



# EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE **FIELD GUIDE**

**Turkey**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 is the “Culture General” section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 is the “Culture Specific” section, which describes unique cultural features of Turkish society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) or contact the AFCLC Region Team at [AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil](mailto:AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil).

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## PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

### What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.



### Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible.

We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner



that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains”—

in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains—which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### **Social Behaviors across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

### Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

## 12 Domains of Culture



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This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions

as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

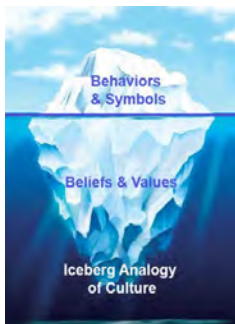
## Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true—regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

## Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate 2 levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols



(top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout Turkey you will encounter cultural patterns of



meaning that are common across the country. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which can be used to frame those cultural patterns of meaning.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

### 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social

relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

### 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture’s categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

### 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in an interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.



### 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This



knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in Turkish culture, establishing and maintaining relationships with others often takes precedence over accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology

Now that we have introduced general concepts that can characterize Turkish society, we will focus on the specific features of society in Turkey.



# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Overview

Located at the strategic crossroads of Europe and Asia, Turkey (Turkey) has seen the rise and fall of empires since its recorded history began in the 2nd millennium BC. Today, Turkey is a parliamentary republic, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and a candidate for membership in the European Union (EU).

**Note:** A small part of modern-day Turkey, the northwestern region of Thrace, lies in Europe (see map on *Political and Social Relations*). It is separated by the Bosphorus Strait and the Sea of Marmara from the rest of the country. This part occupies the Anatolian Peninsula, a part of Asia previously known also as “Asia Minor.”

### Early History

Archaeological finds, including stone tools and animal bones, indicate early humans lived in Anatolia beginning about 20,000 BC. Between 10,000-8,000 BC, humans began to congregate in settlements, where they grew crops and kept domesticated animals. Around 9,000 BC, inhabitants in southeastern Anatolia erected large pillars, some decorated with elaborate animal carvings. Scientists believe this place, called Göbekli Tepe, is the world's oldest site of religious worship. Another site, Çatalhöyük in southern Anatolia, was home to about 5,000 people as early as 7,000 BC and is considered one of the world's earliest cities. Primarily farmers and traders, these inhabitants also produced decorative textiles and pottery while living in brick and timber houses decorated with intricate paintings and reliefs.



Regional occupants then learned to smelt copper and make bronze, allowing them to manufacture tools which facilitated the growth of agriculture. By about 3,000 BC the region was experiencing significant economic growth based on residents' increased agricultural output and enhanced seafaring skills. Improved metalworking techniques allowed production for export, stimulating the development of vast trading networks.

## Early Empires

Starting around 3,000 BC, a succession of empires ruled parts of Anatolia. At other times, local groups vied for control.

**The Rise of the Assyrians:** Around 3,000 BC, the Assyrian Empire arose in northern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq and Syria). By about 2,000 BC, Assyrian merchants had built up a network of trading colonies across Anatolia. To track their transactions, the Assyrians developed a writing system consisting of wedge-shaped marks called cuneiform. Commercial records on clay tablets discovered at the Assyrian colony of Kanesh (present-day Kültepe) represent Anatolia's earliest examples of writing.

## The Rise and Fall of the Hittites:

By the 2nd millennium BC, waves of invaders from the North and East crossed into Anatolia, subjugating and assimilating local groups. From one of these groups, the Hatti, the invaders derived their name, the Hittites, and established the first empire to arise within

Anatolia. The Hittites mastered iron forging, a skill which made them a powerful military force. By about 1400 BC, they controlled almost all of the Anatolian Peninsula. At the empire's height around 1260 BC, the Hittite rulers competed with the ancient Egyptian pharaohs for regional influence. Expert craftsmen, the Hittites built walled cities with impressive temple and palace complexes and produced elegant pottery and other decorative arts. Further, the Hittites adopted cuneiform for their own language.



By about 1200 BC, other groups threatened the Hittites' domination. While the Assyrians pushed north and annexed Hittite kingdoms, a group of maritime marauders known as the "Sea People" attacked the Mediterranean coast. A 3rd group called the Phrygians moved south from Thrace. For several centuries, no single group could dominate Anatolia. Some order returned to the peninsula when the Lydians, a warrior group from



Thrace, conquered much of western Anatolia in the 7th century BC. Noted metalworkers, the Lydians are credited with the invention of coinage.

**Other Groups:** During this early period, many other groups also settled in the region. The Kurdish people began entering the region from the

Eurasian steppes as early as the 2nd millennium BC. After first settling eastern Anatolia in the 7th century BC, Armenians united as a large kingdom in far eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus by the 1st century BC.

### The Greeks

Meanwhile, western Anatolia had been in intensive contact with the Greeks since about 3,000 BC. Between 2,600-1200 BC, Anatolia's Aegean coast was an integral part of Greek Minoan-Mycenaean civilization. After the 8th century BC, a particularly large wave of Greeks settled in Anatolia, establishing important city-states. One Greek settlement was the colony of Byzantium, established in the 7th century BC at the site of Turkey's present-day capital, Istanbul (see "Myth" below).

### The Persians

From its base in modern-day Iran, the Persian Achaemenid Empire absorbed most of Anatolia in the 5th century BC, conquering the Assyrians, Lydians, and Phrygians. In the West, the Greeks initially welcomed the Persians but then rebelled, calling on mainland Greece for aid.

## The Hellenistic Age: Alexander the Great

In response, Greek leader Alexander the Great led an army to Anatolia in 334 BC and defeated the Persians. Over the next 4 years, Alexander continued his campaign into Africa and South Asia, in the process consolidating the world's largest empire at the time. Following Alexander's death in 323 BC, the Anatolian holdings were divided among several generals. During the subsequent Hellenistic (Greek) period, many Anatolian residents adopted Greek culture and language as rival city-states jostled for dominance. In the 3rd century BC, the Hellenistic city of Pergamum (near modern-day Bergama) was a renowned center of learning.

## The Roman Empire

Meanwhile, the Romans had begun building their empire in central Italy around 500 BC. During the 2nd century BC, the



Romans pursued rapid expansion eastwards. Following territorial conquests in Greece, the Romans took on many Greek attributes, such as adopting Greek as the empire's language in their new Anatolian territories. In 133 BC, Pergamum's king handed over his holdings to the Romans without a fight. Shortly thereafter, the empire reorganized its Anatolian territories as the province of "Asia." By 43 AD, all of Anatolia was integrated into the Roman imperial system, ruled by emperors from their capital in Rome.

Inclusion in the empire brought various advantages, including relative peace, a comprehensive legal system, and improved infrastructure, such as an elaborate network of roads and water distribution systems. Further, Anatolia's multi-ethnic residents shared a common identity as Greek-speaking Roman citizens.

## The Byzantine Empire

In 285, Roman emperor Diocletian reorganized the empire, dividing it into western Latin- and eastern Greek-speaking halves. In 330, his successor, Constantine, moved the empire's capital from Rome to Byzantium, the settlement on the Bosphorus

founded by the Greeks some 1000 years earlier. Renamed Constantinople, the city would remain the capital of the eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire, for the next 1100 years.

The 313 Edict of Milan (see *Religion and Spirituality*) established freedom of religion across the empire. Following Emperor Constantine's conversion and the late 4th-century establishment of Christianity as the state religion, Anatolia became a center of Christian thought (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

The Byzantine Empire reached its height under Emperor Justinian (r. 527-565), who conquered territories in North Africa, Italy, and southern Spain. In addition, he ordered the construction of palaces, churches,



and other buildings across the empire. Justinian's most famous construction was the Hagia Sophia Church. Converted to a mosque in the 15th century, the building today is a museum and one of Istanbul's most popular tourist attractions.

### **The Byzantine Empire's Slow Decline**

Over the next centuries, a religious dispute (see *Religion and Spirituality*) rocked the empire. In addition, the Byzantine rulers faced challenges in defending the vast empire.

**The Rise of the Turks:** While the Turks' early history is unclear, the first historical records referring to Turkic groups are Chinese accounts from 200 BC. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD, nomadic Turkic tribes in Central Asia began to organize. With their significant horsemanship and military skills, they were soon expanding their holdings through conquest. By the 7th century, the Turks were using written language and occasionally allying with the Byzantines against a common enemy. Starting in the 9th century, Turkic tribes began to raid Anatolian territory. Around the same time, many converted to Islam (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

**Great Seljuk Turks:** In the late 10th century, a Turkic leader named Seljuk Bey established his dynasty in Central Asia. In 1055, a subsequent Seljuk ruler captured Baghdad (Iraq) and forced the caliph, the Islamic spiritual leader, to grant him the title of sultan (leader). After establishing control over Persia (modern-day Iran), the Seljuk Turks began their expansion west, contesting control of various Byzantine territories.

In the 1071 Battle of Manzikert near Lake Van in Anatolia's East, Seljuk Sultan Alp-Arslan led Turkic horsemen known as **gazis** in a decisive victory over the Byzantines. Over the next decades, Turkic generals established numerous principalities called **beylikler** (singular: **beylik**) throughout Anatolia.



**Sultanate of Rum:** The most significant of these *beylikler* was the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum (1077-1308) with its capital at Konya in southwestern Turkey. Gradually, some Anatolian residents began to adopt the Turks' language and religion while some Greeks and Armenians maintained their own traditions.

At the height of Seljuk rule, science, literature, art and architecture flourished. This flowering of the arts was in part

due to the influx of skilled and educated people fleeing the advance of the Mongols from the East.

**Christian Crusaders:** The Turks soon faced challenges to their power and authority. Their success particularly concerned the Byzantines and their brethren in Rome. Despite significant religious conflict between the 2 halves of the empire earlier in the century (see *Religion and Spirituality*), the Byzantine ruler requested support from Rome in defeating the Seljuk Turks in 1095. In response, the Pope as leader of the Roman Catholic Church declared a religious crusade against Muslim control of the Holy Land.

The European crusaders passed through Anatolia in several waves. In 1097, they seized several important sites, altering the balance of power in Anatolia and allowing the Byzantine Empire to regain some of its influence. By 1176, however, the Turks had

re-grouped and defeated the Byzantines in a major battle.

The Empire faced another blow in 1204 when crusaders on their way to battle Islamic



forces in Jerusalem decided instead to sack and loot the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The Catholic crusaders destroyed several Orthodox Christian (see *Religion and Spirituality*) churches and monasteries while killing thousands. The Byzantine Empire never fully recovered from this blow, and by 1261, it was reduced to Thrace and northwestern Anatolia.

**Mongol Invaders:** In 1243, Mongol forces led by Genghis Khan invaded Anatolia, destroying the Seljuk army at the Battle of Köse Dağ. By 1308, the Seljuk Sultanate was reduced to a Mongol vassal state. Despite this swift conquest, Mongol control of Anatolia proved to be short-lived. Within a few decades, the Mongols withdrew, leaving several Turkic *beylikler* competing for dominance.

### The Rise of the Ottomans

According to semi-mythical accounts, a Turkic leader named Ertuğrul founded a *beylik* in western Anatolia. His son, Osman I (r. 1284-1326), proceeded to rapidly expand territorial control of his Osmanlı, or Ottoman principality, in the process founding a dynasty that would create one of the world's greatest empires.

Besides acquiring the title “sultan,” Osman became known as the “Bone-Breaker” for his determination to conquer new lands. The Ottomans acquired territory in Thrace beginning in 1354 and moved their capital from Bursa to Edirne, north of Constantinople, directly threatening the Byzantines. The



Ottomans then proceeded to conquer the Balkans while requiring the Byzantine emperor to pay them tribute.

Ottoman troops first besieged Constantinople in 1397 but fell short of taking the city before having to divert troops to respond to a renewed threat from the East. In 1402, notorious Central Asian warlord Timur (also known as Tamerlane) crushed Ottoman forces near Ankara (the present-day Turkish capital) and even captured the Ottoman sultan. Even though their attackers quickly withdrew, the Ottomans required several years to recover from this defeat before attempting to take Constantinople again.

**The Capture of Constantinople:** Cut off by land since 1365, Constantinople was very vulnerable. In 1453, Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (also known as “the Conqueror”) besieged the city again, effectively trapping city residents from positions in 2 forts.



The subsequent 50-day siege included impressive offensive and defensive acts, including the Ottomans' transport of warships across land on greased runners and the Byzantine blockage of Constantinople's harbor with thick iron chains. Despite their

massive resistance, the Byzantines could not withstand the Ottomans' superior force, and the city fell.

Immediately, Mehmet took steps to make the city his own, converting the Hagia Sophia church to a mosque. Over the years, the city, now named Istanbul, became even more diverse due to certain Ottoman policies. For example, the sultan resettled thousands of Albanians, Turks, Greeks, and Armenians to the city and accepted certain refugee populations into the empire, such as the Jews of Spain after their 1492 expulsion.

In subsequent decades, the Ottomans continued to acquire new territory, expanding to both the East and the West. They conquered Syria, Egypt, and the Islamic world's 2 holiest cities, Mecca and Medina in present-day Saudi Arabia in 1517. Thereafter, the Ottoman sultan added "caliph" to his title, claiming his status as spiritual leader of the Islamic world while Istanbul replaced Baghdad as the center of Sunni Islam. For the next 3 centuries, until the mid-1700s, the Ottoman Empire was the region's most powerful state. It effectively controlled the entire Balkans, parts of central and southern Europe, and the Middle East from Egypt to the Persian border, while its ships ruled the Mediterranean, Black, and Red Seas.

### **The Height of the Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Empire reached its height under Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-66), when it attained its greatest territorial size and was supported by an efficient governmental administration and an immense military. A melting pot of Central Asian, Middle Eastern, North African, and European peoples, the Empire provided its citizens an all-encompassing social and political system in exchange for their loyalty.

Besides overseeing a groundbreaking revision of the Empire's legal code, Süleyman pursued further expansion into Europe, taking Belgrade (Serbia) in 1521 and Budapest (Hungary) in 1526, though his 1529 and 1532 sieges of Vienna (Austria) were unsuccessful. As patrons of the arts, Süleyman and his wife Hürrem Sultan sponsored



artistic and architectural projects throughout the Empire as well as the restoration of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem.

When Süleyman died in 1566, the Ottoman Empire was a world power. To maintain its governmental bureaucracy as well as its powerful standing infantry, cavalry, and navy, the Empire relied

on the ***devşirme***. Within this system, rural Christian subjects were required to give 1 son in service to the sultan. After conversion to Islam and education, the young men became civil servants or ***Janissaries*** (professional soldiers).



### The Long Decline of the Ottomans

A series of weak sultans in the late 16th and early 17th centuries coincided with the rise and expansion of other European powers. Consequently, the Ottoman economy began to falter in the face of increased competition. Local rulers in far-away Ottoman provinces took

advantage of the Empire's weakness while the *Janissaries'* loyalty to the Empire gradually became secondary to their own interests.

Decline was temporarily halted in the 17th century when a series of grand ***viziers*** (similar to a Prime Minister) overhauled the bureaucracy and instituted military reforms. Following the acquisition of Ukrainian territory, the Empire resumed its attempt to take Vienna in 1664 and again in 1683 before withdrawing. With this defeat, the other European powers recognized the Empire's fragility. In a 16-year war, Russia united with Austria, Poland, and Venice to try and drive the Ottomans out of Europe. Under the resulting 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, the Empire lost half its European possessions.

Rebellious *Janissaries* continued to contribute to the Empire's instability. Meanwhile, the Ottomans' decline coincided with the Russians' rise. In the late 18th century, Russian troops mobilized by Catherine the Great invaded the Empire, gaining access to the Black Sea and annexing the Crimean region.

In 1826, Sultan Mahmud II suppressed a major *Janissary* revolt in a massacre known as the "Auspicious Event." Consequently, the Empire dissolved the *Janissaries* and reorganized the bureaucracy, though the reforms were largely unsuccessful.

The early 19th century also saw the first of several waves of nationalism sweep the Empire, bringing rebellion and demands for independent rule. First, the Greeks revolted. Following several years of conflict, the European powers forced the Ottomans to recognize Greek independence in 1832. As other ethnic and nationalistic groups clamored for self-rule, the Empire became known as “the sick man of Europe.”

**Attempts at Reform:** By the mid-19th century, it was obvious that the Empire must implement major reforms in order to survive. In a decades-long effort called the *Tanzimât* (“reorganization”), reformers aimed to modernize the Empire along the lines of other European powers. They pursued this goal by affirming the equality of all Ottoman subjects before the law, abolishing certain



taxes, devising a new military recruitment system, and changing the legal system. At the peak of these efforts, the Empire adopted a new constitution in 1876 that created a representative parliament and guaranteed religious freedom. It quickly became apparent that the sultan’s support for the reforms was superficial: within a year he had dissolved the parliament and withdrawn the constitution.

**Territorial Loss:** France and Britain backed the Ottomans in the Crimean War with Russia (1853-56). Although the Russians were defeated, the Ottomans were forced to grant access to the Dardanelles Straits to Russia as well as give up control of Bulgaria. These events, combined with France’s acquisition of Algeria and Tunisia and Britain’s occupation of Egypt, meant the Ottoman Empire was steadily losing its regional influence. Further, the Empire’s 19th-century repression of revolutionary activities in Armenia aroused significant European public opinion against the Ottomans.

## The Young Turks

Unhappy with the slow pace of reforms and with the military's lack of success on the battlefield, young military officers began to rally for real change. These men came to be known as the "Young Turks," a term now commonly used to refer to any new generation of reformers. In 1907, several reform groups came together to form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Seeking to restore the 1876 constitution, the CUP also strived to unify the Empire's diverse elements.

In 1908, the CUP took power in a coup. When Sultan Abdülhamid II refused to accept a constitution, the CUP forced him to abdicate and installed his brother on the throne. Taking advantage of the Empire's instability, several European powers claimed Ottoman territory. Weakened, the Empire lost all of the rest of its European holdings except Thrace in the 1912-13 Balkan Wars. Although the sultan still ostensibly ruled the Empire, the CUP actually governed as a military dictatorship.



## World War I (WWI)

When WWI broke out in 1914, the Empire entered the war as an ally of Germany, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary fighting against the Allies consisting of the US, Britain, and Russia.

**Armenian Atrocities:** In winter 1915, the Ottomans mounted an offensive against the Russians in the Caucasus. In a counteroffensive that pushed the Ottomans back into Anatolian territory, the Empire suffered staggering losses. Fearing that the Christian Armenian residents of eastern Anatolia would support the Christian Russians, the CUP government ordered the deportation of some 2 million Armenians from the area. Deportation quickly turned into a massacre: between 600,000 and 1 million Armenians lost their lives as Turkish and Kurdish forces attacked villages and slaughtered Armenians seeking refuge. This action engendered revulsion across Europe and still influences Turkey's foreign relations today (see *Political and Social Relations*).

**Gallipoli:** In spring 1915, the Allies mounted an offensive intended to end the Ottomans' participation in the war and open the Dardanelles strait for the passage of supplies to Russia's



ports on the Black Sea. To this end, Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) and British troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula, about 180 mi south of Istanbul where they found Ottoman troops waiting within fortified trenches. The

subsequent 9-month battle ended in a stalemate but ultimately cost a combined 500,000 casualties, including over 100,000 dead.

These losses, combined with the effects of British-supported revolts in Palestinian, Arabian, and Egyptian Ottoman territories, were devastating. With the war winding down in 1918, the CUP leadership fled the country and the sultan petitioned the Allies for peace. In 4 years of war, the Ottoman Empire mobilized around 2.8 million men, losing 325,000 of them in battle. Further, some 2 million Turkish and Armenian civilians had died of war-related causes.

### **War of Independence**

Following the Allies' win in WWI, Allied forces occupied Istanbul and took custody of Sultan Mehmed VI. During the 1919 Paris peace talks, France, Britain, Italy, and Greece presented claims to Ottoman territory. Further, all peace talk participants agreed to an autonomous Kurdistan but before the treaty could be ratified, conflict flared again. In mid-1919, Greek troops invaded Izmir on the Aegean coast and marched inland toward Ankara. In response, a simmering nationalist movement flared under the leadership of Ottoman military officer Mustafa Kemal.

**Mustafa Kemal:** An ardent nationalist since his youth, Mustafa Kemal had taken part in the coup that toppled the sultan a decade earlier and was a well-known leader from the Gallipoli campaign. Supervising Ottoman demobilization when the

Greeks invaded, Mustafa Kemal rallied support for the nationalist cause and raised an army. Soon, Mustafa Kemal's troops were engaging the Greeks. In July 1919, Mustafa Kemal organized a nationalist congress to adopt a National Pact calling for an independent Turkish state. After some initial reluctance, the Ottoman government approved the Pact in January 1920. At a Grand National Assembly (**Turkey Büyük Millet Meclisi** or TBMM) convened in April, the nationalists elected Mustafa Kemal their President.

While fighting between the Greeks and Turkish nationalists in 1920 was inconclusive, by 1921 the tide began to turn with a series of Turkish victories. Discouraged by the Turks' success, France and Italy withdrew from Anatolia. In 1922, the Turks recaptured Izmir from the Greeks. With only Istanbul remaining in Allied control, Mustafa Kemal accepted a British-proposed truce that ended the fighting. The TBMM then abolished the office of sultan, claiming the TBMM was the sole governmental authority. Mehmet VI, the last Ottoman sultan, went into exile.

**The Treaty of Lausanne:** In the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Allies recognized the present-day territory of Turkey while abandoning their demand for an independent Kurdish state. Further, the treaty reaffirmed the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. Significantly, it also mandated an exchange between Turkey and Greece of most of their ethnic minorities. With some exceptions, such as Greeks living in Istanbul, most were compelled to move.

Consequently, some 1.25 million Greeks permanently left Turkey while some 450,000 Turks from Greece resettled in Turkey.



### **The Republic of Turkey**

On October 29, 1923, the TBMM proclaimed the Republic of Turkey with Ankara as its capital and Mustafa Kemal as its President and head-of-state. Emerging from almost a century of continuous conflict and instability, the new nation faced a weak economy

and an infrastructure in ruins. Further, the new state had no history of stable democratic governance to draw upon. While ethnic Turkish identity and nationalism were well established among the peasants of Anatolia, they were as yet unconnected to the new country called “Turkey.”

**Kemalist Reforms:** President Mustafa Kemal promoted modernization and westernization as solutions to these challenges. Consequently, he aimed to transform Turkey into a state patterned on those of Western Europe. Over the next decade, the new government enacted sweeping reforms intended to support the “Six Arrows” of his philosophy, known as Kemalism: republicanism, nationalism, populism, reformism, etatism (state control of economic policy), and secularism.

These reforms transformed Turkish society. Besides abolishing the caliphate (see *Religion and Spirituality*), the government closed religious schools, banned all Islamic brotherhoods, outlawed all headgear indicating religious affiliation, and discouraged women from wearing a veil. Further, the country adopted the Western calendar, shifted the workweek to comply with Western European standards, developed new penal codes based on European models, and introduced a new, Latin-based alphabet (see *Language and Communication*).

**Atatürk:** Kemalist reforms also abolished Ottoman titles and required all citizens to adopt a last

name, which Turks traditionally did not have. As his new last name, Mustafa Kemal took “Atatürk,” meaning “Father of the Turks.” The TBMM subsequently prohibited the name’s use by anyone else. Over the course of his 15-year Presidency, Atatürk allowed just 1 political party, the Republican People’s Party (***Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*** or CHP). Founded by Atatürk in 1923, the CHP continues to advocate Kemalism today (see *Political and Social Relations*).





## World War II (WWII)

Following Atatürk's death in 1938, the TBMM elected his chief aide, İsmet İnönü, President. Intent on continuing Atatürk's



policies, İnönü initially maintained single party rule. Despite pressure to the contrary, İnönü managed to keep Turkey neutral throughout WWII. In the closing days of the war in 1945, Turkey

did declare war on Germany in order to participate in subsequent peace negotiations. Consequently, Turkey became a founding member of the United Nations (UN).

## Multiparty Politics

As postwar policies strengthened Turkey's ties with the West, diverse groups began demanding greater political freedoms. In response, the government allowed new political parties to participate in the 1946 elections. As the main opposition party, the Democrat Party (***Demokrat Partisi*** or DP) achieved some support and by 1950 gained the majority of seats in the TBMM.

Over the next decade of DP political control, Prime Minister (PM) Adnan Menderes, as head of government, focused on the economy. Growth was initially robust and living standards rose significantly. Further, the DP gained popularity due to its relaxation of certain restrictions on Islamic institutions. But by the mid-1950s, the DP's economic mismanagement had severely weakened the economy. To silence growing opposition, the government introduced several repressive measures, further destabilizing the situation. Following violent demonstrations in 1960, the Menderes government suspended all political activity and imposed martial law.

## The Military Steps In

While Atatürk himself believed that the military should stay out of politics, the Turkish military typically has viewed itself as the guardian of Kemalism and the state's secular order. When

Menderes imposed martial law, the Turkish military concluded that the government had discarded Kemalist principles. Consequently, Turkish army units seized power in a coup in mid-1960, arresting most political leaders, including Menderes.

In 1961, an interim legislature ratified a new constitution that reduced the government's centralized powers. The military committee tried some 600 former officials, finding most guilty and sentencing Menderes to death. In October, the military oversaw new elections in which 4 political parties won seats in the TBMM. CHP leader İnönü returned to power as leader of a coalition government.

### **Instability and Violence in the 1960s**

In the 1965 elections, the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi* or AP), won a clear majority over the CHP. The AP under PM Süleyman Demirel extolled right-wing populism, supporting the open expression of Islam and encouraging the development of a private sector. Meanwhile, the CHP's continuing support of Kemalism resulted in a polarized situation that encouraged

political extremism. Soon, organizations on both the far right and left resorted to violence, disrupting student demonstrations and carrying out physical attacks on political opponents. Among the general population, social unrest was also fueled by economic hardship, social inequalities, and the slowness of reforms.



### **The Military Intervenes Again**

Concerned about ongoing instability, the military intervened again in spring 1971 by issuing a memorandum demanding the government's replacement. PM Demirel immediately resigned. As in 1960, the military arrested political and militant group leaders then withdrew again from politics relatively quickly. The 1973 elections brought the CHP back to power.

### **Instability and Violence in the 1970s**

Stability proved elusive in the 1970s as political infighting continued. Besides political instability, rapid urbanization and

triple-digit inflation coupled with sky-high unemployment caused social and economic upheaval. In an attempt to curb the violence, the government unlawfully detained thousands, subjecting some to torture.

Although the CHP retained power in the 1977 elections, various radical and militant groups continued their violent protests. In late 1978, the government proclaimed martial law, then in 1979 curbed union activities and restricted public assembly. Meanwhile, the military voiced its objection to the growing

influence of religious sectarianism on politics.

### **The Invasion of Cyprus:**

The historical conflict between Turkey and Greece flared in the 1960s when fighting between Greek and Turkish residents on British-ruled Cyprus



was quelled by UN peacekeepers. Following a Greek coup attempt in 1974, some 30,000 Turkish forces invaded the island. After taking control of about 1/3 of the island, the Turks established the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). To date, Turkey is the world's only country that has officially recognized the TRNC (see *Political and Social Relations*).

### **The Military Intervenes for a 3rd Time**

With substantial international support, PM Demirel initiated a large-scale economic stabilization plan when he returned to office in 1979. Still, recovery lagged. In summer 1980, political violence and sectarian unrest brought governance to a standstill due to political infighting. In September, activists demanded the reinstatement of Islamic law at a massive rally in Konya. Frustrated by the government's inability to stabilize the economy and maintain public order, the military used the rally as a pretext to intervene. Proclaiming the rally a direct challenge to its authority and to Kemalism, the armed forces seized control for the 3rd time in 20 years.

Seeking to reestablish law and order, the military remained in power for 3 years, dissolving the TBMM and outlawing political parties. Further, it extended martial law across the country while arresting some 30,000 suspected militants, political party leaders, union organizers, and student activists. Critics charged the military government with political repression, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment without trial, torture, and other human rights violations. A new 1982 constitution vested more power in the office of the President rather than the TBMM and stipulated that political parties must receive at least 10% of the national vote to be represented in the TBMM.

### A Return to Civilian Rule

As it prepared for a return to civilian rule, the military approved the participation of just 3 political parties in the 1983 elections. In a rebuke to the military and the CHP, voters gave the Motherland Party (**Anavatan Partisi**) their support. Motherland leader Turgut Özal became PM, a post he would hold through the 1980s before becoming President in 1989. The stable political situation of the 1980s and early 1990s accompanied a period of economic reform and slow growth (see *Economics and Resources*) coupled with a population boom.

### Resurgent Kurdish Nationalism

Because the Republic of Turkey was founded as a homeland for Turks, any recognition of linguistic, ethnic, or religious rights for minority populations was considered threatening to the nation's unity. Consequently, the Turks ensured that the



1923 Treaty of Lausanne denied the minority Kurds an autonomous homeland, while granting minorities no recognition in the early Republic. Resentful of the government's efforts to forcibly assimilate them, the Kurds rebelled in 1925, 1930, and 1937-8. While the military regularly quelled these uprisings, often with enormous loss of life, the place of the Kurds in Turkish society remained a controversial topic over the decades.

In 1984, the Kurdish movement became more militant. While some activists continued to focus on nonviolent political struggle to obtain basic rights for Kurds, others began to advocate an armed insurrection to achieve an independent Kurdish state. That year, from a base in neighboring Syria, a group called the Kurdistan Workers' Party (***Partiye Karkeren Kurdistan*** or PKK



founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan) began sending fighters across the porous border into Turkey. For the next 15 years, PKK militants waged a vicious war against the Turkish military.

The military answered the PKK's acts of terrorism with a brutal counterinsurgency that uprooted thousands and encouraged attacks against civilians. In sum, the conflicts left tens of thousands dead.

### Changing Coalition Governments in the 1990s

Following Özal's sudden death in 1993, Tansu Çiller became Turkey's first female PM. Widespread dissatisfaction with her economic policies enabled the rise of the Welfare Party (***Refah Partisi*** or RP). In 1995 elections, the RP won the majority of votes on promises to enact socially responsible economic policies, while supporting traditions such as Islam to balance globalization and modernization. As the next PM, RP leader Necmettin Erbakan attempted to increase the role of Islam in politics, public life, and education. This attempt, plus his disinterest in integration with Europe and inability to solve Turkey's economic problems, alarmed the military.

**Military Intervention:** In 1997, the military published a statement demanding adherence to secularism and the constitution. While the military did not take over the government this time, it did force Erbakan to resign while designating his replacement and banning the RP. Soon, the Islamist movement reconstituted itself into new parties, including the Justice and Development Party (***Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*** or AKP).

**The Capture of Öcalan:** Following the conclusion of the First Gulf War in 1991, thousands of Iraqi Kurds sought refuge in Turkey. The PKK took advantage of the chaos to increase its guerilla attacks. In response, the Turkish military mounted a fierce retaliation. By 1993, some 10,000 people had died in clashes between the military and Kurds.

In 1998, Turkey accused Syria of supporting the Kurds and demanded it turn over PKK members. PKK leader Öcalan escaped but was captured in Kenya a year later. Following his trial, Öcalan called for a ceasefire. In recent years, the government has granted some of the Kurds' demands for protection of their human rights, largely to promote Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. Recently, though, there has been a resurgence of PKK militancy (see *Political and Social Relations*).

### **The AKP Takes Power**

By 2001, Turkey was again facing significant economic challenges including inflation over 100% and the collapse of its banking system. In 2002 elections, the AKP won with a 2/3 majority while its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, became PM in 2003.

Upon gaining power, the AKP pledged to focus on Turkey's accession to the EU and growing the economy. In

Erdoğan's first term, the government was largely successful: the economy stabilized and sufficient human rights reforms resulted in the EU



agreeing to re-open membership talks (see *Political and Social Relations*). Voters rewarded the AKP by electing it with even greater majorities in 2007 and 2011.

By 2011, it was clear that Erdoğan strived to remain in power following his 3rd term, most likely as President. Other developments were cause for concern for many citizens. These

included the AKP's renewed efforts to return Islam to public life and the government's increasingly repressive actions. In 2013,



widespread protests occurred across the country. The government responded harshly, sending in heavily armed riot police that quelled the movements.

### Contemporary Turkey

In 2014, Erdogan became Turkey's first directly elected

President (see *Political and Social Relations*). In the following year, Erdoğan announced his plan to increase the power of the Presidency while exhibiting increasingly authoritarian tendencies, jailing journalists, purging the judiciary of opponents, limiting the activities of opposition parties, and attempting to control the military.

In June 2015 elections, the AKP did not attain a majority of the votes. Because the AKP was unable to form the coalition with other political parties required to name a PM, the government scheduled new elections in November. This time, the AKP attained a majority, naming Ahmet Davutoğlu as PM. In a surprise move in late spring 2016 that revealed a growing ideological rift among AKP party leaders, Erdoğan forced the removal of PM Davutoğlu from office and appointed Binali Yıldırım (pictured) in his place (see *Political and Social Relations*). Unlike Davutoğlu, Yıldırım is a subservient and staunch ally of Erdoğan, and in his role as PM, he pledged to help Erdoğan establish a stronger Presidency.



In July 2016, a small renegade faction of the Turkish military unsuccessfully attempted to

overthrow the government. Immediately following the failed coup, Erdoğan declared a state of emergency, radically enhancing Presidential powers and allowing him to bypass the TBMM and rule by decree. As of August 2016, Erdoğan had jailed and purged from their positions thousands of government employees, members of the judiciary, military personnel, journalists, and academics in an effort to root out political opponents and quell internal dissent. Erdoğan's government has



also closed hundreds of private schools, imposed travel restrictions on educators and public sector workers, and shuttered dozens of media organizations.

Despite Erdoğan's success in power, Turkey's political

system remains fragile. Some factions remain committed to the country's secular Kemalist roots, while others, such as the AKP, vigorously pursue an enhanced role for Islam in society. Turkey's future, as well as its commitment to democracy, freedom of speech, secularism, and human rights, is presently unclear. Some observers suggest that Erdoğan may use the 2016 failed coup as an excuse to rid himself of political opposition groups, acquire still more power for the Presidency, and even abolish the multi-party system.

Further, some observers believe that the government's rollback of certain reforms coupled with Erdoğan's recent authoritarianism may weaken Turkey's bid for EU membership and diminish Turkey's standing as a reliable partner to the West. However, Turkey's 2016 agreement with the EU to house some migrants and Syrian war refugees has earned it certain concessions from the EU. A spate of recent terrorist attacks (see *Political and Social Relations*) demonstrates Turkey's vulnerability to spillover of regional violence while renewed fighting between the military and the PKK indicates the Kurdish issue remains unresolved.



## Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

Turkey's myths and stories reflect its multicultural history and range from Greek-based mythology to Turkic trickster tales. For example, ancient Greek myths typically interpret historical events through divine intervention and prophecy, while Turkic traditions include the stories of Nasreddin Hoca, a practical joker who is said to have lived during Seljuk rule. Another well-known story relates the founding of Byzantium, a settlement that would eventually become Turkey's capital, Istanbul.

## The Founding of Byzantium

King Byzas of the mainland Greek city-state of Megara decided to build a new city. To attain the gods' advice, he traveled to Delphi to consult the Oracle, a priestess serving the god Apollo who often delivered prophecies in riddles. Indeed, the Oracle told Byzas to build his city "opposite the blind."

Byzas traveled far and wide in search of "the blind." Arriving at a place where the ocean flowed through a narrow passage, he noticed an unoccupied peninsula. It appeared to be an ideal place for a city: it was well above the sea so inhabitants could easily spot enemies, while the water surrounding it on 3 sides made it defensible.

Across from this prime location was a small settlement. Because its residents had apparently overlooked the much superior location for their village, Byzas concluded that they must be "the blind" mentioned by the Oracle. He quickly claimed the peninsula as the site for his new city which he named after himself: Byzantium.



## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name

Republic of Turkey  
(Türkiye)  
*Türkiye*  
*Cumhuriyeti*

### Political Borders

Georgia: 170 mi  
Armenia: 193 mi  
Azerbaijan: 11 mi  
Iran: 312 mi  
Iraq: 228 mi  
Syria: 558 mi  
Greece: 119 mi  
Bulgaria: 139 mi  
Coastline: 4,473 mi

### Capital

Ankara

### Demographics

With a population over 84.1 million, Turkey is the world's 18th most populous country. The population is growing at a rate of 0.61% annually, similar to rates of Brazil and Lebanon, but lower than neighboring Syria (1.67%). Turkey is primarily urban: 75% of residents live in metropolitan areas. Notably, approximately 15.8 million people reside in Istanbul, continental Europe's largest city.



### Flag

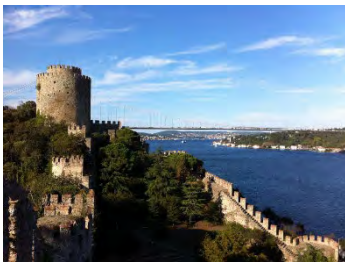
The Turkish flag consists of a white vertical crescent moon and a 5-point star centered outside the crescent's opening, set against a red backdrop. The flag's design and colors

resemble the banner of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's

predecessor state. The moon and star serve as traditional symbols of Islam, while simultaneously representing the Turkish people. In an alternate interpretation, the flag symbolizes a pool of Turkish warriors' blood reflecting the moon and a star.

## Geography

Situated at the nexus of Europe and Asia, the majority of Turkey's territory, referred to as Anatolia, lies in Asia. A small region located in Europe known as Thrace is separated from Anatolia by the Sea of Marmara. The Bosphorus Strait connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea, while the Dardanelles Strait connects it with the Aegean Sea. Turkey is bordered by the Black Sea to the north, by Georgia and Armenia to the northeast, by Azerbaijan and Iran to the east, by Iraq and Syria to the southeast, by the Mediterranean Sea to the south, by the Aegean Sea and the Turkish Straits to the west, and by Greece and Bulgaria to the northwest. Turkey's total area is about 302,535 sq mi, making it slightly larger than Texas.



Much of Anatolia is characterized by undulating hills and broad central plateaus that become mountainous in the East. Mountains and forests stretch along the Black Sea to the north, while fertile coastal lowlands extend along the southern coastlines of the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. With 6 mountain ranges, Turkey's highest point is Mount Ararat, rising 16,854 ft. Two of the region's major rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, originate in eastern Turkey. Turkey's largest lake, Lake Van, covers 1,434 sq mi and is one of the world's largest saltwater lakes.

## Climate

Due to its topography, Turkey's climate varies, though all regions experience 4 distinct seasons. Along the southern coasts, winters are mild, with temperatures averaging 42°F, while summers are warm and dry, averaging 72°F. Central

Anatolia experiences a more extreme climate. Summers are hot, averaging 86°F, while winters are snowy and cold with temperatures dipping as low as 20°F. Rainfall is heaviest along the northern coast, where temperatures average 46°F in the winter and 72°F in the summer.

### Natural Hazards

Turkey is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including earthquakes, flooding, and landslides. In 2023, Turkey suffered 2 devastating earthquakes within a 9-hour period, the worst in recorded history which destroyed portions of the Gaziantep Province in Turkey, close to the Syrian border, killing over 62,000 people in Turkey and Syria. Floods are particularly pervasive along the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts, regularly inundating densely populated areas and damaging regional infrastructure. Torrential rains along the Black Sea make the northern coast particularly susceptible to landslides.

### Environmental Issues

Water pollution caused by improper disposal of industrial and human waste is a significant concern in Istanbul and other large metropolitan areas. In addition, increased oil tanker traffic along



the Bosphorus Strait, a busy maritime passage, raises fears of large oil spills and their impact on coastal marine life. Although urban air quality has improved in recent years following the Turkish government's regulation of industrial

activities, air pollution from automobile emissions remains a persistent concern in Istanbul, Ankara, and other large urban areas. Finally, land degradation from deforestation, overgrazing, and the clearing of land for farming results in a loss of biodiversity.

### Government

Turkey has a parliamentary political system which is run by the President. The country divides into 81 provinces administered

by governors, which further subdivide into municipalities. Ratified in 1982, the Constitution divides powers among executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

### Executive Branch

Between 1923 and 2018, Turkey was a parliamentary representative democracy. A presidential system was adopted by referendum in 2017; the new system came into effect with the presidential election in 2018 and gives the President complete control of the executive, including the power to issue decrees, appoint his own cabinet, draw up the budget, dissolve parliament by calling early elections, and pack the bureaucracy and the courts with political appointees.



The office of Prime Minister has been abolished and its powers (together with those of the Cabinet) have been transferred to the President, who is the head of state and is elected for a five-year term by direct elections. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President since 2014 and currently serving his second term as President, is the first to be elected by direct voting. Turkey's constitution governs the legal framework of the country. It sets out the main principles of government and establishes Turkey as a unitary centralized state.

### Legislative Branch

Turkey's legislature is the 1-chamber Grand National Assembly of Turkey (***Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi***--TBMM), composed of 600 members who are elected for a five-year term by a party-list proportional representation system, representing 81 provinces. The TBMM has the power to draft, amend, and repeal laws, to declare war or martial law, and to ratify international agreements.

### Judicial Branch

Turkey's highest court is the Constitutional Court or ***Anayasa Mahkemesi***, comprised of the president, 2 vice presidents, and 12 judges. The president and vice president of the court serve

4-year terms while judges serve single 12-year terms. The judiciary also includes the Supreme Court of Appeals, which oversees criminal and civil cases, and a system of lower courts that supervise “administrative” matters, such as bankruptcy, family law, taxation, and citizenship. In addition, military courts handle matters related to military service and assume control during periods of martial law.

## Political Climate

Turkey has a multi-party system in which political parties or coalitions of parties compete for power. Although the democratic process is generally free and fair, Turkey's constitution outlaws extremist parties and requires parties to obtain at least 10% of national votes to be represented in the TBMM. Of note, Turkey's military has historically been closely involved in the political process, acting as guardian of Turkey's traditionally secular political system (see *History and Myth*). Seeking to provide domestic stability in instances of political and ideological extremes, the military has successfully overthrown 4 elected governments since 1960 and staged a 5th failed coup attempt in

July 2016 (see *History and Myth*).



Recently, Turkey's political climate has been characterized by a growing divide between conservative Islamic groups seeking to preserve traditional Islamic-Turkish culture

and progressive secular groups advocating a pro-Western orientation and opposing an overt Islamist agenda.

Holding 267 seats in the TBMM, Turkey's current ruling party is the Islamist-leaning, socially conservative Justice and Development Party (***Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*** or AKP). The AKP has largely remained in power since the party's formation in 2002, providing a political voice to Turkey's more pious residents who were ostracized for decades by secular ruling parties. The AKP and its founder, President Erdoğan, are generally regarded as promoting an Islamist agenda

secularism. Some of their policies and actions have resulted in civil unrest (see *History and Myth*).

With 130 seats, the secular, moderate, and social-democratic Republican People's Party (***Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*** or CHP) is the TBMM's 2nd largest party. Established in 1923 by Turkey's founder Atatürk, CHP is Turkey's oldest party and has traditionally worked to safeguard the founder's secular, Kemalist vision (see *History and Myth*). Today, CHP serves as the AKP's main opposition.

Holding 57 seats in the TBMM, the center-left to left wing green politics (***Yeşil Sol Parti*** or YSGP) is the TBMM's 3rd largest party. YSGP emphasizes left-liberalism, anti-capitalism, and alter-globalization. The 4th TBMM member is the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (***Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*** or MHP). MHP advocates strict secularism and Turkish nationalism and currently holds 50 seats in TBMM.

The Good Party (***İyi Partisi***) is a nationalist, liberal-conservative and secularist political party in Turkey which holds 44 seats in the TBMM. Established on 25 October 2017 by its current leader Meral Akşener, the party adheres to the principles and ideals of Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It follows a centrist political ideology and puts a particular emphasis on the restoration of the parliamentary system and the integrity of the judiciary and other institutions.

## Defense

The Turkish Armed Forces (***Türkiye Silahlı Kuvvetleri***) (TSK) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, air, and paramilitary branches, with a joint strength of 373,200 active duty troops and 378,700 reservists. With few exceptions, all men aged 20-41 must serve from 6-12 months of compulsory military service.



**Land Forces:** Turkey's Army is composed of 260,200 active-duty troops with 16 special forces regiments and brigades, 33 maneuver divisions and brigades (including armored, mechanized, light, and aviation), and 11 combat support regiments and brigades (including artillery and engineering).



The Special Forces Command is comprised of roughly 18,000 personnel.

**Navy:** Comprised of 45,000 personnel including 3,000 Marines, Turkey's Navy is a well-equipped force

organized into 17 principal surface combatants, 50 patrol and coastal combatants, 13 submarine units, 11 mine warfare units, 15 uninhabited surface vehicles units, 45 amphibious ships and craft, and 37 logistics and support units. Turkey's Marines divide into 4 marine battalions and 1 artillery battalion. Finally, Naval Aviation has 1 naval attack helicopter squadron.

**Air Force:** Composed of 50,000 active-duty personnel, the Air Force comprises 9 fighter/ground attack squadrons, 2 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) squadrons and units; 1 each airborne early warning and control unit, electronic warfare (EW) unit, search and rescue squadron, and tanker squadron; 6 transport squadrons, 2 search and rescue squadrons, 6 training squadrons, 18 air defense squadrons and units, and 1 air maneuver brigade. The Air Force is equipped with 293 combat-capable aircraft, 37 helicopters, and 58 UAVs for ISR purposes.



**Paramilitary:** Turkish paramilitary forces divide into 152,100 gendarmerie personnel and 8,700 Coast Guard members.



# Turkish Air Force Rank Insignia



Marshal



Chief of the  
General Staff



General



Lieutenant  
General



Major  
General



Brigadier  
General



Colonel



Lieutenant  
Colonel



Major



Captain



First  
Lieutenant



Lieutenant



Second  
Lieutenant



Petty Officer  
Sergeant  
Major



Sergeant  
Major



Petty Officer  
Senior  
Sergeant



Petty  
Officer Chief  
Sergeant



Petty Officer  
Senior  
Sergeant



Petty  
Officer  
Sergeant



Petty Officer  
Junior  
Sergeant



Senior  
Sergeant



Sergeant



Specialist  
Corporal



Corporal

## Foreign Relations

Turkey's strategic geographic position at the junction of Europe and the Middle East shapes its foreign relations. In the decades following World War II, Turkey sought a predominantly Western orientation, successfully building ties with the US and the European Union (EU) – a political and economic partnership among 27 European nations – while joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – a political and military alliance of 32 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense. More recently, Turkey strengthened its regional presence in Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa by leveraging its Islamic identity to foster diplomatic and trade ties with regional Islamic countries.



While Turkey historically preferred a noninterventionalist foreign policy, recent regional conflicts have forced it to pursue a more aggressive policy in international affairs. Today, Turkish troops are deployed on NATO, United Nations (UN), and other international missions in Ukraine, the Balkans, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. A relatively stable democratic state with a moderate Islamist government, Turkey continues to be a powerful and important regional actor.

**Relations with Russia:** Turkey and Russia share a tense and occasionally volatile relationship, as both nations historically competing for regional political and economic influence. Most recently, opposing interests over the conflict in Syria (see “Security Issues” below) have heightened tensions. In late 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian jet operating from a Syrian airbase, accusing it of entering Turkish airspace. While immediate tensions quickly subsided, Russia imposed temporary economic sanctions on Turkish industries in retaliation (see *Economics and Resources*), further souring relations. Tensions had eased somewhat as both nations worked to restore bilateral economic and political ties following Russia's condemnation of the 2016

coup attempt. Although, Turkey condemned Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it refrained from voting on Russia's suspension from the Council of Europe. In 2024, the European Union proposed sanctions on Turkish companies aiding Russia's war effort.

**Relations with Iran:** Turkey and Iran share generally cordial political ties, strengthened since the Islamist-leaning AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002. On multiple occasions, Turkey has defended Iran in international forums, including voting against UN sanctions on Iran in 2010 and hosting UN negotiations to resolve Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy. Recently, however, the ongoing crisis in Syria and Iran's support of the Syrian regime has increased bilateral friction. Of note, Turkey-Iran's profitable economic relationship diffuses the occasionally heightened tensions. As with Russia, Iran's condemnation of the 2016 attempted coup and public support of Erdoğan have further improved ties.

#### **Relations with Armenia:**

Turkish-Armenian relations remain strained following the events of WWI (see *History and Myth*). In 2022, both countries pledged to pursue normalization of ties. In the same year, the first



commercial flights resumed. Between 2021-2023, Turkish and Armenian leaders and envoys met multiple times to restore ties after decades of hostility. A border crossing was opened in 2023 to allow passage of Armenian humanitarian aid to Turkey following the earthquakes.

**Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean:** Turkey remains the world's only country to give official recognition to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a Turkish-majority territory in the northern 1/3 of the island of Cyprus (see *History and Myth*). A Greek majority inhabits the island's South, an area internationally recognized as the independent Republic of Cyprus. Despite multiple attempts at reunification, including Turkey's promise to attend UN-administered negotiations, the island remains divided.

**Relations with the EU:** As a candidate for EU membership, Turkey has been undergoing accession negotiations for several years. Of note, Turkey agreed in early 2016 to increase the number of Syrian refugees it accepts in return for accelerated accession into the EU and an increase in financial aid. Membership remains popular among Turkish citizens who desire the economic advantages and cultural affinity it offers.

Outside of the membership process, Turkey and the EU retain close economic and political ties. Turkey is a member of the European Customs Union, a free trade agreement with the EU that makes it one of Turkey's largest trading partners. In addition, Turkey collaborates closely with the EU on regional security issues.

**Relations with the US:** Historically close allies, Turkey and the US formally established diplomatic relations in 1927. Since then, both nations regularly cooperate as members of NATO, with Turkey serving as NATO's vital eastern ally controlling the maritime territory that links the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.



Turkey and the US maintain strong diplomatic, economic, and military ties, cooperating on a range of bilateral issues such as trade, defense, and counterterrorism. A key partner in maintaining regional stability, Turkey participates in a US-led coalition to counter the Islamic State (IS). Turkey also provides the US access to strategic military facilities, enabling US operations in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Of note, recent US support of Syrian Kurdish groups fighting the IS, but also affiliated with Turkish Kurdish insurgents involved in hostilities with the Turkish government (see *History and Myth*) threatens to disrupt Turkey-US military cooperation. In addition, the US has criticized Turkey's inability to halt the flow of insurgents and weapons across its permeable Syrian border and

at times has accused Turkey of actively supporting Syrian terrorist groups. Despite these tensions, both nations continue to affirm the importance of maintaining a strategic relationship and work to deepen bilateral diplomatic and economic relations.

## Security Issues

Turkey's security environment is dominated by escalating threats from a long-unwinding, recently renewed, violent Kurdish insurgency, internally and externally-based militant Islamist groups, and threats resulting from conflicts in neighboring Syria and Iraq. Some observers assert that the 2016 attempted coup and Erdoğan's subsequent purging and restructuring of the military have left Turkey destabilized, weak, and more vulnerable to both domestic and regional security threats.

**Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK):** Turkey's most persistent security problem is the PKK, which has been participating in an intermittent armed insurgency against the Turkish government since 1984 (see *History and Myth*). While the PKK began as a separatist movement calling for an independent Kurdish state,



today the PKK seeks increased autonomy and political representation of Kurds within Turkey.

Generally, the armed conflict has been confined to the southeastern portion of Turkey, although

recently both the PKK and a splinter group, the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), committed several terrorist attacks in major western cities. In early 2016, TAK carried out an attack in the capital city of Ankara, killing 37 people. Despite recent peace talks, armed and violent confrontations between the PKK and Turkish military are ongoing.

**The Islamic State Organization (IS):** The IS (also known as Daesh, ISIS, and ISIL) is a militant radical Islamist group which currently controls large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria and seeks to establish an independent Islamic state. Notorious for its brutality in the region, the IS recently conducted several terrorist

attacks in Turkey. It is estimated that between 2014-2017, 304 civilians were killed in IS attacks. The most recent attack occurred in January 2024 when the IS attacked a Roman Catholic church in Istanbul. Some experts suggest IS networks have extended into Turkey, making Turkey particularly vulnerable to future attacks.

**Tensions with Syria:** Turkey's historically tense and at times hostile relations with Syria are particularly intensive along their long, porous border. Although the 2 nations sought to develop economic and diplomatic ties in the early 2000s, tensions escalated following the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Turkey chose to back Syrian rebels, opposing Syria's ruling government and its violent suppression of opposition groups.

Since then, Turkey has allowed an armed Syrian insurgency group, the Free Syrian Army, to operate within Turkey and launch attacks into Syria under the protection of the Turkish military. Turkey has also engaged in several military actions against Syria, including shooting down a fighter plane in 2014.



As a direct result of the war, close to 3.12 million Syrian refugees and migrants have settled in Turkey. This influx has stressed national resources, increased unemployment, and stirred interethnic tensions. To decrease cross-border movement and help secure the historically porous frontier, Turkey completed construction of 475 miles of concrete wall along the Syrian border in 2018.

Turkey's membership in NATO and regular military cooperation with the US create additional diplomatic rifts with Syria, particularly since Syria is politically and economically aligned with non-NATO Russia and Iran. Finally, other tensions arise from Turkey's control over Syria's water supply: Turkish dam construction projects along major rivers flowing into Syria severely limit Syria's water resources.

**Tensions with Iraq:** Turkey-Iraq relations are clouded by Turkey's diplomatic ties to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), a Kurdish-majority semi-autonomous federal territory in northern Iraq currently seeking independence from Iraq's central government. Concerned by the increasing strength of the IS in the region, Turkey provides the KRG with economic and military aid to help insulate it from growing IS threats. Meanwhile, Iraq fears Turkey's actions in the region will secure the KRG's financial and political independence.

Further straining relations with Iraq are Turkey's efforts to mitigate and counter threats from PKK factions residing in northern Iraq. Iraq opposes Turkey's incursions into its territory to combat the PKK, charging that they target Iraqi civilians. As of February 2025, Turkey was still conducting military operations against the PKK in Iraq.

## Ethnic Groups

The Turkish government collects no information on the ethnic composition of its population. As a result, estimates of the size of ethnic groups vary widely. Generally, observers agree that the majority of the population (about 75%) are ethnic Turks.

Kurds make up Turkey's largest minority group at about 19% of the population, though some studies suggest the proportion might be as high as 30%. While Kurds live primarily in southeastern Turkey, internal displacement from ongoing



violence (see “Security Issues” above) has prompted many Kurds to move west. Today, Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir are home to sizeable Kurdish populations.

About 10% of the population belongs to other ethnic groups – including Arabs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Tatars, and Roma (or “Gypsy”) – who primarily live in Istanbul and other western cities. Turkey is also home to the Laz and the Circassians, who live along the northern Black Sea coast.

## Social Relations

The Republic of Turkey was founded on the notion that its citizens were all “Turks,” regardless of their ethnicity, language, or religion. Turkey's founders believed that recognition of any minority rights would threaten national solidarity. Consequently, Turkey's constitution and subsequent laws gave no official status to the country's minority populations. Certain regulations and policies even infringed on groups' rights. For example, the government long prohibited the use of Kurdish languages (see *Language and Communication*), meddled in the internal affairs of non-Muslim religious groups, and restricted the activities of non-Sunni Muslim groups (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

These issues continue to create significant divides in Turkish society today. While the Kurds have attained some rights (see *Language and Communication*), they continue to press for their claims in both violent and non-violent ways. Meanwhile, Turkey's religious minorities pursue their rights in international courts (see *Religion and Spirituality*).



The role of Islam in public and private life is currently the most divisive topic (see *History and Myth*). Societal discord over Islam's place in Turkey often overlaps with discussions concerning Turkey's place within Europe and its general orientation to the West. Proponents of secularism maintain that secularism is Turkey's only path to full and equal membership in the European “family.” Islamists counter that only Islamic ethics and values can provide the moral and social strength Turkey needs to face an uncertain future. This religious divide and polarized political climate are compounded by economic and geographic divides. Economic development has fueled the growth of a new middle class in the Anatolian interior, largely comprised of conservative supporters of Sunni Muslim values. By contrast, Turks living in coastal urban areas historically support secularism with the exception of Istanbul, which is home to millions of AKP Islamic conservative supporters.



### 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

#### Overview

While its census does not record religious affiliation, the Turkish government estimates that 99% of the population is Muslim. In line with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (see *History and Myth*), the Turkish government officially recognizes 3 minority religious communities: Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox Christians and Jews. Collectively, these minority groups are estimated to comprise less than 1% of the population. A 2020 survey found 85% of Turks feel religion is somewhat or very important in their lives.



Turkey's 1982 constitution establishes the country as a secular state while providing for freedom of religious belief and worship and prohibiting discrimination on religious grounds. Although no religious community has full legal status, the government promotes Sunni Islam through its Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) while restricting the rights and freedoms of followers of other traditions.

The government exerts control over religious activities in many different ways. For example, it oversees compulsory Sunni Islamic instruction in public schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and provides all training for Sunni clerics (*imams*). It further restricts other religious groups within the country from training their clergy and regularly interferes in the internal affairs of minority religious groups.

#### Early Spiritual Landscape

Turkey's early inhabitants followed an array of faith traditions. The religion of the Hittites (see *History and Myth*) included many gods and objects of worship, including a Weather or Storm god

and a Sun goddess. During their rule, the Romans (see *History and Myth*) introduced other deities, such as Jupiter, the supreme god; Minerva, the goddess of wisdom; and Mars, the god of war, while allowing other customs to continue. Consequently, some residents performed fertility rites to the ancient mother goddess, Cybele, while others were devoted to the Egyptian god, Osiris, or to Greek gods or goddesses.

**Judaism:** Archaeological and textual evidence suggest Jews moved into Anatolia as early as the 4th-century BC. Somewhat oppressed under Byzantine rule (see *History and Myth*), the Jewish communities flourished under the Seljuk Turks. The community further expanded under the Ottoman Turks, who welcomed Jews expelled from other parts of Europe (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*).

**Christianity:** Anatolia played an important role in the early development of Christianity. The apostle Paul, born in Tarsus in southern Turkey around 1



AD, traveled through the region, then a part of the Roman Empire, spreading Christian teachings. In Antioch (near the modern-day southern city of Antakya), Roman rulers first used the term “Christians” to refer to followers of Jesus.

Prior to the Roman Empire’s 4th-century adoption of Christianity (see *History and Myth*), Christians who refused to make sacrifices to the

Roman emperor were persecuted. Of note, Armenians in eastern Anatolia were among the earliest non-Jews to accept the new religion.

After the Romans converted, Anatolia became an important center of Christian thought, including the site of several significant doctrinal decisions and disputes. At a council held in 325 in Nicaea (present-day Iznik in northern Turkey), attendees

drafted a declaration of faith, the Nicæan Creed, which is still used today.

In the 8th-9th centuries, a dispute over the use of icons in worship rocked the Byzantine Empire. In subsequent centuries, philosophical and theological differences between the western and eastern branches of the Christian movement resulted in greater estrangement. In the Schism of 1054, the leaders of the 2 branches, the Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in Constantinople, excommunicated each other. The end result was a permanent division between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

## Islam

### Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.



### Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

### Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

### Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger.”
- **Prayer (*Salat* or *namaz*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka’aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka’aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one’s income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (*The Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.



### Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews “people of the Book,” referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

**Abraham:** All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

**Scriptures:** Much of the content of the Qur’an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible’s Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God’s word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

**Jesus:** The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

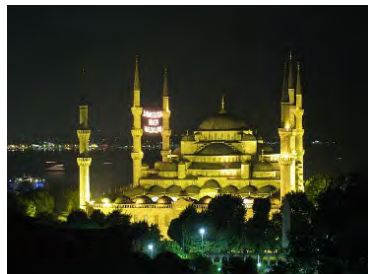
**View of Death:** Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

### Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

### Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see *Time and Space*), Ramadan, known as **Ramazan** in Turkey, is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that



denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life.

Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as **iftar**. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** **Kadir Gecesi** in Turkey, this “Night of Power” marks Muhammad’s receipt of the first verses of the Qur’an.

- **Eid al-Fitr: Ramazan Bayramı** or **Şeker Bayramı** in Turkey, this “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrates Ramadan’s end and is a national holiday.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha: Kurban Bayramı** in Turkey, this “Festival of Sacrifice” commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God.

### The Arrival of Islam in Turkey

Around the 9th century, Turkic tribes began expanding from their base in Central Asia, raiding the Caucasus, Persia (modern-day Iran), and Anatolia. The Turks first encountered Islam while struggling for dominance with Arab opponents. Over the course of several centuries, many Turkic tribes adopted Islam. By the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks became the dominant champions of Sunni Islam against the Shi’a version of Islam practiced in Persia.

The Ottoman Turks’ capture of Constantinople in 1453 (see *History and Myth*) brought permanent change to Anatolia’s religious landscape. As head of the Ottoman Empire, the sultan was also the

**caliph** (leader) of the Sunni Muslim world and charged with protecting and enforcing Islamic law and teachings. He also pledged to protect the Greek Orthodox Church, which had Constantinople as



its religious center. Thus, the Empire demonstrated significant religious tolerance. Further, under the Empire’s **millet** system, subjects were governed according to their religious affiliation. In this way, Christian and Jewish leaders led and regulated the internal affairs of their own communities.

The central role of Islam in governance as well as the relative autonomy of minority religious communities ended with the 1923 establishment of the Republic of Turkey (see *History and Myth*). Founder Atatürk implemented transformative changes to put his Kemalist philosophy into practice (see *History and Myth*). These included confiscating all properties from Islamic organizations, converting Islamic schools to secular institutions, and closing Islamic courts. Instead of separating state and religion, the reforms put religion under state control by establishing a government agency to administer and oversee all religious organizations.

## Religion Today

### Islam

Beginning in 1950, Turkey slowly liberalized its policies toward Islam, lifting certain restrictions and allowing greater religious expression. For example, the government has lifted the ban on the wearing of headscarves in schools, universities, and governmental buildings.

**Sunni Islam:** Some 88% of Turkey's Muslims are Sunni followers of the Hanafi school, a generally tolerant and liberal school of Islamic thought. The governmental Diyanet supports only Sunni Muslim *imams* and institutions.



**Alevism:** While exact figures are unknown, scholars estimate that 4% of Turkey's population identify as Alevis, a form of Islam that has some similarities to the Shi'a branch. The Turkish government does not recognize Alevism as a unique tradition, instead viewing it as an unorthodox Islamic sect. Rather than gathering in mosques for their services, Alevis worship together in *cemevi* (gathering places) that the government does not recognize as legal houses of worship. Consequently, Alevis are ineligible for the types of governmental support that Sunni mosques receive.

**Sufism:** The history of Sufism in Turkey traces to the 8th century, when followers of charismatic leaders began to establish societies or fraternal orders. Characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer, Sufi traditions typically incorporate practices meant to advance personal spirituality and connection with divinity. While they enjoyed substantial support during the Ottoman era, the Sufi brotherhoods were banned in the early Republic. Although some Sunni Muslims today still reject Sufism, society generally recognizes the Sufi brotherhoods' deep and important connection to Islamic history and Turkish culture and society.

### Whirling Dervishes

Based on the teachings of 13th-century Sufi mystic and poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, the worship service of the Mevlevi order uses music and dance to induce a state of universal love and connection with the divine. During the service, known as a **sema** and performed at a **tekke** or lodge, male dancers wear full-length white gowns and conical hats. Accompanied by music played on a **ney** or reed flute, dancers perform prayers, greetings, and imitations while swirling and spinning to create an ecstatic experience. While spinning, the whirling dervishes extend their right arms upward so that divine energy enters the right palm, travels through the body, and then exits through the left palm that faces the earth.

### Christianity

Around 300,000 Christians live in Turkey today. With about 150,000-200,000 followers, the Eastern Orthodox population represents the largest Christian community. The Turkish government does not acknowledge the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople seated in Istanbul as the central church authority for the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians. Instead, the government only recognizes it as the religious leader of Turkey's Greek Orthodox minority population. The government exercises substantial control over the Church's internal affairs by



requiring its Patriarch to be a Turkish citizen and refusing to reopen the country's only Greek Orthodox seminary, despite international pressure to do so.

One of the oldest Christian branches, the Armenian Orthodox Church has around 90,000 followers in Turkey today. The Christian community also counts some Roman Catholics, who first arrived with the Crusaders in the



Middle Ages (see *History and Myth*), several Protestant denominations, Syriac Orthodox Christians, and Chaldean Catholics.

### Judaism

Around 12,000-16,000 Jews live in Turkey today, primarily in Istanbul where 19 synagogues serve 85% of the Jewish population. In the last few years, a rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric on the part of the government and within the general public has prompted some Jews to permanently leave the country.

### Religion and Society

In the last decades, the place of Islam in contemporary Turkish society has been a major topic of debate (see *Political and Social Relations*). Viewing itself as a protector of Kemalist secularism, the military has intervened several times in the Turkish political process (see *History and Myth*). Some members of Turkey's religious minorities have pressed their cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Following a recent ECHR ruling, the government has begun providing some subsidies to certain Christian, Jewish, and Alevi organizations. In 2022, the Turkish government created an **Alevi** Culture and Cemevi Presidency within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, Alevi groups have rejected the government's characterization of Alevi as a cultural practice rather than a religion.

## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Overview

Family is at the center of Turkish social life and forms the backbone of society. Key family values include respect for elders, loyalty, inclusiveness, and sense of community. Turks typically exhibit a strong obligation to their kin, maintaining close relationships with extended family members and involving them in all important life events.

### Residence

In recent decades, there has been a migration of Turks to urban areas seeking work and education, resulting in a population



boom in Turkey's major cities. In both urban and rural settings, most Turks take pride in their homes, decorating them with art, ceramics, paintings, and lavish carpets while keeping them meticulously clean.

Many homes feature modern appliances like dishwashers, washing machines, stereo systems, and large televisions.

**Rural:** In rural areas, most homes include a small bathroom, a kitchen, and living room, which doubles as a sleeping area for the family at night. While many rural homes are constructed from modern materials such as bricks and cement, poorer residents in small villages use naturally available materials like mud bricks, stone, and wood. Many rural homes are equipped with solar panels and satellite dishes. In some villages, multi-story apartment complexes are increasingly replacing individual houses.

**Urban:** While most urban residents live in high-rise apartments, more middle- and high-income Turks are choosing to live in suburban, single-family homes. Typically larger than their urban

counterparts, suburban dwellings may contain 4-5 rooms, including a bathroom, kitchen, family room, and multiple bedrooms. Many homes also feature western-style dining and living rooms. Turkey's poorest urban residents live in hastily erected slums on city outskirts called **gecekondu**. Here, dwellings are typically simple, single-story unfinished homes, often constructed in phases as funds and materials become available.

Home exteriors are usually colorful. Many apartments are equipped with balconies, where residents socialize with family and friends, share



meals, and relax in the summer. Wealthier families tend to maintain elaborate gardens around their homes. Because they consider home ownership a sign of success, many Turks prefer to purchase instead of renting their homes. In fact, wealthy Turks often purchase a property for each child as an investment or to pass on as an inheritance.

### Family Structure

Those Turks who move to urban areas tend to maintain close ties with their **memleket** (home town) and **hemşeri** (fellow countrymen), visiting on weekends and special occasions. In urban areas, extended family members often purchase residences near each other.

Urban households typically comprise small nuclear families consisting of parents and their children. By contrast, households in rural areas tend to be larger, averaging 8 or more people, including parents, children, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. Generally, the father is the head of the household and is the primary breadwinner while the mother is responsible for household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and raising the children. Turks revere their elderly family members,

physically and financially caring for them as they grow older. Nursing homes are uncommon, particularly in rural areas.

## Children

Families in rural regions may have as many as 5-6 children, while urban families generally have just 1-2. Grandparents and extended family members play a large role in raising children, serving as mentors and supporting the parents as needed. In a departure from tradition, some wealthy Turkish families employ nannies to help in childrearing. In rural areas, children assist their parents with household chores from a young age. The eldest son assumes the responsibility of caring for his younger



siblings and helping his father complete daily tasks. By contrast, urban children have fewer responsibilities.

Children typically live with their parents until they marry, though in some cases, newly

married sons remain in the family residence with their brides until the young couple gains financial independence. Exceptions include young adults who leave their rural hometowns to pursue employment or education opportunities in urban areas and young urban adults who leave home to live with friends.

**Birth:** Generally, Turkish women give birth in hospitals, though some rural women may have their children at home accompanied by a midwife. Immediately following a baby's birth, friends and family visit the mother and child, bringing gifts. The child's grandfather or other revered family member whispers the baby's name into his or her ear and recites a prayer. In religious families, an *imam* (a Muslim religious leader – see *Religion and Spirituality*) may perform the name-giving ceremony instead. For the initial weeks after birth, the grandmother may move into the family residence to help care for mother and child. In more traditional families, the mother and baby do not leave the home in the first 40 days following birth.

## Male Rites of Passage Ceremonies

**Circumcision:** Turkish boys undergo circumcision between ages 5-8, signifying their passage into adulthood and membership in the Islamic community. For the ceremony, boys traditionally dress in a white satin suit, a cape trimmed with feathers, and a tall crowned cap. Today, some prefer an Ottoman-era costume of brightly-colored trousers, coat, and turban. Following the procedure, the family hosts a party during which the boy receives presents from family and friends. In rural areas, the entire village may attend the ceremony and festivities.

### National Service:

Another important symbol of transition into adulthood for males is the compulsory military or national service that all men must fulfill (see *Political and Social Relations*).



### Dating and Marriage

Boys and girls typically start socializing with each other around age 12. Dating in the Western sense is uncommon, except in some university settings or in large urban areas. Instead, most young adults socialize in groups. Popular group activities include visiting coffee shops, restaurants, the cinema, parks, shopping malls, and sporting events.

Once a couple decides to commit to a relationship, their families commonly expect marriage to be the next step. In some cases, especially in rural areas, a family member chaperones the pair throughout the courtship. Some young couples may try to see each other in secret to avoid family scrutiny. It is traditional in rural areas for parents and other relatives to help choose their children's partners. Single urban adults tend to follow their own romantic interests.

Couples generally spend less than 2 years in courtship before marrying, rarely living together during this time. Some Turks

prefer to complete their education and/or mandatory military service before marrying. Most couples marry in their early 20s. Of note, it is unlawful for Turks to marry before age 18, though some do (see *Sex and Gender*).

**Bridewealth:** Upon engagement, the groom and his family traditionally paid ***başlık parası*** or a so-called bridewealth to the bride's family in exchange for her promise of marriage. Although rare, this custom is observed in some rural regions today.

**Weddings:** Urban weddings tend to be simple. First, the groom collects the bride from her home and proceeds to the wedding venue in a car decorated with ribbons and flowers. Upon arrival, the bride and groom participate in a civil ceremony that involves reciting vows, exchanging rings, and signing a marriage contract. The couple then celebrates by dancing, singing, and mingling with family and friends throughout the day and into the night.

By contrast, rural weddings are usually more elaborate, typically consisting of a 3-day series of parties. The first event is a female-



only ***kina gecesi*** (henna evening) when the bride's relatives apply a henna paste to portions of her hands and feet, dyeing them red. Throughout the following day, the couple's families serve simple meals to the assembled guests.

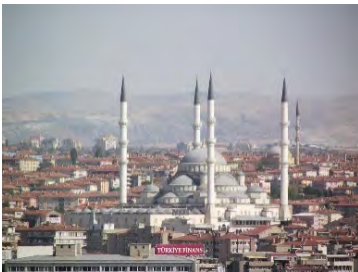
Held on the last day of celebrations, the actual wedding ceremony usually takes place in the village square. The groom's male family members collect the bride from her home and bring her to square where the groom awaits.

Following the ceremony, family and friends gather at a reception where they present gifts to the bride and groom while enjoying elaborate meals and dances. Traditionally, the groom's family is responsible for the wedding costs while both families share the costs of furnishing the newlywed couple's home.

**Divorce:** Although Turkey's divorce rate increased by 31% over the last few years, it now stands at 2.1 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to the US rate of 2.4. Social stigma linked to divorce is sometimes an issue in rural areas.

## Death

In line with Islamic tradition, Turks bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. After a death, the deceased's body is cleansed, wrapped in a clean white cloth, and placed in a coffin. The coffin is then draped in a green cloth inscribed with a prayer. If the deceased was a government employee or in the military, the coffin typically is draped in the Turkish flag. Male relatives and friends then transport the coffin to a mosque where a cleric offers prayers.



Relatives then transport the deceased to a cemetery for burial. At the gravesite, family and friends remove the deceased from



the coffin for placement in the grave. Following the burial, the family receives mourners who bring food, offer condolences, and pray, usually in the deceased's home. Mourners commonly dedicate dishes of **helva**, a dessert served on special occasions to

the deceased. Instead of sending flowers to the family, the deceased's friends and relatives often donate to charities in his memory. The family gathers at a mosque for an additional memorial service 7 days, 40 days, and 1 year after the death.

## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Overview

Traditionally, Turkish society is patriarchal, meaning that men hold most power and authority. While this outlook on gender roles is changing among some city dwellers, the traditional view persists in most rural and some urban areas. Although women and men have equal rights before the law, gender inequity continues to present challenges to women in economic and political spheres.

### Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Labor:** Turkish women are traditionally responsible for household duties and childcare, training their daughters for this role from an early age. Girls begin performing household chores around age 8, with the eldest sister (**abla**) also tending to the needs of her younger siblings. Women in urban areas tend to be active in the public realm and are increasingly economically and socially independent. Even if they work outside the home, most urban women still perform the majority of domestic tasks.

**Labor Force:** In 2023, about 36% of Turkish women worked outside the home, a significantly lower rate than the European Union average (52%) and in the US (57%), but higher than in neighboring Iran (14%), Iraq (11%), and Syria (13%). Highly educated Turkish women hold positions in healthcare, government, education, and business, including high-paying service industries such as banking and finance. By contrast, women without a university education generally only have access to low-wage jobs without social security benefits. In rural areas, women commonly perform a significant amount of agricultural labor for a daily wage. In all sectors, men typically receive preferential job placement and earn higher wages than women with comparable work experience and education levels.





## Gender and the Law

In 1923, Turkey's founder Atatürk (see *History and Myth*) initiated a series of sweeping social and economic reforms intended to improve the position of women in society. Women were granted the right to vote in 1930. Today, the Turkish



constitution continues to guarantee equal rights to women in social welfare, education, healthcare, and employment.

Women and men enjoy equal rights within marriage, in divorce, inheritance, and in their authority over their children. In addition, the constitution guarantees special protections to single mothers and pregnant women, such as requiring absent fathers to help financially

support their children. The law also protects women from differential treatment based on gender and from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Despite this legal framework, laws are not always enforced. For example, sexual harassment remains a serious workplace issue while women generally experience discrimination in hiring and promotion. In addition, certain cultural traditions associated with conservative Islam hinder women's full participation in society, especially in Turkey's rural, eastern regions. Religiously conservative families in particular often bar their female members from entering the workforce.

## Gender and Politics

While Turkey elected its first and only female Prime Minister, Tansu Çiller, in the early 1990s (see *History and Myth*), rates of women's participation in the political process historically have been low. Turkish law does not require that women receive a certain percentage of political appointments, although some political parties choose to apply internal gender quotas requiring a proportion of party seats to be filled by women. As of January 2025, 118 women hold seats in the 600-seat Parliament (see

*Political and Social Relations*), meaning that 20% of members are women, a lower rate than in the US, where women comprise 28% of Congress members. In 2025, 1 of 17 Cabinet ministers was a woman, accounting for only 6% of ministers.

### **Gender Based Violence (GBV)**

Women face a significant level of violence in Turkey, mostly related to domestic incidents. Although Turkish law criminalizes domestic violence, some women consider it a private matter and are reluctant to seek help. Still others are unaware of the law and of its reporting mechanisms. Moreover, members of ethnic minorities (see *Political and Social Relations*) may hesitate to seek protection because they distrust authorities or face language barriers. Generally, even if GBV cases are reported, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Police sometimes delay the prosecution of cases, instead advocating for internal reconciliation within the family. In some cases, police refuse to respond to domestic violence incidents altogether.



While rape is a criminal offense that carries severe penalties, some victims, particularly those in rural areas, do not report these crimes to avoid an accusation of adultery or bring the family shame. Despite the Turkish government's effort to curb the practice, "honor killings" (the killing of females perceived to have brought dishonor to their families) continue to occur in the rural southeast and in conservative families.

While early (before age 18) or forced marriage is criminalized, some studies suggest as many as 45% of women in poor, rural regions marry early, some as young as 12. As of 2023, nearly 7% of girls were married by age 18.

### **Sex and Procreation**

In urban areas, attitudes towards public displays of affection have liberalized in recent years. Consequently, some kissing and holding hands has been tolerated. By contrast, rural

residents and religiously conservative Turks tend to be more reserved and consider such intimacy a private matter.

Turkey's birthrate has steadily declined since the 1960s, from 5.7 children per woman in 1968 to 1.9 in 2024. This drop is primarily due to Turkey's urbanization and women's changing roles in society. As more Turkish women become better educated, work outside the home, and marry later, they have fewer children. Concerned about the decreasing birth rate, President Erdoğan has recently and controversially encouraged

Turkish families to have at least 3 children.



Since 1983, abortion in Turkey has been legal through the first 10 weeks of pregnancy and in cases of rape, incest, malformation of the fetus, and risk of

injury to the mother. Access to the procedure is somewhat limited – many women particularly in rural areas are unaware of the law, few hospitals offer non-emergency terminations, and some doctors refuse to perform the procedure altogether.

### Homosexuality in Turkey

Although homosexual activity has been legal in Turkey since 1923, Turkish law recognizes neither same-sex marriages nor civil unions of same-sex couples. Homosexuals generally experience significant social stigma and face discrimination in the workplace, school, health services, and housing. While public displays of affection between same-sex couples may be tolerated in large urban areas, homosexual activity in rural and religiously conservative areas may provoke harassment. In 2019, a global survey reported that only 25% of Turkish citizens were accepting of homosexuality, 57% were not, and 18% declined to answer. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Turkey. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Language Overview

The official language of Turkey is Turkish, which most citizens speak as a primary language. While the Turkish government no longer collects census information on other languages, scholars report that some 36 other languages are spoken in the country.

### Turkish

A member of the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family, Turkish is most similar to Azerbaijani and Turkmen. Over centuries of contact with other cultures and languages (see *History and Myth*), Turkish speakers incorporated many foreign words into their vocabulary. During the Ottoman era, residents of Anatolia used a modified version of Arabic script to write Turkish.



Following the Turkish Republic's 1923 founding (see *History and Myth*), Atatürk implemented comprehensive reforms intended to modernize and westernize the new country as well as construct a new Turkish national identity. An important part of these reforms was the Turkish language. Consequently, a new Turkish alphabet replacing the Arabic script with Latin was mandated.

Further, Atatürk forbade the use of foreign loanwords in Turkish.

Established in 1932, the Turkish Language Association (TDK)

identified Turkish equivalents for commonly- used Persian, Arabic, and French words. The transformation was so rapid and comprehensive that few Turks today can understand Turkish from the Ottoman or early independence eras, a situation that sometimes leads to intergenerational miscommunication.

Modern Turkish utilizes a 29-letter Latin alphabet that relies on diacritics to indicate pronunciation. For example, symbols placed over vowels often indicate length, while those placed over or under consonants indicate a pronunciation change. Thus, the Turkish “s” sound is identical to the English “s”, but “ş” sounds like “sh,” and the “ı” (undotted i) sounds like “uh” in the word “plus.”

Modern spoken Turkish is soft and melodic, largely due to a system of vowel harmony that requires the sounds of suffixes to align with preceding vowel sounds. Turkish is an agglutinative language, meaning it adds suffixes to root words to adapt their meaning. For example, the word **terbiye** (good manners) gains a new meaning with the addition of several suffixes. **Terbiyesizliklerindenmis** means “I gather that it was due to their rudeness.”



Historically, Anatolian Turks spoke several different Turkish dialects, although the TDK chose Istanbul's dialect as the basis for modern standard Turkish. Nevertheless, the several Turkish dialects are still spoken today. Broadly, Turkish dialects divide into western varieties

that are somewhat similar to modern standard Turkish and eastern dialects that sound quite different, less melodic, and more guttural. Two prominent eastern dialects are Karadeniz, spoken in the Black Sea region, and Doğu, spoken in eastern Anatolia.

## Kurdish

An estimated 11-20% of Turkey's population speaks 1 of 2 Kurdish languages: Northern Kurdish, also known as Kurmanji or Kermancî, and Zaza. Unlike Turkish, the Kurdish languages belong to the Indo-European language family and are most similar to Persian. In 1932, the TDK prohibited all spoken and written Kurdish in the public sphere, a repressive policy that provided fuel for the Kurds' struggle against the Turkish government (see *History and Myth*). In a significant step, President Özal supported the legalization of Kurdish speech, song, and music in 1991. Despite this legal change, progress has been slow. For example, Turkish courts allowed Kurdish testimony for the first time in 2013, and despite a 2012 decision legalizing education in other languages, few Kurdish language schools have opened (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

## Other Languages

Some Turks speak languages other than Turkish or Kurdish. Scholars estimate that Arabic has some 5 million speakers, while Persian has over 226,000 and Azerbaijani about



600,000. Other languages with at least 100,000 speakers include Bosnian, Bulgarian, Chechen, Crimean Tatar, Gagauz, Georgian, and Pontic Greek. Other languages include Albanian, Armenian, Assyrian Neo-Aramaic, Karakalpak, Ladino, Laz, Ossetic, Romani, and Turoyo.

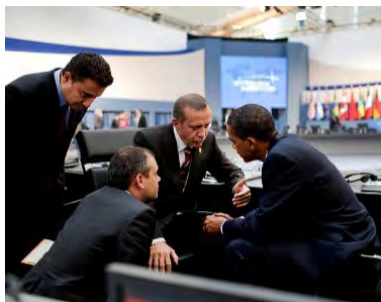
**English:** English is the most popular foreign language in Turkey. Since English instruction typically begins in the 4th grade (see *Learning and Knowledge*), Turkish youth are more likely to speak English than older generations. In urban areas such as Istanbul, many young Turks incorporate English in their slang, creating colloquial “Turkinglish”.

## Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Turkey requires not only knowledge of Turkish but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

## Communication Style

Turkish communication patterns reflect the value Turks place on respect, loyalty, community, and hospitality. While Turks also appreciate sincerity, they tend to value social harmony even more. Consequently, Turks typically avoid direct criticism and



public conflicts, preferring to confront issues in private.

Hierarchy is also important in Turkish society. Accordingly, Turks emphasize their respect and deference to religious, political, and community leaders as well as

other authority figures by listening attentively and avoiding interruptions. Turks tend to be outspoken, confident, and somewhat more emotional than Americans. They use conversational touching (see *Time and Space*), warm facial expressions, and tactful humor to enhance their interactions.

Turks typically admire a good sense of humor and often make fun of themselves and others in a tactful, gentle way. Other jokes detail the misfortunes of the popular fictional characters Temel and his wife Fatma or the trickster Nasreddin Hoca (see *History and Myth*). Other jokes highlight society's or politicians' shortcomings.

## Greetings

Turks typically greet with great care and respect. When meeting or entering a room, they may say **merhaba** (hello), **hoş geldiniz** (welcome), or **nasılsınız** (how are you?). The respective responses would be **merhaba**, **hoş bulduk** (glad to be here), or **iyiyim, teşekkür ederim** (fine, thank you). A common greeting among observant Muslims is **selam aleyküm** (peace be upon you), and the response is **aleyküm selam** (and upon you be peace).

Following this verbal greeting, Turks typically exchange cheek kisses, handshakes, or both. Greetings between members of the opposite sex often depend on the setting



or the nature of the relationship. For example, in rural areas or religious settings, men may avoid touching a woman in greeting, preferring instead to nod in acknowledgment. Young Turks often greet elders by kissing the elder's hand then pressing it to the younger Turk's forehead. Of note, some Turks may consider a very firm handshake as impolite.

## Forms of Address

Turks use different forms of address to demonstrate respect and the nature of the relationship. Turkish adults typically address each other using their first name followed by the title **Hanim** (Madam) or **Bey** (Sir). More informally, children address young adults as **Abla** (elder sister) and **Ağabey** or **Abi** (big brother). Most Turks use **Teyze** (aunt) and **Amca** (uncle) after the first name when greeting someone much older.

Turkish has distinct “you” pronouns that reflect different levels of formality and respect. Turks typically use the formal “you,” or **siz**, when meeting for the first time, with elders, or authority figures. They tend to reserve the informal **sen** for friends, relatives, or close colleagues. Foreign nationals should use formal forms of address unless advised otherwise.



## Conversational Topics

Common conversation topics includes participants' well-being, work, and family. Other common topics include culture, history, hobbies, and sports. Turks typically appreciate any attempt to speak their language even if only a few words.

Although Turks may criticize aspects of their country or their government, foreign nationals should avoid doing so. Topics such as religion, politics, and sex may cause offense. Other sensitive issues may include the use of women's headscarves (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and Turkish relations with Kurds, Armenians, and Greeks (see *History and Myth*). Some Turkish men, especially observant Muslims and rural-dwellers, never

inquire directly about another man's female relations nor should foreign nationals.



## Gestures

Turks frequently use gestures to augment and sometimes replace spoken words. For example, moving the head back and raising the eyebrows means “no,” a gesture that is sometimes accompanied by a “tsk” sound. While nodding means “yes,” shaking the head

signifies “I’m not sure.” To politely indicate “No, thank you,” Turks place a palm flat on the chest. Turks typically use the entire hand to point.

Foreign nationals should avoid showing the soles of feet or shoes to Turks, who consider both unclean. Further, foreign nationals should avoid walking in front of someone praying and making the Western “A-OK” sign, both of which are considered offensive.

## Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

## Useful Words and Phrases

English	Turkish
Hi / Hello	Merhaba / Selam
Good morning	Günaydın
Good day	İyi günler
Good evening / good night	İyi akşamlar
My name is ____	Benim adım ____
What is your name?	Adınız ne?
How are you?	Nasılsınız?
I'm fine, thank you	İyiyim, teşekkür ederim
Please	Lütfen
Thank you	Teşekkür ederim / Sağol
You're welcome	Rica ederim
Yes / No	Evet / hayır
Goodbye	Allahısmarladık
See you later	Görüşürüz
I am American	Amerikalıyım
Do you know English?	İngilizce biliyor musunuz?
I don't understand	Anlamıyorum
Sorry	Üzgünüm / Affedersiniz
I don't know	Bilmiyorum
What time is it?	Saat kaç?
Restroom	Tuvalet
I'm lost	Kayboldum
Help!	İmdat!
Cheers!	Şerefe!
What?	Ne?
Where?	Nerede?
Who?	Kim?
How?	Nasıl?
When?	Ne zaman?
Which?	Hangi?

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 97%
- Male: 99%
- Female: 95% (2021 estimate)

### Early History of Formal Education

Formal education came early to ancient Anatolia. During the Hellenistic period of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, the city of Pergamum was home to a medical school and a large library (see *History and Myth*). In 425 AD, Byzantine emperor Theodosius II founded the Imperial University of Constantinople to teach Latin, Greek, law, philosophy, math, astronomy, and music. With the spread of Islam during the Seljuk era (see *History and Myth*), religious leaders opened **medrese**, religious schools where Sunni scholars taught scripture and **fikih** (canon law) to young men. After conquering the Byzantine Empire, Ottoman sultan Mehmet II established what would become Istanbul University in 1453.

During the first centuries of Ottoman rule, education of the general population fell to the individual

religious communities. Under the empire's **millet** system (see *Religion and Spirituality*), each religious community designed and administered its own educational programs. Thus, Muslim religious authorities largely limited education for Muslims to **medrese** that provided men some basic religious education and trained imperial administrators in Islamic jurisprudence. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Empire faced substantial internal unrest and external threats (see *History and Myth*). In response, the Ottomans created specialized naval, military engineering, military science, and medical colleges, as well as training institutes for diplomats and civil servants modeled on Western European schools.



As a part of their mid-19th century reforms (see *History and Myth*), the Ottomans planned for a comprehensive system of primary and secondary schools that included compulsory and free primary education. Progress towards these goals was slow due to a lack of funding, but by 1914, there were 36,000 Ottoman schools. Most of these were small primary schools that provided education to the empire's Muslims. At the same time, some 1,800 Greek Christian and 800 Armenian Christian schools respectively served 185,000 Greek and 81,000 Armenian children. Despite the spread of educational opportunities, only about 10% of the population were literate in the early 1900s.

### Education in Atatürk's Republic of Turkey

Following the Republic of Turkey's founding in 1923 (see *History and Myth*), Atatürk sought to modernize the country by transforming it into a Western, secular state. The Ottoman education system was an immediate target for reform. Atatürk centralized education in the Ministry of National Education (MEB), which instituted a series of reforms in support of the new country's secular Kemalist values (see *History and Myth*). In 1924, the MEB abolished *medrese* and all other forms of religious education and mandated coeducational instruction delivered in modern Turkish (see *Language and Communication*).



Atatürk sought to extend education to every citizen by offering free schooling at all levels and extending basic literacy programs to adults. Besides developing practical skills, education was intended to socialize students in Turkey's

new secular nationalist values. Despite this focus on universal education, many rural regions remained underserved for decades. Some conservative religious communities also refused to educate girls. Nevertheless, with these reforms, the literacy rate reached about 33% by 1938.

## Education after Atatürk

In the decades following Atatürk's death in 1938, the Turkish government began to relax certain restrictions regarding the role of religion in Turkish society, notably, the place of Islam in the educational system. In 1949, the government established a faculty at Ankara University to train **imams** (worship leaders – see *Religion and Spirituality*) and other teachers of Sunni Islam. In 1951, the government began to open **imam hatip okulları** (Islamic secondary schools) around the country. By the mid-1950s, the government made Sunni Islamic religious instruction mandatory in all secondary schools.

In subsequent decades, Turkey built thousands of new secular and *imam hatip* schools. Following the 1980 military coup (see *History and Myth*), support for Islam's place in education increased, as many Turks believed religion could be a bulwark against leftist ideologies. By the early 1980s, nearly all children aged 6-10 were enrolled in school, and by 1990, the literacy rate reached 81%. In 1997, the government extended compulsory education to 8 years. During this period, the government also conducted major literacy campaigns and implemented school equivalency programs for adults with a focus on women and other marginalized groups.

## Modern Education System

The modern Turkish education system reflects remnants of Atatürk's Kemalist philosophy, late 20th century reforms, and recent trends. Besides developing capable citizens with a strong sense of national values, the system aims to produce students with the skills required of a modern information-age society. Turkish teaching techniques have evolved from traditional rote memorization towards applied learning such as student-led instruction.



Turkey has continued to reform its education system, making 12 years of basic schooling compulsory in 2012. The next year, the government made several significant changes to Atatürk-era policies, including ending the recitation of the Turkish pledge of allegiance in primary schools and allowing teachers to wear headscarves (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

By 2019, state-of-the-art technology, such as tablet PCs and smartboards, was forecasted to be operational in all schools but has yet to be fully implemented. Known as “movement to increase opportunities and improve technology” (FATİH), this program was intended to make classrooms more interactive.

Through these and other programs in recent years, literacy rates have continuously increased along with student enrollments. While significantly improved, Turkish students’ academic



achievement remains below that of US students on international math, reading, and science exams. This gap is related to historically low government spending on education. In 2022, the government spent approximately 2.6% of its GDP on

education, lower than the amount spent on education by the US (5.4%).

The Turkish education system faces other challenges, particularly in gender parity: girls in rural areas or from conservative families have less access to education than boys. Although, in 2022, 92% of both boys and girls aged 15-19 attended secondary school. Other challenges include gaps in education quality and access among regions and between urban and rural areas; inadequate teacher training; and a misalignment between acquired skills and labor market needs.

**Religious Education:** Turkey's 1982 constitution requires compulsory Sunni Islamic religious instruction at both the

primary and secondary levels. While students in grades 4-8 receive 2 hours of instruction per week, those in grades 9-12 receive 1 hour per week. Only students from officially recognized minority religions (Greek/Armenian Orthodox Christianity or Judaism, see *Religion and Spirituality*) are eligible for an exemption to this requirement.

Since the 1950s, *imam hatip* schools have expanded to include some primary grades. Enrollment at these schools has increased significantly: from 65,000 in 2002 to more than 1.5 million today. This increase was facilitated by the forced conversion of some secular schools into *imam hatip* schools, an act that caused public protests. In 2014, a new school allocation system based on exam scores and residency assigned 40,000 students to local *imam hatip* schools against their wishes, further increasing tensions.

**Pre-Primary:** Many private and some public institutions offer non-compulsory pre-primary education for children aged 1-5, although enrollment is relatively low. In 2022, about 33% of 3-4-year-olds and about 96% of 5-year-olds attended such programs.



**Primary:** Consisting of 8 grades starting at age 6, primary education remains compulsory and comprises elementary (grades 1-4) and middle (grades 5-8) schools. The curriculum includes Turkish language and literature, math, science, social science, arts and crafts, music, and physical education. Foreign language instruction (typically in English, German, or French) begins in grade 4. In 2022, about 99% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary schools.

After completing elementary school, students may attend academic, vocational, or *imam hatip* middle schools, or parents may choose to homeschool their children. While academic schools follow the basic scholastic curriculum, vocational and

*imam hatip* schools focus respectively on technical skills and Sunni Islam. At the end of grade 8, all students must take a placement exam to determine the type of high school they may attend. Limited slots in academic high schools force students with lower scores to attend vocational, technical, or *imam hatip* high schools.

**Secondary:** High school (grades 9-12) is also compulsory. In 2022, about 79% of all secondary students attended academic schools where the curriculum includes Turkish language and literature, math, science, social sciences, foreign language (usually English), religious education, philosophy, and physical education. Some specialized academic schools offer programs in a particular language or subject.

Approximately 21% of secondary students attend vocational, technical, or *imam hatip* high schools. While vocational high schools provide courses in public health, agriculture, business, and other fields, technical high schools offer instruction in electronics, chemistry, machinery, construction, and similar



industries. *Imam hatip* schools provide instruction in Sunni Islamic studies. To graduate and pursue post-secondary education, all secondary students must pass an exam that determines their placement in a university or in a technical, vocational, or other post-secondary institution. Graduation rates from all types of secondary schools (73%) are much lower than the European average.

**Post-Secondary:** In 2023, only 42% of 25-34 year-olds had any tertiary-level education, although tertiary enrollment exceeded 73%. Turkish institutions offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral academic degrees, as well as vocational certificates. The government invests significantly in higher education, appropriating about 1/3 of all education expenditure to post-



secondary institutions. Consequently, many public post-secondary institutions are high quality, offering a large variety of programs of study.

While 27 universities form the core of Turkey's post-secondary education system, hundreds of smaller institutions provide supplemental offerings. Istanbul University is Turkey's oldest and largest university, with over 527,000 students. Other notable institutions include Bilkent University, Boğaziçi University, Koç University, and Marmara University. The language of instruction of most post-secondary programs is either Turkish or English.



**Private Schools:** The demand for education in Kurdish was one of the Kurds' ongoing protests against the Turkish government in the past few decades (see *History and Myth*). In 2012, then-PM Erdoğan announced that private schools were permitted to offer instruction in languages other than Turkish. By late 2014, 3



private Kurdish-language schools had opened. Significant hurdles, such as a lack of funding and qualified teachers, have prevented more from opening. Generally, private schools, particularly those that offer some instruction in

languages other than Turkish or Kurdish, have high enrollment rates and currently serve about 8% of all secondary students.

## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Overview

Turks believe that trust, honor, and respect are fundamental to building strong personal and professional relationships. They are typically generous hosts who strive to demonstrate their hospitality.

### Time and Work

Turkey's work week runs from Monday-Friday with most business hours from 9:00am-6:00pm. While hours vary by store size and location, most shops are open from 9:00am- 7:00pm Monday-Saturday, with some closing for an hour lunch break.

Most banks are open Monday-Friday from 8:30am-5:00pm, with reduced hours on Saturdays. Post offices typically open Monday-Saturday

from 8:30am-9:00pm, though a few also have limited opening hours on Sunday. Some banks, post offices, and shops stay open later in urban areas than in rural locations. While many businesses close on Sundays and public holidays, some supermarkets, large food stores, and bazaars in urban areas remain open.



**Working Conditions:** The standard Turkish work week is 45 hours with up to 270 annual overtime hours. In addition to paid public holidays, Turkish workers receive 14 days of annual paid leave, which is increased incrementally based on the number of years worked. Although Turkey has many labor regulations to protect workers, lax enforcement means some workers may receive no pay for overtime hours, suffer under deficient workplace safety standards, or experience abuse or discrimination.

**Time Zone:** Turkey adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Turkey observes daylight savings from the end of March to the end of October, when Turkey is 3 hours ahead of GMT.

**Date Notation:** Like the US, Turkey uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Turks typically write the day first, followed by the month and year.

**Lunar Calendar:** Turks use the Islamic calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

### National Holidays

These holidays occur on fixed dates:

- January 1: New Year's Day
- April 23: National Sovereignty and Children's Day
- May 1: Labor and Solidarity Day
- May 19: Atatürk Commemoration and Youth Sports Day
- August 30: Victory Day
- October 29: Republic Day

These Islamic holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- **Ramazan Bayramı:** End of Ramadan
- **Kurban Bayramı:** Festival of Sacrifice

See *Religion and Spirituality* for more information on Islamic holidays.

## Time and Business

Business tends to move somewhat slower in Turkey than in the US. Most Turks prefer to build trust and develop personal relations before doing business, which often requires extra time and communication. While Turks appreciate punctuality, arriving late to a meeting is typically acceptable given prior notification. Most business discussions occur during scheduled office meetings, although informal meetings in other locations or during meals are also common.

When meeting for the first time, Turkish businessmen verbally greet then shake hands and may kiss on the cheeks (see *Language and Communication*). Most business meetings begin with inquiries about health and family, followed by light conversation and tea that accompanies almost every meeting.

Turks conduct themselves in business settings in a way that communicates the value they place on honor and respect. Maintaining formality is important until the Turkish business



partner signals otherwise. Turks value competence and flexibility in their business partners. Since direct or candid comments may cause distress or loss of face, Turks typically use vague language and

delay decisions to avoid disappointing business partners. Turks rarely make business decisions during initial meetings or without management's approval.

The Turkish workplace is typically hierarchical; senior officials or upper management tend to run meetings and make most decisions with support from subordinate staff. Managers generally deliver feedback and criticism in private in order to avoid conflict and embarrassment. While not the norm, some businesses follow informal, consultative, and democratic decision-making styles.

## Personal Space

As in most societies, the use of personal space depends on the nature of the relationship. While Turks often maintain a distance of an arm's length when conversing with strangers, the distance is typically much smaller with family and friends.

## Touch

Turks tend to engage in more conversational touching than Americans. Similarly, same-sex friends of both genders may hold hands to demonstrate their close platonic relationship. Of note, observant Muslims or socially conservative Turks may avoid touching members of the opposite sex.

## Eye Contact

To a Turk, direct eye contact conveys interest, respect, and transparency and is therefore an inherent part of any greeting or business meeting. While staring is impolite, Turks may consider reluctance to make regular eye contact a sign of dishonesty or an attempt to conceal information. Of note, prolonged eye contact between members of different genders may signal romantic interest. For this reason, some women may avoid direct eye contact with unrelated men.

## Photographs

Mosques, airports, dams, military zones, and similar places often prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Turk's permission before taking his photo.

## Driving

Some Turks have aggressive driving habits, passing vehicles on blind corners or at high speeds or ignoring designated lanes and traffic signals. Traffic law enforcement continues to suffer from corruption, with drivers paying bribes to avoid fines. Nevertheless, Turkey's rate of traffic-related deaths was 7 deaths per 100,000 people in 2021, lower than the US rate of 14. Drunk driving is a serious offense; first-time offenders automatically lose their license, pay a large fine, and may be imprisoned for up to 3 years.



## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

### Overview

Turkey's traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the country's multi-ethnic and multicultural past. They exhibit Persian and Arab influences, Ottoman and Islamic traditions, 20th-century Kemalist values, and modern global trends.

### Dress and Appearance

**Traditional:** Some Turks wear traditional clothing for festivals, holidays, or special events. While styles and fabric reflect distinctive regional variations, most traditional clothing consists of several layers of brightly colored silk, velvet, cotton, or linen fabric, often enhanced with stripes and embroidery.

Women's attire typically includes **şalvar** (light loose trousers) or a long skirt topped by an apron. The trousers or skirt are paired with a **kaftan** (long robe) or a



**pardosü** (long jacket), which covers a loose, long-sleeved shirt. Accessories may include a wide cloth belt, headscarf or other head covering, socks, and shoes or slippers. Women may wear a distinct headdress or hairstyle to signify marital status. Most women wear several pieces of jewelry, some incorporating blue and white **nazar** (evil eye) charms traditionally worn to ward off evil spirits.

Men traditionally wear **şalvar** with a loose, long-sleeved shirt covered by a **kaftan** and a **yelek** (long jacket with hanging sleeves) or other jacket. Accessories may include a cloth belt, socks, shoes or slippers, and a headdress like a turban or **fez** (cylindrical felt hat). During the cold winters, men and women typically wear additional **kaftan**, jackets, and other layers made of wool or fur.

**Modern:** For everyday dress, most Turks wear clothing that reflects the latest European fashions, sometimes adding elements of traditional Turkish styles. While Turkish fashion tends to be colorful and unique in its design, individual styles depend on geographic location, religion, and gender.

Many residents of Turkey's western urban areas prefer a "smart casual" business look that is more formal than typical American styles. Residents of more conservative and observant communities and Turkey's eastern regions prefer more traditional looks, with comfort more important than style. Some observant Muslim women may wear a headscarf, veil, or garments that cover most of the body and head. While the government recently lifted the ban on headscarves in schools and universities, the appropriateness of religious attire in public remains a contentious topic (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Foreign nationals should avoid short skirts, shorts, and sleeveless tops unless at the beach, resort, or pool.

### Recreation and Leisure

Most Turks prefer to spend their leisure time with friends and family. While women often gather at home, men often meet in a



**kahvehane** (coffee house) to discuss an array of topics, from family to politics and religion. Private and public occasions such as weddings, sporting events, and religious holidays are cause for

celebration and reaffirm social bonds.

Modern shopping malls have largely replaced traditional **hamam** (public bathhouses) as Turks' preferred socializing sites outside the home. Some Turks shop, dine, and socialize at traditional bazaars and markets. Many Turks travel to local beaches or enjoy international vacations, particularly during the hot summer months. Television and other forms of mass entertainment are widely popular year-round.

**Festivals:** Turkey hosts a variety of public festivals to celebrate important cultural, historical, and religious events. Many communities celebrate Republic Day and Victory Day with parades. Other popular festivals include the Istanbul and Ankara International Film and Music Festivals, the Istanbul Biennial, the Aspendos International Opera and Ballet Festival, the Izmir International Fair, the Nevruz spring festival celebrated all over Anatolia, and the Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Festival (see “Traditional Sports” below).

Other festivals mark Muslim holidays (see *Religion and Spirituality*). During the 3-day **Ramazan Bayramı** (also known as **Şeker Bayramı**), Turks enjoy socializing and feasting with relatives and close friends. During the 4-day **Kurban Bayramı** many families sacrifice a sheep then host a lavish meal featuring the meat. Both holidays may also include celebrating with music and dance.

## Sports and Games

**Traditional Sports:** **Yağlı güreş** (oil wrestling) is a popular sport in which men wearing leather pants coated in olive oil have 40 minutes to pin down or lift their opponent. First held in the mid-14th century, oil wrestling is one of the world's longest-enduring sports.

**Deve güreşleri** (camel wrestling or fighting) is popular in communities along the Aegean coast. In these matches, handlers induce 2 male camels to wrestle, with the winner forcing the other to the ground.



A popular traditional equestrian sport, **jereed** is played with teams of 6-8 men on horseback throwing blunt wooden javelins at each other to score points. With origins in Central Asia, **jereed** is common today in Turkey's eastern provinces as well as at festivals and weddings across the country.

**Soccer:** Soccer, or “football” as it is known to Turks, is the most popular sport in Turkey. Besides following European leagues,



Turks enjoy their own domestic league, the **Süper Lig**. The league's favorite and most successful teams are Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, and Beşiktaş. At the international level, Turkish teams have had success: Galatasaray beat Arsenal to win the



European Cup in 2000, and Turkey's national team placed 3rd in the 2002 World Cup. Despite its popularity, soccer is still largely a male sport: while most Turkish boys and men play in leagues or in informal weekend

games, few girls or women participate.

**Other Sports:** Other popular sports include wrestling, boxing, martial arts, basketball, volleyball, baseball, and water sports. In the winter, Turks enjoy skiing, especially at a popular resort near Bursa. Turkish athletes have had success at the Olympics, medaling in wrestling, weightlifting, taekwondo, and track and field in 2016. Of note, Turkey is one of a few countries that refers to sports in its constitution, encouraging participation and protecting athletes.

**Traditional Games:** Turks enjoy traditional word games like riddles, chants, and tongue twisters. Other popular games include **tavla** (similar to backgammon) and **mangala**, a 2-person board game in which players try to capture an opponent's game pieces. Popular children's games include **Körebe** (Blind Man's Bluff), **Birdirbir** (Leapfrog), and **Aç kapıyı bezirgan başı** (like London Bridge).

## Music

**Traditional:** For much of history, Turkish music developed distinctive styles based on function and place of performance. Persian and Arab language and styles influenced the classical music of the Ottoman courts, while traveling **aşıklar** (poet-musicians) entertained the peasantry in town centers with Turkish-language pieces about mythical heroes and events.

In the early to mid-20th century, the Turkish government collected and archived **türkü** (folk songs). Although they typically have Turkish lyrics, **türkü** feature distinctive Middle Eastern rhythms and sounds. Filled with emotion, **türkü** lyrics tell of heroes, ancestors, military campaigns, hometowns, love, anguish, and the seasons. With roots in classical Ottoman styles, **fasıl** is popular in restaurants and taverns, where listeners enjoy its use of traditional Turkish percussion, string, and wind instruments as well as violins and clarinets.

Turkish music utilizes many traditional instruments, the most notable being the **saz**, a type of lute. Typically wooden, the **saz** is pear-shaped, 3-stringed, and usually 4-5 feet in length. Other traditional instruments include the **ney** (reed flute), **kemençe** (wooden bowed string instrument), **tambur** (fretted string instrument), **zurnas** (shrill pipe), and the **darbuka**, **davul**, and **tef** (drums).

Due to their long history of contact with Middle Eastern cultures and musical influences, the Turks have adopted some regionally-popular instruments, including the **ud** (a pear-shaped instrument with 11-12 strings), **kanun** (a zither-like instrument with 72 strings), and **bandir**

(frame drum). Notable Western instruments used in Turkish music include guitars, violins, and bagpipes.



**Modern:** Turkish pop blends modern Western-style music with Turkish and Middle Eastern sounds and traditions. Sezen Aksu and Tarkan are popular Turkish pop singers, and Sertab Erener won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2003. Inspired by Byzantine and Arabic styles, songs in the Arabesque genre focus on melancholic themes. İbrahim Tatlıses is the most popular Arabesque musician. Many Turks also enjoy international pop, rock, and jazz.

## Dance

While each region in Turkey has unique traditional dances, they often have commonalities. These include participation by both men and women and the use of line or circle formations, handholding, traditional instruments, and singing. Dances often begin slowly then speed up considerably, climaxing in a hypnotic or frenetic state.



The most well-known Turkish dance is the **sema**, a religious dance performed by members of a Sufi Islamic mystical order (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In an attempt to enter a trance state close to

God, whirling dervishes dance in counter-clockwise circles to music performed on the *ney* and on drums. Each participant may spin up to 2,000 times in 15 minutes.

**Halay** is a popular outdoor folk dance native to central and southeastern Anatolia. During this dance, 3 or more people hold up or link their hands and form lines or semi-circles and move to the rhythm of a pipe and drums. Popular in Turkey's Black Sea region, the **karşılama** is a greeting dance in which men and women stand in rows while dancing to a slow rhythm played by many traditional instruments. As the music accelerates, the dancers begin to twirl, kneel, clap, and embrace. Popular Turkish folk dances are rooted in local traditions and also have been influenced by Western, Middle Eastern, and other foreign traditions for centuries. Well-known throughout the region, **göbek dansı** (belly dancing) has a long history in Turkey and is distinguished from other regional styles by its unique rhythm and use of finger cymbals.

## Theater and Cinema

**Karagöz** is a form of classical Turkish shadow puppet theater that traces to the 16th century and was a popular form of entertainment during the Ottoman era. Performances typically feature lead characters Karagöz and Hajeivat who exchange

witty dialogue contrasting the peasantry with the educated elite. Often performed during Ramadan festivities (see *Religion and Spirituality*), *Karagöz* remains popular today. By contrast, the traditional *rta yunu* is performed with live actors. Usually improvised, performances often take place on a circular open-air stage and begin and end with dances.

The British, French, and Italians introduced Western-style theater to the Ottoman court in the mid-19th century. Even though theater is unpopular among some observant Muslims, the government supported developing new ones during the 20th century. Thus, most major communities have at least one.

Turkey produced its first film in 1914, and by the 1930s, nearly every town had a movie theater. Turkish movie production peaked in the 1970s, when the industry released almost as many films as Hollywood. Prominent film themes include traditional village life, social justice issues, the status of women, and Turkish urban life. Turkish films and directors have won international awards. For example, the film *Winter Sleep* won the coveted Palme d'Or at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

## Literature

Turkey has a long and rich history of literature, both oral and written. The development of poetry and religious writing within the



Ottoman royal court was heavily influenced by Arab and Persian culture and literary traditions. Thus, Turkic literature adapted themes, plots, symbols, and even characters from Persian and Arab classical literature. Poetry, especially, was very popular during the Ottoman era, when famous poets composed in many different forms and styles. Still popular today, Persian poet and Sufi mystic Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi lived in Konya during the 13th century, producing allegorical lyric poetry that heavily influenced Turkish literary and religious traditions (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

By contrast, traveling *ozanlar* (storytellers) and *aşıklar* shared Turkish-language folklore with peasants and townsfolk. While

most folklore and folk poetry was orally transmitted, the 15th-century *Book of Dede Korkut* is a unique written collection of the epic stories of the early Turkic peoples.

In the 19th century, authors Ziya Paşa, İbrahim Şinasi, and Namık Kemal helped advance the use of the Turkish language in literature, in the process laying the foundation for Atatürk's Turkish language reforms (see *Language and Communication*). In the 20th century, Nâzım Hikmet influenced Turkish literature through his rejection of traditional Persian and Arab poetic forms and focus instead on social justice, patriotism, and depictions of ordinary life.

Modern Turkish literature comprises all genres. Common themes include the adventures of warriors, mysticism, the peasantry, social injustices, and Ottoman history. In 2006, novelist Orhan Pamuk became the first Turk to win the Nobel Prize for literature. His novels explore the Ottoman past, including the 20th century Turkish quest for identity that looks for inspiration in both the Eastern and Western traditions.

### Visual Arts and Handicrafts

Turkish visual art is notable for its combination of themes and artistic traditions from a variety of sources, from Europe to Central Asia. Ottoman-era paintings, calligraphy, and architecture often included geometric motifs and foliage designs that are still common today.



Traditional handicrafts include textiles, ceramics, wood- and metalwork, marbled paper, and jewelry. As evident in Turkey's bazaars today, woven carpets and painted tiles are popular products. The Turks' history of carpet production traces to their roots in Central Asia (see *History and Myth*). Tile production reached its artistic peak during the Ottoman era, when expert craftsmen in Iznik supported a robust industry whose output included the internal decoration of Istanbul's Sultan Ahmed Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque for its thousands of blue tiles.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Proper dining etiquette and hospitality towards guests are integral parts of Turkish culture. Rural residents and older generations typically dine and entertain guests at home. Alternatively, younger, urban Turks tend to socialize in bars,



clubs, and restaurants. Turkish cuisine is diverse and extensive, with most dishes incorporating fresh, local ingredients accented by bold and aromatic herbs and spices.

### Dining Customs

Most Turks eat 3 daily meals. While lunch may

be substantial, dinner is usually the largest and main meal of the day. Turks especially enjoy dining and entertaining guests outdoors on patios, terraces, and balconies.

In rural areas guests may stop by a friend's or relative's home unexpectedly. By contrast, guests in urban areas typically call ahead to schedule a visit. When visiting a Turkish home, guests usually remove their shoes, replacing them with slippers or proceeding into the home barefoot. Often, guests bring a small gift for the host, such as flowers, candy, or fruit.

Once seated for the meal, hosts serve their guests first. After guests finish their portions, they usually must decline several offers of additional servings if they do not want more food. An important socializing activity, meals often consist of multiple courses served over several hours. Of note,



while Turkish families commonly eat at Western-style tables with chairs, others in some rural areas or in poorer homes may sit on mats around a low table.

## Diet

Rice is Turkey's main staple. Besides plain, boiled rice, Turks enjoy it mixed with dried fruits, nuts, and various spices. Bulgur (a dry, cracked wheat) is another common grain. Bread accompanies almost every meal and is often used to scoop up food or soak up sauces and oils. Common varieties include **ekmek** (a white loaf bread) and **pide** (a soft, slightly leavened wheat bread). The most popular forms of protein are lamb, beef, and chicken which may be stewed, grilled, or cut into small pieces and roasted on a skewer (**kebap**). Along Turkey's coasts, fish is particularly popular and is typically grilled, steamed, or fried.

Many dishes incorporate assorted dairy products, such as yogurt, cheese, and milk, as well as local vegetables, including peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, and eggplant. Vegetables are typically served fresh, chopped into salads, stuffed with rice and meat, or served grilled alongside a protein and starch. Many dishes are dressed in olive oil and flavored with a variety of aromatic spices. Turks also enjoy several types of native fruits, including melons, oranges, figs, and grapes.



Many of Turkey's primarily Muslim population (see *Religion and Spirituality*)

adhere to certain dietary restrictions. For example, observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they observe particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is **halal**, allowed by Islamic law.

## Popular Dishes and Meals

Breakfast generally consists of cheeses, meats, vegetables, and olives served with bread, jam, and honey along with multiple glasses of tea, coffee, or juice. Eggs are another prominent

breakfast item, often served mixed with cheese, vegetables, or **sucuk** (cured sausage).

Turks typically begin lunch and dinner with various **meze**, a selection of hot and cold appetizers, such as olives, salads, shrimp, cured meats, grilled fish, **dolma** (grape leaves stuffed with rice, meat, and vegetables), and **hummus** (chickpea paste), among others. Both lunch and dinner also feature a main course, usually comprised of a protein, starch, and vegetables.

Popular Turkish dishes include **köfte** (meatballs made with rice or bread); **börek**



(pastry stuffed with cheese and meat); **tarhana** (soup of cracked wheat, yogurt, and fermented vegetables); **kisir** (cracked wheat in tomato and chili sauce); **şiş** (cubed meat) and **Adana** (ground lamb) *kebab*, as well as **döner kebab** (lamb or chicken grilled on a rotating spit, sliced into strips and served on bread). For dessert, Turks enjoy fresh fruits, **baklava** (thin pastry layered with honey and nuts), **muhallebi** (milk pudding) and **lokum** (a gummy sweet made of rose water, powdered sugar, coconut, and pistachios).

## Eating Out

Turks eat out regularly, enjoying restaurant visits that may last several hours. Restaurants range from upscale establishments serving international cuisine to small casual eateries and cafes. Coffeehouses are particularly popular socializing locations, especially among men. Although some restaurants may add a service charge to the bill, wait staff expect an additional tip of 5-10% for good service.

Street vendors are common in urban areas, serving sweet and savory snacks like **simit** (a bread ring coated with sesame seeds), **mediye** (stuffed or fried mussels), and **kokoreç** (grilled sheep's intestine), *kebab*, fresh fish sandwiches, sunflower seeds, and nuts.



## Beverages

Turks consume coffee (*kahve*) and tea (*çay*) with every meal and throughout the day. Coffee is unfiltered and brewed strong, typically simmered in a copper pot then poured into small cups to allow the grounds to settle. Tea is generally heavily laden with sugar and served in small glasses without handles. Fresh-squeezed juices



from pomegranates, oranges, lemons, cherries, and strawberries are also popular. In the winter, Turks may enjoy *salep*, a sweet hot drink made of powdered orchid root. *Ayran*, a refreshing drink of yogurt and water, is popular on hot days.

While generally not offered in rural regions and in many parts of eastern Turkey, alcohol is widely available in urban areas and along Turkey's coasts. The most popular alcoholic drink is *rakı*, an anise-flavored spirit typically served with a splash of water. Turks also enjoy wine and locally-produced beer.



## Health Overview

The Turkish population's health has improved significantly in recent years. Between 2002 and 2024, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from 32 to 18 deaths per 1,000 live births. Meanwhile, maternal mortality dropped from 64 to 17 deaths per 100,000 live births. In addition, life expectancy at birth has increased steadily over the last several decades, from 59 to 77 years. Although it remains below the EU and US averages of 81, life expectancy in Turkey is similar to that of neighboring Armenia (76), Bulgaria (76), and Iran (76).

While Turks generally have access to modern healthcare, facilities are concentrated in cities and underserve rural

dwellers. Further, the quality of care varies greatly among private, public, urban, and rural facilities. Of note, the recent influx of refugees into Turkey (see *Social and Political Relations*) presents a great strain to the healthcare system.

### **Traditional Medicine**

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Turkish medicine centers on the use of herbal and other natural non-surgical remedies to identify and treat the basic causes of illness.

Historically, traditional medicine has been popular in Turkey. Today, many Turks continue to supplement conventional therapies with traditional remedies. Merchants in both urban and rural markets commonly sell medicinal plants and herbal remedies.



Notably, in 2014 the Turkish government legalized the use of certain traditional procedures in public hospitals. Among others, these treatments include

acupuncture (a practitioner inserts very thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin), homeopathy (a form of alternative medicine developed in 18th century Germany in which a patient ingests diluted plant, mineral, and animal substances to trigger the body's natural system of healing), music therapy, hypnosis, and reflexology (the process of applying pressure to a patient's hands and feet).

### **Modern Healthcare System**

In 2003, Turkey introduced the Health Transformation Program (HTP) as a means of improving the governance, quality, and efficacy of Turkey's healthcare sector. Highly successful, HTP aims to provide free, universal health coverage to all Turkish citizens. Today, about 99% of the population is insured.

The Ministry of Health regulates Turkey's health care system at the national level, implements the national health insurance

program, and manages central hospitals. Meanwhile, local authorities dispense primary care services through municipal clinics and regional hospitals. In 2022, Turkey had 1,547 public and private hospitals, delivering a full range of surgical, intensive, and emergency care.

Despite improvements made through the HTP, some health challenges remain. Because medical resources are concentrated in cities, rural areas often lack adequate facilities or offer lower quality care. Further, private facilities are too expensive for most Turks, while public hospitals are often poorly maintained and understaffed. Due to low pay in the public sector, many of Turkey's finest physicians choose to work in the private sector or to leave the country altogether. In 2021, Turkey had just 2 physicians per 1,000 people, lower than the US ratio of 3.6 and significantly lower than the EU ratio of 4.

### Health Challenges

Rates of communicable and infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, malaria, and measles

have decreased significantly in recent years due to government investment in immunization programs and post-exposure treatments. Instead, chronic and non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, cancer, and digestive and respiratory diseases have risen and now account for 69% of all deaths. In 2021, the top causes of death were COVID-19 and cardiovascular diseases. The probability of dying prematurely from NCDs in Turkey is 20%.

Preventable “external causes” such as car accidents, suicides, drownings, falls, and violent crimes resulted in 3% of deaths. Although Turkey launched an aggressive anti-smoking campaign in 2007, about 41% of Turkish men and 20% of women continue to smoke regularly. About 20% Turkish adults are obese, lower than the US rate of 33%, but slightly higher than the EU average of 15%.



## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Overview

For centuries, most residents of Anatolia subsisted as peasants in an agrarian and trade-based economy. Many others toiled as herders or traders on the numerous trade routes linking Europe and Asia. In conjunction with the Ottoman Empire's political decline (see *History and Myth*), the region's economy shrank considerably in the late 19th century. In an effort to industrialize and better compete with other European nations, the Ottomans encouraged foreign investment in the early 20th century. As investment declined during World War I (see *History and Myth*), these industrialization attempts largely failed.



When President Atatürk came to power in 1923, he initiated a drive to supplement agriculture with state-run manufacturing and service sectors. The economy developed rapidly through the growth of tobacco, sugar, and oil industries, iron and steel factories, and insurance and banking sub-sectors. Likewise, US aid and the remittances of Turkish guestworkers in Germany contributed to substantial cash inflows. Turkey also instituted protectionist anti-trade policies to safeguard its new industries. After years of high growth within this centralized economic development model, a financial crisis in the 1970s caused a severe economic contraction.

In 1983, Prime Minister Özal led the implementation of liberal free-market reforms. These included reducing subsidies, encouraging exports and foreign direct investment (FDI), making the exchange rate more flexible, and privatizing many state-run companies, among other changes. In 1987, Turkey established 20 “free zones” in major cities and ports to entice more FDI. Despite some growth, Turkey faced economic crises in 1994, 1999, and 2001 due to mismanagement and external

recessions. In each case, banks failed, inflation soared above 100%, and investors fled. In response, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided loans under the condition that Turkey implement new reforms, including a currency devaluation, more privatizations, and bank restructuring.

Turkey's economy has stabilized since 2001, aided by the IMF reforms, global economic growth, and high commodity prices. From 2002-07, Turkey grew by almost 7% per year, a faster rate than most countries in the region. This upswing stalled briefly during a 2008-09 global financial crisis that caused Turkey's trade-dependent economy to reduce by almost 5%. Despite this decline, prudent financial management helped annual growth to rebound to 9% in 2010-11, one of the fastest rates in the world.

In 2012, Turkey's average annual economic growth began to slow again to a modest 3% due to diminished demand for Turkish exports. Nevertheless, Turkey's modern industrial sector, rapidly expanding services sector, and a local construction boom recently have enabled consistent growth and a stable economy.

Turkey now has the world's 13th-largest economy. Banks and



financial markets are well-regulated, and although FDI is below its 2007 peak, Turkey attracted \$10.95 billion in FDI in 2023. During the first decade of the 21st century, per-

capita income tripled and the poverty rate declined by over half.

While much of Turkey's economy is centered in Istanbul and the western provinces, the so-called "Anatolian tigers" (small- to medium-sized export businesses in central and southern Turkey) have also fueled growth. In recent years, Islamic forms of finance and banking void of interest payments have experienced significant growth, now accounting for 8% of all banking assets in Turkey.

Even though the Turkish economy is relatively stable, diversified, and aligned to free-market principles, it still faces several challenges. Per capita income and labor productivity have grown barely since 2007. Further, investment remains irregular, and Turkey's inflation rate hit a 23-year high of 72.3% in 2022. In 2023, Turkey's inflation rate reached 53.9%. Finally, unemployment is currently at 9.4% while economic conditions and opportunities among regions remain unequal.



In response to these concerns, Turkey has initiated its “12th Development Plan 2024-2028,” designed to create a stable and strong economy, a skilled workforce, a resilient environment and sustainable ecosystem, competitive production through green and digital transformation, and democratic governance founded on principles of justice.

### **Services**

Accounting for about 54% of GDP and 58% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing segment of Turkey's economy. Key services sub-sectors include wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, banking and financial services, telecommunications, and tourism.

**Energy Transit:** Turkey is an energy transit hub due to its strategic location between Europe and the oil and gas producers of the Middle East, Central Asia, and Russia. Besides transit through its Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, several pipelines transport vast quantities of oil and natural gas, resulting in billion-dollar profits from transport, storage, and associated fees. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline alone has the capacity to transport 1 million barrels of oil per day, with several more planned and under construction.

**Tourism:** In 2023, more than 49.2 million tourists visited Turkey. Concentrated in Istanbul and along the Mediterranean coast, Turkey's tourism industry directly accounts for about 12% of GDP and 10% of employment. The most popular destinations

include historical sites and western beaches. Visitors from Germany, Russia, Georgia, Iran, Bulgaria, and other countries spent over \$52.2 billion in 2023, which is a substantial increase over 2020's spending of \$26.3 billion. In 2020, tourism took a major hit due to COVID-19. Prior to 2020, the 2019 rebound in international tourism and spending was attributed to a perception of improved security, a diversified tourism industry, and a weakened lira.



### Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for about 28% of GDP and 28% of the labor force. The most significant sub-sectors include manufacturing, mining, and construction.

**Manufacturing:** The manufacturing of textiles, food and drinks, electronics, and automobiles accounts for most of Turkey's industrial production, 20%. Manufactured clothing and other textile products make up 7% of exports and employ over 1.5 million people. The growing electronics sector accounts for 6% of exports and supplies Europe with more televisions than any other country. The auto industry has grown quickly over the past decade and now produces more than 1.49 million cars annually, mainly for European and domestic markets. Other significant manufacturing industries include chemicals, steel, and wood products.

**Construction:** In 2023, the construction industry accounted for about 5% of GDP and employed over 1.85 million people. Of the world's top 250 construction firms, nearly 17% are Turkish. Residential construction and infrastructure projects have been a mainstay of Turkey's economic success since the 1980s. Prior to 2021, overall, the Turkish construction industry had grown annually by around 10% in recent years. Nevertheless, post-COVID geo-political and economic issues in its major foreign markets (Russia, Kuwait, Turkmenistan, and Algeria) currently pose challenges to the continued growth of the industry.

## Agriculture

The agricultural sector – includes farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry – is the smallest segment of the Turkish economy, accounting for roughly 6% of GDP and 15% of the labor force.

**Farming and Livestock:** Nearly 25% of Turkey's land area is dedicated to cultivation, half of which is devoted to field crops such as wheat and other cereals, corn, cotton, sugar beets, tobacco, and potatoes.

Known as the bread basket of the Middle East, Turkey is self-sufficient in food production and also exports a variety of field crops, olives, citrus, nuts, tea, and roses. Of note,



Turkey is the world's leading supplier of hazelnuts, dried figs, apricots, and raisins. Livestock farming is also a major activity, consisting primarily of cattle, sheep, and goats. Small family farms averaging about 15 acres are common.

**Fishing:** In 2023, the large Turkish fishing and aquaculture industry consisted of more than 250,000 employees, 13,631 of those are fishermen, and around 14,064 vessels that harvested over 454,000 tons of anchovies, sardines, sprats, and mackerel, among others. Aquaculture accounted for 556,290 tons. The Black Sea accounts for about 3/4 of the wild catch, mostly processed into fishmeal and oil. Besides domestic consumption, Turkey exports fish products primarily to Europe, Asia, and the

Middle East.



**Forestry:** With about 15% of its territory covered by woodlands, Turkey has a highly-developed

forestry industry. About 50% of that territory is under state protection, with the remainder available for commercial activities. Pine, oak, poplar, cypress, and beech trees are primary sources for timber, paper, and other wood products.





### Currency

The New Turkish Lira (₺), Turkey's currency since 2005, is issued in 6 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200) and 1 coin value (1 lira, pictured). A lira subdivides into **kuruş** (cents), issued in 5 coin values (1, 5, 10, 25, 50). With fluctuations in exchange rates, \$1 has been worth between ₺6.24 and

₺36.52 in recent years. Most businesses accept credit cards, although some smaller vendors may only accept cash in small denominations.

### Foreign Trade

Totalling \$356.99 billion in 2023, Turkey's exports primarily consisted of petroleum, automobiles, jewelry, and automobile parts sold to Germany (8%), the US (6%), Iraq (5%), the UK (5%), and Italy (5%). In the same year, Turkey imported \$410.8 billion in gold, petroleum products, automobiles, and scrap iron from China (12%), Germany (8%), Switzerland (6%), the US (4%), and Italy (4%).



### Foreign Aid

The European Union (EU) gives Turkey hundreds of millions of dollars in annual financial and technical

support aimed at preparing the country to conform to EU standards. Since 2016, the EU pledged an additional €3.5 billion to help Turkey respond to the Syrian refugee crisis (see *Political and Social Relations*). Türkiye received a total of \$68.9 million in disbursed aid from the United States government in 2022. In 2023, United States provided \$180 million in foreign aid to Türkiye after massive earthquakes (see *Political and Social Relations*). While it is traditionally a net recipient of aid, Türkiye provided over \$5.6 billion in developmental and humanitarian assistance in 2022.

## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Overview

Turkey has a modern physical infrastructure with efficient public transportation systems and well-maintained roads. Turks enjoy an advanced and extensive telecommunications network, although the government is known to limit freedom of speech.

### Transportation

While the percentage of Turkish families using privately-owned vehicles has risen steeply in recent years, many Turks also travel by bus, train, taxi, ferry, bicycle, or foot. Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities have efficient and reliable mass transit systems that include buses, **dolmuşlar** (shared taxis), trains, trams, and metro lines that typically run from 6:00am-midnight. Special bike and pedestrian zones are increasingly common in urban areas but can be dangerous due to aggressive drivers.

Since the 1980s, Turkey has invested significantly in its transport infrastructure, seeking to secure its position as a hub of international trade and transport (see *Economics and Resources*). New infrastructure includes metro lines in 5 cities and high-speed trains connecting major urban areas. While Turkey works to develop its outdated railway system, its advanced air, road, and sea transport networks now connect to major global markets. Turkey's Vision 2023 includes significant infrastructure plans in all transport sectors.



**Roadways:** In 2023, 93% of Turkey's 159,960 mi of roads were paved. In 2024, Turkey announced plans to invest \$2 billion in 206 miles of highway projects. While most major roadways are well-maintained, some 11,260 miles are unpaved or in poor condition. Highways connecting major cities are typically 4-6 lanes, though some are only 1 lane in each direction. Highway

D100, known in Europe as route E80, runs from Portugal to Turkey's border with Iran.

**Railways:** Turkey has over 8,157 mi of railways that connect major cities and towns with Eastern Europe and Iran. During the 2010s, Turkey invested more in railways than any other form of transport. In 2014, state-owned **Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devlet Demiryolları** (Turkish State Railways) opened a 520-mile-long high-speed railway that connects Istanbul, Ankara, and Konya with trains that travel up to 150 mph. Turkey's Minister of Transport announced a 30-year plan to increase the number of regions connected by the high-speed network from 8 to 52 by 2053.



**Ports and Waterways:** Turkey has about 750 mi of waterways that are navigable year-round. It plans to build a new canal in Istanbul by 2027 to divert shipping traffic from the Bosphorus Strait, currently one of the world's busiest waterways. Major sea ports include Ambarlı and Haydarpaşa in Istanbul, as well as Ereğli, Izmir, and Mersin. Regular ferry services connect Turkey with Greek islands and Northern Cyprus.

**Airways:** Turkey has 98 airports, 91 with paved runways. While Istanbul Atatürk Airport was the largest, the new Istanbul Airport was opened in 2019 and has a capacity of 80 million passengers. By 2025, planners estimate it will serve over 250 million passengers annually, more than any other airport worldwide. Turkish Airlines is the national carrier, serving 111 countries. Other Turkish carriers include AnadoluJet, AtlasGlobal, Onur Air, Pegasus Airlines, and Sunexpress.

## Energy

Fossil fuels continue to drive Turkey's economy, with a heavy dependency on imports, especially oil and gas (93% and 99%, respectively). Turkey imports oil and gas from Russia, Iran, and Iraq. To reduce dependence on these countries, Turkey has built pipelines to transport oil and gas from Central Asia (see *Economics and Resources*). Renewable hydropower, solar and

biomass account for 42% of Turkey's total electricity generation. To support its energy independence goals, Turkey plans to build nuclear power plants with the first of 3 being operational in 2035.

## Media

While the Turkish constitution protects freedom of expression, in practice the government censors journalists and limits any speech deemed offensive to the Turkish nation or President Erdoğan (see *History and Myth*). Turkey has recently jailed journalists, blocked media outlets like YouTube and Twitter, pressured media companies critical of the government, and promoted self-censorship.



**Print Media:** The Turkish press includes hundreds of local and national periodicals published in Turkish, Kurdish, English, and other languages. In early 2016, Turkish courts required that Turkey's most popular newspaper, *Zaman*, replace its editors and management due to their critical views of the government. *Posta*, *Sözcü*, *Sabah*, and *Hürriyet* are popular newspapers with circulations over 300,000; *Hürriyet* has an English edition.

**Radio and TV:** The state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) broadcasts many popular radio and TV programs. Other private stations offer programs in Turkish, English, and other languages. Cable, satellite, and Internet services also provide international content.

## Telecommunications

Turkey's comprehensive telecommunications network is undergoing rapid modernization and expansion. In 2023, Turkey had about 11 landlines and 106 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.

**Internet:** In 2023, about 86% of Turks regularly used the Internet – rates tend to be higher in western and urban areas. The Turkish government censors Internet content, blocking or limiting access to many websites. Since 2015, the government may legally block content and conduct surveillance of users without a court order.



For more information on  
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