History & Culture of Turkey: From Anatolian Civilization to Modern Republic

A guide created by Chatham students for Chatham students for our 2010-2011 Global Focus
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Turkey: A Brief Profile

The People of Turkey

People
Population: 76,805,524
Life Expectancy: 72 years
Languages: Turkish, Kurdish, and other minority languages
Literacy: 87.4% (men: 95.3%, women: 79.6%)
Ethnicity: Turkish 70-75%, Kurdish 18%, other minorities 7-12%
Religion: Muslim 99.8% (mostly Sunni), other 0.2%

Government
Type: republican parliamentary democracy
Like the United States, Turkey's government system includes executive, judicial, and legislative branches.
Executive: Presidents (the chief of state) serve five-year terms and are eligible for a second. They choose a Council of Ministers including the Prime Minister (the head of government). Currently in office are President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
Judicial: Like the United States, the Turkish judicial system uses multiple levels of courts.
Legislative: Representatives to the 550-seat council are elected every 5 years. As of 2009, Turkey has 49 separate political parties, but only those with a 10% or more constituency may hold seats in the legislature. The three most prominent parties are the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, at 46.6%; the Republican People's Party, or CHP, at 20.8%; and the Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, at 14.3%.
A constitution was ratified in 1982.

Geography
Turkey is ranked 44th in landmass with a total area of 783,562 sq. km.—slightly larger than Texas. The country consists of the smaller western and European region of Thrace and the larger eastern and Asian region of Anatolia. Turkey shares borders with Syria, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Azerbaijan. Summers are hot and dry, winters mild and wet.

http://www.geography-site.co.uk/pages/countries/atlas/maps/turkey.gif
Modern Turkey is situated on the Anatolian peninsula, or Asia Minor. Because Anatolia marks the convergence of two great landmasses—present day Asia and Europe, respectively—it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited regions on the planet. Neolithic Çatalhöyük, one of the earliest human settlements, is located on this peninsula; the settlement lasted from 7500 BCE to 5700 BCE. Anatolia has witnessed the rise and fall of numerous empires, beginning with that of the Hittites in the 8th century BCE. When their five-hundred year rule ended, various Indo-European and Greek civilizations followed in their wake. The Persian Achaemenid Empire conquered the region in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, only to fall to Alexander the Great in 334 BCE. Anatolia was then divided into Hellenistic kingdoms, all of which yielded to Rome by the mid-1st century BCE.

Byzantium, the city now known as Istanbul, was chosen by Roman emperor Constantine I to be the new capital of the Roman Empire. Subsequently, the city was rechristened Constantinople. The city kept its name and remained the capital when the Byzantine Empire, or Eastern Roman Empire, rose to power after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. For roughly a thousand years, the Byzantine Empire controlled Anatolia, until the Islamic Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453 CE. Throughout its 600-year history, the Ottoman Empire served as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the empire was among the most politically prominent and powerful in the world. However, it was already in decline when it allied with the German Empire in World War I.

After its defeat by the Allied Powers, the Ottoman Empire was partitioned into new nations, creating the modern Arab world. But Turkish Nationalists resisted partitioning at the hands of the Allied Powers; thus began the Turkish War for Independence.
The end of the First World War ignited great change for the country of Turkey. The Ottoman Empire still had control of the region, yet the Allied forces, upon occupying the country, defeated the Ottomans and left the sultanate discredited. The occupation of Turkey by the Allies and other armies, such as the Greek, upset many Turks. Battles were soon waged by the Turkish army against all occupying forces.

These events led to the Turkish War for Independence, which lasted from 1919 to 1923, and was led by the popular and experienced Ottoman general, Mustafa Kemal. On September 9, 1922, the Turkish Army defeated and drove out enemy forces, enabling them to reenter the previously occupied Izmir. The following Mudanya Armistice, signed on October 11, 1922, forced all Allied Forces to withdraw from Turkish territories.

On October 29, 1923, Kemal was elected the first President of the new Republic. He continued to serve as President of Turkey for four consecutive terms, the only person to serve for such an extended period of time. With the adoption of Law No. 2587 on November 24, 1934, Mustafa Kemal was given the last name “Atatürk,” meaning “Father of the Turks,” a privilege reserved for him alone.
Culture

Ethnic Groups of Turkey

Turkey, the bridge between Asia and Europe, has plenty of ethnic diversity due to thousands of years of immigrations. Much like the United States, the country has been through many waves of immigration. Turks make up about 80% of the population. The rest are mostly Kurds, although in Istanbul there are significant populations of Greek and Roma. There are also numerous minority populations of Caucasians, Europeans, and Arabs.

Turks: Turks define themselves by a common culture. They descended from nomadic tribes such as the Mongols and the Huns. After working with Arab armies, they converted to Islam in the 9th and 10th centuries. There are three main groups of Turks: Anatolian Turks, the most prominent; Rumelian Turks, and Central Asian Turks. Their ethnicities are defined by paths of immigration.

Kurds: The Kurds are of a nation that has never been politically unified into a state of its own. About half of the 26 million Kurds live in Turkey, while others are located in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. They identify with each other through a common language and culture. While the Turks have tried to suppress the Kurds, the Kurds are seeking equality and/or sovereignty.

Other populations: The Caucasians, Abkhazians, Chechens, Gagauz, Ingush, Nogay, Ossetes, and Yezidis are all Muslim peoples who have been able to assimilate into Turkish society. Arabs also form a small population; they arrived with the acquisition of parts of Syria or as farm workers.

Despite a long relationship with Europe, very few Europeans live in Turkey today. In the mid-1800s, Armenians, at 2.5 million, comprised a large population in Turkey. However, in 1915 the Turkish government launched a genocide against them, killing more than half the people in two years. Most have left for the now-sovereign state of Armenia; only 70,000 remain in present-day Turkey.

Religion

The vast majority (99.8%) of Turks are Muslim, three quarters of which practice Sunni Islam. The Turks adopted Islam while working with Arabs to conquer much of the Middle East around the turn of the 11th century.

While Islam has influenced the development of Turkey for almost a thousand years, Turkey is officially a secular state. The only other Islamic secular state is Senegal. This decision was made in 1924 when a nationalist regime took over. Up until this point, Islamic traditions were enforced by the government. Now Islam would not be a part of public life. This was an attempt to replace an Islamic identity with a Turkish identity. Construction of mosques was halted, schools were secularized, and many religious activities were prohibited. This spawned a public outcry; not until the 1970's and 80's was Islam begin tolerated again. So, while Turkey is secular, the nation very much identifies with Islam.

Religious minorities in Turkey include Christianity and Judaism.
Although written works are now the most-widespread form, poetry of the oral folk tradition was for centuries the dominant genre. Poets composed their works to be sung to music. This oral folk tradition remained uninfluenced by most Arabic and Persian literature.

Unlike the folk tradition, the written word was continuously influenced by the language and forms of Arabic and Persian literature. With the rise of the Ottoman Empire, a style known as Divan literature was born.

Predominantly influenced by Persian literary forms and Sufi thought, Divan poetry was highly ritualized and symbolic. Like folk poetry, it was often set to music. Divan narratives were also poetic and followed a rhyme scheme borrowed from an Arabic style.

In the 19th century, Turkish literature became Westernized with the introduction of the novel and the short story. In 1872 the first Turkish novel appeared: Taşak-u Ta'lat ve Fitnat (Ta'lat and Fitnat In Love) by Şemseddin Sami. French literature and literary movements were an influence throughout the Westernization process.

With the war for and the founding of the Republic of Turkey, three nationalist literary movements came to prominence. The New Literature movement took its cues from the Western model of progress, both intellectually and scientifically. The Dawn of the Future movement directly opposed the New Literature movement, and in their manifesto declared, “Art is personal and sacred.” Meanwhile, the National Literature movement sought to remain autonomous from either Eastern or Western influence.

Post-independence prose grew out of the National Literature movement. The village novel, which presented a realistic portrayal of life in Turkish villages, was one of the more popular styles, along with social realism. Poetry, however, branched into several forms. Inspired by modernism, Nâzım Hikmet was the first poet to write in free verse.

Contemporary Turkish literature’s most renowned figure is prose writer Orhan Pamuk. Winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, his novels are noted for employing postmodern technique. Translated into over fifty languages, his books are bestsellers.

In 1952, forty-nine films were produced in Turkey. In the span of that year alone, more films were produced than in all previous years combined since the production of the first Turkish film, a documentary, in 1914. By the 1960s, Turkey was the fifth largest film producer in the world.

Similar to Hollywood, Yeşilçam (“Green pine”) is a metonym for the Turkish film industry. It thrived throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Filmmakers like Ömer Lütfi Akad greatly influenced this era of films and directors. One of the most notable films of this era was the 1964 Berlin Film Festival Golden Bear Award-winner, Susuz Yaz (Dry Summer), directed by Metin Erksan. The film stars one of the most popular and acclaimed Turkish screen actresses of all-time, Hülya Koçyiğit.

By the 1970s, the film industry began to decline due to the impact of television and video. It was not until director Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Uzak (Distant) appeared in 2002 that the industry began to experience a revival. Ceylan’s film went on to win the Grand Prix at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival, among other awards.

Of Turkish descent, German filmmaker Fatih Akin won the Golden Bear Award in 2004 for his film Gegen die Wand (Head-On). He also directed a documentary on the music scene in Istanbul, Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul.
Art

The art of Turkey was largely influenced by Islam, which encourages the use of patterns and designs rather than figurative works. One of the most illustrative examples of this artistic preference is the calligraphy of the Ottoman Empire. Calligraphy of this era is highlighted by the distinctive *Diwani* script, invented by Housam Roumi and developed during the 16th and 17th centuries. The style is characterized by the complexity of the lines of the letters and the close juxtaposition of the letters within each word.

![Diwani calligraphy](image)

Also developed during the Ottoman Empire was a style of miniature painting. Based on the Persian miniature style, as well as the illuminations and painting of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman miniature was frequently used to illustrate manuscripts.

Most Turkish art serves a religious purpose—calligraphy is found in hand-written Korans, miniatures were stylized to draw focus from worldly beings and hint at Allah, and Byzantine architecture influenced the central dome style of mosque introduced during the Ottoman Empire.

Carpet, too, serves a religious purpose, artistically in its designs and functionally in its use in mosques. Carpet is woven from wool, cotton, silk, or a blend, and styles vary by region.

![Uşak carpet](image)

Food and Drink

In the United States, a Turkish diet is what is commonly referred to as Mediterranean food: cheeses, soups, breads, lentils, *kebab*-style meat dishes, vegetarian items like the stuffed vegetables known as *dolma*, and pastries such as *baklava* are all common features of the diet. Fish is also a staple in the regions located near the seas.

While Turkish cuisine varies widely from region to region, some foods, like yogurt, are common to all areas. The English word “yogurt” is derived directly from the Turkish “yöğurt.” The dairy product accompanies many dishes and is used in the preparation of cakes, soups, and pastries. *Ayran*, a popular beverage, is made from yogurt.

Turkish-style coffee is also a favorite beverage. The coffee is prepared by boiling finely powdered roast coffee beans in a pot. It is then served in a small cup, in which the dregs settle. This method of preparation has been used since the Ottoman Empire.

![Ayran](image)

Sports

*Yağlı güreş*, or oiled wrestling, has been the national sport since the Ottoman Empire. However, in contemporary Turkey, soccer reigns as the most popular sport. The national team finished third in the 2002 World Cup. Basketball is also popular; the country will host the 2010 FIBA (International Basketball Federation) World Championship. Mehmet Ökur and Hidayet Türkoğlu have established successful careers in the NBA. Formula One racing gained in popularity in 2005 with the debut of the Turkish Grand Prix.

![Yağlı güreş](image)
Music

A cultural crossroads and point of fusion, the Anatolian peninsula has produced myriad styles of music throughout the centuries. But the root of traditional Turkish music can be traced back to the Seljuk Turks, who colonized the region in the 11th century. The birth of the Republic of Turkey led to the Westernization of Turkish music. Now both forms thrive.

Classical royal court music from the Ottoman Empire includes the fasıl, a suite of four instrumental forms and three vocal forms without interlude. Instead of following a Western scale, the music is written in makams, a system of modes with other compositional rules. Instruments used to perform this music include the long-necked tanbur lute, the short-necked oud lute, the end-blown ney flute, the bowed kemençe, the kanun zither, and violin. Münir Nurettin Selçuk was one of the most revered classical singers.

In the royal harems, the dance music now equated with belly dancing emerged. Originally, belly dancing was performed by women for women. Eventually, male dancers, rakkas, began to perform publicly. The form performed by rakkas is the popular style today.

Romani, or gypsy, music has both influenced and been influenced by fasıl. Roma musicians brought the music to the meyhanes or taverns where it is still performed and sung along to by patrons. A typical Romani musical group might consist of clarinet, violin, kanun, and a darbuka hand drum.

Janissary bands or Mehter Takımı are the oldest type of military marching band in the world. They were the original models for military marching bands throughout Europe. The oldest marches have existed since the 16th century.

The creation of the Republic of Turkey led to the Westernization of classical music. However, Turkish music has had as strong an influence on Western music through the centuries. Beethoven, Mozart, Joseph Haydn, and jazz musician Dave Brubeck have all composed Turkish-inspired works.

In contrast to classical, folk music usually contains lyrics based on real life events or folklore. The ozan or wandering minstrel would play this music. Folk styles vary from region to region. Contemporary folk music now embraces political subjects and serves as protest music. The bağlama lute, the kemençe, the zurna wind instrument, the ney, and the double-headed davul drum.

Religious music includes “mosque music,” the Alevis’ songs of mystical revelations performed by aşıks, and the music of the whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi order of sufi. The founder of this order was the now world-famous poet, Rumi, whose poems provide the lyrics for the music.

Italian theater and opera had a profound effect on Turkish music at the turn of the 20th century. It led to the creation of kantos, songs sung between performances and acts. These songs were the forerunners of today’s popular songs.

Contemporary Turkish music ranges from pop music to hip-hop to Arabic pop-influenced Arabesque to Anatolian rock to the traditionally a cappella or percussion-backed Islamic anasheed.
Contemporary Turkey

Politics

Twentieth century Turkey has experienced four military coups—in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997—all in response to politicians overstepping their boundaries. The most recent of these is sometimes described as a postmodern coup. When the public became concerned about the prime minister’s non-secular practices, Turkey’s first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, was pressured to step down as opposed to being forcibly removed out of office when the public became worried about his less-than-secular practices.

In 1999, the coalition government began much-needed progress on economic and human rights concerns as Turkey continued its active accession bid for membership in the European Union. However, the EU still requires Turkey to make a vast amount of reforms. The inclusion of Turkey into the EU would be an event of primary global significance, because it would be the first Islamic state to join, and 92% of the country is in Asia.

In November of 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan represented Turkey at the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh to discuss global economic concerns.

Economy

The agricultural sector still accounts for a large portion of production and employment in Turkey, even as other more modern industries have begun to grow. Textile and clothing production also accounts for about one-third of industrial employment. A few of the country’s many exports include coffee, olives, cotton, and lumber. Imports include machinery and fuel, with Russia being Turkey’s main imports partner and the United States supplying imports at 5.9%.

Turkey, like much of the rest of the world, was affected by the recent economic downturn; however, moderate economic growth and foreign direct investments provide the nation a good economic foundation as it jockeys to take its place amongst the top ten largest economies in the world.

The country’s current bid to join the European Union (EU) is also a factor in increasing foreign direct investments. The country’s position as a crossroads of East and West, among other factors, have led to its distinguished role in the Middle East, in the Black Sea Basin, and in Central Asia.

Currency: Turkish lira

Exchange rate: Turkish liras per U.S. dollar- 1.3179 (2008 est.)
Environmental issues in Turkey are a priority. Over the past twenty-five plus years, they have begun to be addressed with the Environmental Law of 1982; the 1991 replacement of the Undersecretariat of the Environment with the Ministry of the Environment, which led to diversification of responsibilities, expansion of staff, and the authority to implement and enforce policies for the protection and conservation of the environment; and, most recently, the signing of the Kyoto Protocol.

One of the major concerns is water pollution. The Bosphorus that divides Istanbul is the world’s narrowest strait used for international shipping. It links the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, which links to the Mediterranean Sea via the Dardanelles. One of the world’s most endangered species, the Mediterranean monk seal is now extinct in the Sea of Marmara and probably extinct in the Black Sea. Heavy shipping and oil spills are continuous problems in these waterways, especially the Bosphorus.

Air pollution has also been a major issue in the highly populated cities of Istanbul and the capital, Ankara. Deforestation and damage to wetlands are also byproducts of urbanization. To counteract these environmental concerns, Turkey is taking great strides to increase its reliance on renewable energy sources, step up its environmental policies, and become a leading green power nation, while simultaneously aiming to take its place amongst the top ten largest economies in the world.

Solar, wind, and, most significantly, geothermal power are all relatively untapped resources in Turkey. Located on the Mediterranean volcanic belt, Turkey has one-eighth of the world’s geothermal potential and is the seventh richest country in this potential. However, because coal has long been the biggest resource, an increase in coal-fired power plants continues.

Deforestation is being redressed; in addition to its national parks, Turkey designated 32 areas as nature preserves between 1987 and 2008. Legislation in 1990 has allowed for 19 Special Areas of Environmental Protection, including a town where Mediterranean monk seals still thrive. Still smaller zones of protection are located throughout all regions of Turkey for the protection of rare and endangered species.

Mediterranean monk seal

Wind farm
Modern Relations between U.S. & Turkey

- Post-World War II - United States extends protection to Turkey after Soviet Union refuses to renew the 1925 Treaty of Friendship with Turkey and demands territorial concessions
- 1952 - Turkey becomes a NATO member
- 1975 - U.S. imposes arms embargo in Turkey following Turkish intervention in Cyprus, 1974
- 1978 - U.S. arms embargo with Turkey is lifted
- 1991 - Turkey struggles to handle influx of Kurdish refugees fleeing war-torn Iraq; U.S. caught off-guard but seeks to assist in aid and security
- 2002 - The Economic Partnership Commission is established, in accordance with the understanding reached in Washington in January between Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and President George Bush, to bring the economic and commercial relations between Turkey and the U.S. to the level of the strategic partnership that exists in the political and military fields
- 2007 - U.S. direct investment in Turkey exceeds four billion dollars
- April 2009 - President Barack Obama visits Turkey to strengthen the U.S.-Turkey alliance and illustrate a partnership with the Muslim world
- September 2009 - Turkey is represented at the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh
Links of Interest

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