



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Turkey holds a key location at the juncture of Europe and Asia, controlling the entrance to the Black Sea. Covering 302,533 square miles (783,562 square kilometers), Turkey is just larger than Texas. The northwestern portion is called Thrace (Trakya), while the remaining area is known as Anatolia (Anadolu) or Asia Minor. These two sections span the strategic Turkish Straits (including the Bosphorus, Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles), which link the Black and Aegean seas. Two-thirds of Anatolia is a plateau that becomes more mountainous to the east; the plateau's elevation ranges from 5,000 to 6,500 feet (1,524 to 1,981 meters). The eastern mountains are very high: Mount Ararat (Ağrı), the nation's tallest peak, stands at 16,940 feet (5,165 meters) at its highest point. Mountains and forests are also found along the Black Sea, limiting coastal peoples' contact with the interior. Both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers flow through Turkey. The low coastal regions support much of the country's agriculture. Winters can be very cold in some portions of the country, although they are mild along the coasts. Summers are pleasant but can be hot in some areas. Turkey is one of the world's most earthquake-prone regions.

History

Modern Turkey is the most recent in a series of important states and empires that have inhabited the Anatolian peninsula since the beginning of history. The oldest known site of human urban habitation is located in central Turkey at

Çatalhöyük (6500 BC). The great Hittite Empire (1750–1200 BC), which dominated much of the Middle East, was centered east of Ankara. Ancient Troy, the scene of much of Homer's *Iliad*, was located near the Dardanelles. Alexander the Great captured Anatolia in the fourth century BC, and the Romans followed three centuries later, establishing important cities, such as Ephesus (Efes) and Antioch (Antakya), as major provincial capitals.

In AD 330, Emperor Constantine of Rome founded the city of Constantinople (now İstanbul), which later became the center of the Byzantine Empire. This powerful state dominated eastern Europe for a thousand years. The Muslim Seljuk Turks entered Asia Minor in the 11th century and began the long process of Islamization and Turkization. In 1453, the successors of the Seljuks, the Ottoman Turks, captured Constantinople and went on to create a vast empire, stretching beyond the bounds of the Byzantine Empire into the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa. The Ottoman Empire survived until World War I, when it allied itself with the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria). With the defeat of the Central Powers, the empire was dismembered.

In 1923, out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, General Mustafa Kemal (known as Atatürk) fashioned the Republic of Turkey. Under Atatürk, the nation was reformed from an empire to a secular state with an Islamic majority. The country was removed from the dominion of Muslim kings, called sultans, and Muslim religious leaders, called caliphs, and was proclaimed a republic. The nation also adopted a Western civil law code, the Gregorian calendar, the Latin alphabet, and modern Western dress. Although most of

Turkey is in Asia, it has always had important European ties. In 1952, Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and provided land for a U.S. military base.

Over the next three decades, the country went through various cycles of political turmoil. Economic and political upheaval in the 1970s led the military to seize control in 1980. The military restored stability, called for elections in 1983, and withdrew from power. The military commander responsible for these actions, Kenan Evran, was elected president. His prime minister, Turgut Özal, became the dominant political figure in the 1980s. In 1989, Özal was elected president.

Elections in 1991 brought Özal's rival, Süleyman Demirel, to power as prime minister. Demirel had been prime minister before and was twice (1971, 1980) ousted in coups. When Özal died suddenly in 1993, Demirel was elected by Parliament as the new president. Tansu Çiller took Demirel's vacated position, becoming Turkey's first female prime minister. Her government faced economic challenges and the insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Tens of thousands were killed in Turkey's struggle with the guerrilla separatist PKK, a group seeking a Kurdish homeland. Turkey must deal with the Kurds' continuing desire for autonomy and make serious improvements on several other fronts before it can reach its goal of joining the EU.

The election of Adullah Gul, a politician with Islamist roots, as president in 2007 sparked protests and concern about maintaining Turkey's secular status. In 2009, Turkey agreed to establish diplomatic ties and open its shared border with Armenia, although disagreement continues over Turkey's killing of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire. In 2010, Turkey's parliament opened a debate about proposed changes to Turkey's constitution that would make the country more democratic.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Turkey has over 77.8 million inhabitants, a population that is growing at 1.27 percent annually. Ankara, the capital, is home to more than 4 million people. İzmir has over 3 million. İstanbul is still the industrial, commercial, and intellectual center of the country and is home to more than 12 million people. About 75 percent of the people are Turkish, 18 percent are Kurdish, and 7 percent belong to a variety of smaller groups. Roughly 69 percent of Turkey's population lives in urban areas. Kurds live mostly in the southeast. People in rural areas tend to be more ethnically segregated than in other areas. Almost 1.5 million Turkish workers live abroad, mostly in Europe and Saudi Arabia.

Language

Turkish, the official language, is related to the Ural-Altaic languages spoken across Asia (from Finland to Manchuria). Arabic is also spoken. Arabic script was used during the Ottoman Empire period, but a Latin-based alphabet has been used since 1928. Most of the Kurdish minority speaks

Kurdish. Because of dialect differences among the Kurds, however, they often communicate and publish parts of their newspapers in Turkish or Arabic. Turkey lifted its ban on Kurdish broadcasting and education in 2002. English is the most popular foreign language and a required course in secondary schools. In some high schools and universities, English is the language of instruction.

Religion

Although 99 percent of Turkey's population is Sunni Muslim, the government makes it clear that Turkey is a secular state with freedom of religion. Islam's status as the state religion was abolished in 1923. Still, Islam maintains an important influence on society. Muslims believe in one God, *Allah*, and that his will was revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. These revelations were recorded in the *Qur'an* (Koran), the holy book of Islam. Muslims accept many Judeo-Christian prophets but proclaim that Muhammad was the last and greatest prophet. Muslims strive to live the Five Pillars of Islam: professing *Allah's* name and Muhammad's role as prophet, fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan*, giving aid to the poor, making a pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia, and praying five times daily.

General Attitudes

Turkey is often described as a bridge between East and West. Because they have interacted with Europe and Asia for centuries, Turks have incorporated features from both areas into their lifestyle and thinking. At the same time, they are patriotic and have developed a unique society.

The people are proud of the achievements of their modern state as well as the accomplishments of their ancestors, who ruled great empires. Turks consider their society to be progressive, Europe-leaning, and strongly influential in the region. They often feel misunderstood by European and other Western nations; they wish their country to be seen as modern, ethnically diverse, tolerant, and democratic.

Individually, Turks prize a good sense of humor; it is considered a sign of intelligence. Group orientation is valued over personal assertiveness or aggression, and honesty and cleverness are admired qualities. People also value a good education, secure employment, wealth, social status, and an honorable heritage. Bravery and loyalty are also prized personal traits.

Personal Appearance

Most Turks wear Western-style clothing. European fashions are especially popular among young people. Muslim women, especially in rural areas, may wear a scarf to cover their hair. Secular laws prohibit such religious clothing in state-run institutions, government offices, and public schools. However, in 2008 the constitution was amended to allow some headscarves to be worn in public universities. Some traditional costumes are still worn in rural areas or for special occasions. The design of a costume's headdress and the type of material used indicate a person's social status.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

When greeting friends or strangers, one shakes hands and says *Nasılsınız?* (How are you?) or *Merhaba* (Hello). A typical response to *Nasılsınız* is *İyiyim, teşekkür ederim* (Fine, thank you). Greetings among friends are followed by polite inquiries about one's health, family, and work. Unless they are strict Muslims, close friends of the same (or sometimes the opposite) gender clasp hands and kiss on both cheeks when greeting. The hands of an older person may be kissed and touched to the greeter's forehead to show respect. Young people often greet each other with *Selam* (Salute). When parting, people say *Hoscakal* (Stay well), *Gorusunuz* (See you later), *Kendine iyi bak* (Take care), or even *Bye-bye*.

Upon joining a small group, one greets each person individually. When addressing others formally, one uses professional titles. Otherwise, the title *Hanım* is used for women and *Bey* for men among peers or with younger persons. These follow the given name: *Leyla Hanım* or *Ismail Bey*. In informal situations, one addresses older people with *Abla* for women (*Fatma Abla*) or *Abi* for men (*Ahmet Abi*). These terms mean “big sister” and “big brother” respectively. When greeting someone much older, one uses *Teyze* (Aunt) and *Amca* (Uncle) after the first name. Urban people generally do not greet strangers they pass on the street.

Gestures

Turkish people generally use their hands a great deal during conversation, forming gestures that add meaning and emphasis. Social courtesies are valued in Turkey. One does not put feet on a desk or table, point the sole of the foot toward another person, smoke without asking permission, or cross the legs while in the presence of an older or superior person. In rural areas it is not proper for adults to eat on the street. It is common for members of the same sex to kiss on the cheeks. Public displays of affection between men and women are not acceptable in rural areas. “No” can be expressed by either shaking the head or lifting it upward quickly.

Visiting

Turks enjoy visiting one another in their homes, and hospitality is an integral part of the culture. Friends, relatives, and neighbors visit often. In large cities, people call ahead, but this is not practical in smaller villages, where unexpected visits occur more frequently. Guests always are invited in and offered refreshments. This usually involves something to drink (such as tea, coffee, or soda) and may also include something to eat (such as crackers or cookies). It is impolite to decline these refreshments. Many Turks remove their shoes when entering a home and replace them with slippers. Guests are expected to do the same at homes where this custom is followed. Visitors are expected to bring a pleasant presence to the home; bad news or accounts of problems are saved for other occasions. It is impolite to ask a host personal questions. Visitors to a home may bring a small gift, such as candy,

fruit, or flowers. Turks strive to make their guests feel comfortable. For example, even if the hosts do not think smoking is appropriate, they may allow visitors to smoke in their homes.

Eating

Breakfast usually is eaten around 7 a.m., or earlier in rural areas. Lunch is at midday and dinner is around 7 p.m. Dinner is the main meal, and the family generally expects to sit down together for this meal.

Eating habits vary with the region and the food being eaten. Turks generally observe the continental style of eating—the fork stays in the left hand and the knife remains in the right. Some foods are eaten with the hands. In rural areas, people may sit on the floor around a low table. To begin or end a meal, one might say *Afiyet Olsun* (May what you eat bring you well-being). One may compliment the cook on the meal by saying *Elinize sağlık* (roughly, “Bless your hand”). Meals can be lavish, and Turks are quite proud of their rich cuisine. Restaurant specialties range from fast food to international cuisine; Turkish kebab restaurants are especially common. Some restaurants include a service charge in the bill (about 10 percent), in which case a 5 percent tip is customary. If no service charge is included, a 15 percent tip should be given.

LIFESTYLE

Family

The primary social unit in Turkey is the family. In rural areas, traditional patriarchal values prevail. An individual is loyal to and dependent upon the family. The Turkish household often consists of an extended family: a mother and father, any unmarried children, and in some cases, married sons with their families. The married sons remain until they are financially independent. In urban areas, nuclear families are standard, and traditional authority structures are less pronounced. It is uncommon for a person to live alone, mostly for economic reasons. Polygamy, as permitted by Islamic law, was abolished in 1930. Women gained the right to vote in 1927 and the right to divorce in 1934, when civil marriage contracts were introduced. However, the divorce rate remains very low. Since 2002, women have had legal equality with men, but much work remains before true equality is achieved. There are many urban women who work outside the home. About a third of the labor force is female.

Housing

Home ownership is viewed as a sign of success in Turkey. Families who can afford to do so purchase a home for each child in the family as an inheritance or investment. When a young couple gets married, families of the bride and groom traditionally share the costs of setting up and furnishing a new home. The better off the family, the more elaborate the interior design. Most urban Turks live in concrete and steel apartments. However, among the upper class, there has recently been a move away from congested cities toward suburban developments, where single-family houses and town

houses are more common. In rural areas, homes tend to be made from concrete and brick or, in poor villages, of mud bricks.

Dating and Marriage

Except perhaps at universities or in large urban areas, dating in the Western sense is not common. Young people associate more in groups than in couples. In the cities, this association is generally open and casual. In rural areas, chaperons are common. Rural families are heavily involved in deciding whom a person will marry, but the choice is generally the couple's in urban areas. It is against the law for men or women to marry before age 18, except in special circumstances. Many people wait to marry until they have completed their education and the mandatory military service males must complete beginning at age 20. Hence, the average age for marriage is 22 for women and 25 for men. Most Turks expect to marry and have children.

Traditional wedding celebrations last three days and are still practiced by some in rural areas. Urban couples often follow more European traditions when marrying. Traditional festivities begin with the *Kına Gecesi* (henna evening), an event for women only. They decorate the hands and fingers of the bride with henna leaf dye and dance and sing. On the second day, both sets of parents serve lunch and dinner to their guests. On the third day, the bride is taken to the groom's home on a horse after folk dances are performed. This tradition is increasingly rare because of the time and expense involved.

Life Cycle

Rituals form an integral part of Turkish life. Boys are circumcised between five and eight. The ceremony is elaborate, and the boy usually dresses in a white satin suit, a cape trimmed with marabou feathers, and a high crowned hat. A party is thrown at which he receives gifts from family and friends. In rural areas, the entire village typically joins the festivities. Turks are considered adults at 18, though many cannot afford to move out of their parents' house at that time. Other milestones include completing an education, military service, and getting married. Aged parents sometimes move in with their married children. Retirement homes are rare. After someone dies, a prayer ceremony is held in the local mosque. Burial is followed by a memorial service, which takes place in the home. Forty days after death, another memorial service is held, this one presided over by an *Imam* (Muslim religious leader).

Diet

Turkish cuisine is world-renowned. Lamb and rice are served with many meals. Seafood is more abundant along the coast. The famous *kahve* (Turkish coffee), a thick brew served in very small cups, is drunk at nearly every meal. Breakfast is usually light, consisting of tea, white cheese, bread, butter, marmalade or honey, and olives. The main meal of the day is eaten in the evening and may consist of several courses. Among other things, Turkish cuisine is famous for the *meze*, a tray or table of hors d'oeuvres, including stuffed grape leaves, salads, shrimp, and a variety of other items. There are also

many unique Turkish soups. Other favorite dishes are shish kebabs (chunks of lamb on a skewer) and vegetables prepared in olive oil. A seasoned rice dish called *pilav* is common. Turkey is known for its sweet desserts, including *baklava* (syrup-dipped pastry) and *muhallebi* (milk pudding). Turkish coffee and tea are the most common drinks.

Recreation

The most popular sport to watch and play is soccer, which was introduced by the British in the 19th century. Basketball, cycling, grease wrestling, traditional wrestling, swimming, volleyball and a variety of other sports are also enjoyed. Picnics are common family activities. August is the month for most vacations. During their leisure time, urban residents may watch television, dine out, visit others, or attend movies. Rural women visit one another in their homes, knit, or watch television. Men in rural areas may gather at teahouses (like cafés) to socialize. When at home, they also watch television. Folk dancing and other cultural arts are popular.

The Arts

Theater, both contemporary and traditional, is a popular Turkish pastime in urban areas. *Karagöz* (a shadow play) is created by casting shadows of puppets on a curtain. Other types of theater are village shows and *orta oyunu*, a type of comedy. Turkish music varies widely by ethnic group, region, and religious orientation. The most common folk instrument is the *saz*, a kind of long-necked lute, but countless varieties of instruments exist, from bagpipes to fiddles and drums. Dance often accompanies music at festivals and important events ranging from weddings to circumcisions. Pop and rock music, from both Turkey and the West, is popular. Among the Kurds, music is an integral part of passing on traditions. The music relies heavily on vocals and follows traditional rhythms. Instruments vary from the *oud* (lute) to various reeded flutes. Turkey is recognized for handicrafts, especially carpets, renowned worldwide for centuries. Other crafts include weaving, metalwork (especially copper and brass), woodwork, musical instruments, glassware, stonework, and jewelry.

Holidays

The ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar is *Ramadan*, when practicing Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. People celebrate the end of *Ramadan* by eating sweets during the three days of *Şeker Bayramı* (sugar holiday). Another Muslim holiday is *Kurban Bayramı* (sacrifice holiday), which marks the season of pilgrimage to Makkah and commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Usually an animal is sacrificed and the meat distributed to the poor. Other official holidays include New Year's Day, National Sovereignty Day and Children's Day (23 Apr.), Youth and Sports Day (19 May), Victory Day (30 Aug.), Republic Day (29 Oct.), and Anniversary of Atatürk's Death (10 Nov.).

SOCIETY

Government

Turkey is a constitutional republic with a multiparty parliament. The president (currently Abdullah Gul) is head of state; the prime minister (currently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) is head of government. The Grand National Assembly (parliament) has 550 members. In 2007, voters approved a referendum calling for future presidents to be elected to five-year terms by the people rather than to seven-year terms by parliament. The military plays a constitutionally mandated role in protecting the secular state, directly influencing government policies and actions. The voting age in Turkey is 18.

Economy

Agriculture is the traditional backbone of the economy, once providing the bulk of all exports. Today, it employs a large percentage of the labor force but accounts for a much smaller percentage of the gross domestic product. Chief agricultural products include cotton, tobacco, citrus fruits, olives, cereals, nuts, livestock, and opium for medicine. Manufacturing employs one-quarter of the labor force but accounts for more than half of all exports. Industries include textiles, food processing, cars, steel, petroleum, construction, lumber, and paper. Mining (coal, copper, boron) and tourism are also important sources of revenue. The tourist industry's infrastructure has grown substantially in the last decade. A large national debt is a major challenge. Inflation has traditionally been very high, although it has recently been brought down to about 10 percent. Income distribution is unequal: urban residents enjoy far higher incomes than rural people or migrants. The currency is the new Turkish *lira* (YTL).

Transportation and Communications

Around major urban areas, the roads are paved and in good condition. In rural areas, infrastructure is generally adequate but not always well maintained. Taxis, buses, streetcars, and *dolmuşes* (shared taxis) provide public transportation. The railroad is used for travel between cities, as are the airways. Turkey is connected with other countries by international air links.

Overall, the communications system is fairly good; several television and radio stations broadcast throughout the country. The press is relatively active and free; however, journalists often practice self-censorship by avoiding sensitive issues such as the military, Kurdish separatism, and political Islam. Telephone service is best in urban areas. Many Turks have mobile phones and internet use is common.

Education

Lasting eight years, primary education is free and coeducational. Students attend a general, technical, or vocational high school for an additional three to four years. Nearly all students complete primary education, and most complete high school. A foreign-language course is required. Exams determine university entrance. There are more than 70 universities in Turkey, the oldest of which was founded at İstanbul in 1453. The state runs most universities. Some 250 specialized colleges and institutions offer vocational and other training.

Health

Basic health care is provided but is not sufficient to meet the country's needs. Urban facilities are generally modern and adequate, but rural facilities are not as well equipped. Institutions, such as the military and state-owned enterprises, provide additional care to their personnel. Turkey's relatively high infant mortality rate is attributed to poor education about child care and a lack of family planning. The government seeks to reduce the figure through improved child immunizations, prenatal care, education, and other programs.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	77,804,122 (rank=17)
Area, sq. mi.	302,533 (rank=38)
Area, sq. km.	783,562

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	83 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	77 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$11,500
Adult literacy rate	95% (male); 80% (female)
Infant mortality rate	25 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	70 (male); 74 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).