attention and analyzes possible directions of development. This "early sign" perspective avoids deterministic predictions yet simultaneously does not underestimate the gravity of current trends.

The ethical dimension of the research has been addressed within the framework of academic honesty and societal responsibility. In presenting the findings, alarmist language was deliberately avoided, and an evidence-based, measured, and constructive tone was adopted. Addressing such a sensitive topic as societal disintegration requires ethical awareness as much as academic rigor. The voluntary participation of individuals in the field research was ensured; informed consent regarding the purpose and scope of the research was obtained; and the confidentiality and anonymity of personal data were meticulously protected. This study aims not to spread fear or set political agendas but to create public awareness and provide evidence-based guidance to policymakers. The author's explicit statement of their own assumptions and limitations constitutes one of the fundamental principles of this study as a requirement of academic honesty and self-awareness. Critical distance was maintained, and an analytical line free from ideological prejudices was preserved. This ethical stance strengthens the study's scientific reliability and societal contribution.

When an integrated evaluation is conducted, it is observed that this study reveals that societal disintegration in Türkiye is not yet a fracture that has produced outcomes but is at a measurable and manageable process stage. Income erosion, societal burnout, and perceptual distance in state-society relations do not signify crisis in themselves. However, the progression of these indicators in the same direction and simultaneously indicates that risk accumulation has reached a measurable level. The World Values Survey findings of Haerpfer and colleagues (2022) demonstrate that institutional trust and societal cohesion indicators are trending toward deterioration at the global scale; while the findings from Türkiye are consistent with this global trend, they present a sharper appearance in the regional context. The fragile states literature emphasizes that neglecting such accumulations is costly and that early intervention requires substantially lower societal, economic, and political costs compared to late intervention (North et al., 2009; Carment & Samy, 2023). The Turkish example demonstrates through concrete data that disintegration can progress silently. For this reason, the findings should be evaluated not as pessimistic fatalism but as a critical call for awareness drawing attention to the importance of deliberate intervention.

Türkiye's regional position carries the results of this study beyond national borders. By virtue of its geographical location, historical heritage, and regional relations, Türkiye is situated at the center of Middle East dynamics. The country's NATO membership, relations with the European Union, and regional power status increase the international dimensions of destabilization in Türkiye. As Zürcher (2017) emphasized in his comprehensive analysis of Turkish history, Türkiye's position as a "bridge between East and West" renders the regional and global repercussions of internal dynamics in the country inevitable. Within this framework, the societal disintegration risks in Türkiye carry the potential to affect not only national borders but also regional stability. Considering that similar economic and societal pressures are observed across the broad geography extending from Pakistan to Morocco, from Egypt to Tunisia, the Turkish experience contains

comparative lessons (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). In this respect, this study generates early warning implications not only for Türkiye but also for countries confronting similar vulnerabilities within the context of the Greater Middle East Project. The preservation of regional stability depends on the strengthening of internal resilience in each of these countries.

The holistic contribution of this article lies in addressing societal disintegration as an early-stage, multidimensional, and measurable process; in rendering visible how economic, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions mutually reinforce one another; and in positioning these dynamics within a regional comparative perspective. When evaluated within the framework of Norris and Inglehart's (2019) cultural backlash theory, the combination of economic insecurity and perception of societal change constitutes a powerful dynamic feeding societal polarization and institutional distrust; the findings of this study exhibit a pattern consistent with this theoretical framework. The joint examination of income, emotion, and perception dimensions has revealed with concrete data the connections frequently overlooked in the literature. The findings and discussions have demonstrated that disintegration progresses not suddenly but gradually, and that this gradualness presents a critical opportunity space for policy and societal intervention. Given that early-stage studies are limited in the literature, this study fills an important gap (Gerring, 2021). The analytical framework developed through the Turkish example is adaptable to different country contexts. In this respect, this study offers an original contribution not only at the country-specific level but also at the theoretical level, opening a new line of discussion in the societal disintegration literature.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates through evidence-based analysis that societal disintegration in Türkiye is not an inescapable fate but constitutes a serious risk zone that should not be disregarded. Income erosion, societal burnout, and perceptual distance in state-society relations, when considered together, provide a powerful early warning set. This set is valuable not only for academic analysis but also for public awareness and policy design. The study adopts the aim of evidence-based guidance rather than imposing normative prescriptions. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (Högbladh, 2025) current data on global conflict trends once again confirm the importance of early warning systems and preventive policies; this study presents the concrete counterpart of this global agenda in the Turkish context. Societal disintegration traps can be overcome through deliberate and determined interventions; the timing of these interventions carries critical importance. Türkiye currently remains at a threshold that is still reversible; in which direction this threshold will be crossed depends on the decisions to be made by societal actors, policymakers, and institutions. Silent accumulations can only become amenable to intervention when rendered visible; this study has aimed to provide that visibility and to serve as a reminder that disintegration is not fate but choice.

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