



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Turkey is more than twice the size of Japan and is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Texas. Turkey holds a key location at the juncture of Europe and Asia; 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 originate in Turkey. The low coastal regions support much of the country's agriculture.

Turkey's climate varies by region. Coastal areas have a Mediterranean climate with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. The inland Anatolian plateau experiences severe seasonal changes, and rainfall is low. Turkey is one of the world's most earthquake-prone regions.

### History

#### *Anatolia and the Turkish Empire*

Modern Turkey is the most recent in a series of important states and empires that have inhabited the Anatolian peninsula

for thousands of years. 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 Istanbul), 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 Turkification. 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.

#### *Atatürk and Westernization*

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 republic with an Islamic majority. The nation also adopted a Western civil law code, the Gregorian calendar, a Latin-based alphabet, and a Western dress code.

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

### ***Political Turmoil and Kurdish Insurgency***

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 those actions, Kenan Evren, was elected president in 1983. His prime minister, Turgut Özal, became the dominant political figure in the 1980s.

In the early 1990s, Tansu Çiller became Turkey's first female prime minister; her government faced economic challenges and the insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an internationally recognized terrorist organization seeking a Kurdish homeland. This ongoing conflict has killed tens of thousands of people. After years of failed peace talks, Turkey and the PKK agreed to a cease fire in 2013, but the deal collapsed in 2015 amidst renewed fighting. The peace process between Turkey and the PKK remains stagnant as hostilities continue and expand into fights with Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria.

### ***Erdoğan Era***

Since 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, backed by his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), has consolidated power in Turkey. During Erdoğan's time as prime minister, Turkey experienced economic growth, and the army came under greater civilian control. Islam's public role has also increased, sparking concerns over Turkey's status as a secular state. In 2014, Erdoğan stepped down as prime minister to run for president, an election he won by an absolute majority. Despite passing a series of reforms, including abolishing the death penalty and recognizing Kurdish minority rights, Turkey's government has become increasingly authoritarian.

Crackdowns on political opponents, journalists, and protesters have become more common. Following a deadly coup attempt by a faction of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in 2016, the government removed hundreds of thousands of soldiers, judges, and civil servants, suspected of having ties to the coup organizers, from their positions and replaced them with Erdoğan loyalists, a move that strained Turkey–EU relations. Turkey also increased attacks on PKK militants in southeastern Turkey and conducted military operations against the Islamic State (ISIS) and Kurdish soldiers from the People's Protection Unit (YPG) in Syria. In 2018, Erdoğan's victory in the presidential election further expanded his executive powers, making it increasingly difficult for opposition parties to challenge his control. Turkey faces a number of challenges, including improving the economy and managing the country's military operations in Syria.

## **THE PEOPLE**

### **Population**

About 70 to 75 percent of the population of Turkey is

Turkish, 19 percent is Kurdish, and 7 to 12 percent belongs to a variety of smaller groups. Ankara, the capital, is home to around 5 million people. İzmir has roughly 3 million. Istanbul is still the industrial, commercial, and intellectual center of the country, and its metropolitan municipality is home to an estimated 15 million people. People in rural areas tend to be more ethnically segregated than those in other areas. Kurds live mostly in the southeastern cities. Several million Turkish nationals live abroad, with most living in Germany. Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees in the world. Over 3.6 million Syrian refugees reside in the country.

### **Language**

Turkish, the official language, is a Turkic language related to other languages spoken across Central Asia. During the Ottoman Empire period, Turkish was written using the Arabic script, but a Latin-based alphabet has been used since 1928. Most of the Kurdish minority speaks Kurdish, mainly in their homes, and Turkish. 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. Arabic is spoken in some areas of southeastern Turkey.

### **Religion**

Turkey is a secular state with freedom of religion, but Islam maintains an important influence on society. Virtually all Turks are Muslim, mostly Sunni. A large minority belongs to the Alevi community, a religious tradition that combines Islam with elements of Turkish culture. 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*, the holy book of Islam. Muslims accept many Judeo-Christian prophets but proclaim that Muhammad was the last prophet. Muslims strive to live the Five Pillars of Islam: professing *Allah's* name and Muhammad's role as prophet, praying five times daily, giving aid to the poor, fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan*, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

### **General Attitudes**

Turkey is often described as a bridge between East and West. Because Turks have interacted with Europe and Asia for centuries, they have incorporated features from both areas into their culture.

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

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

are respected personal traits.

### Personal Appearance

Most Turks wear Western-style clothing. European fashions are especially popular among young people. Many Muslim women, especially in rural areas, may wear a scarf to cover their hair. In the 1920s, as Turkey became more secularized, the headscarf was forbidden in state-run institutions, government offices, and public schools. The ban made it difficult for many Muslim women to join the public workforce. However, in 2013, the government lifted the ban on wearing Islamic headscarves in state institutions such as schools and the civil service, although women in judiciary and military jobs still may not wear headscarves.

Some traditional costumes are still worn in rural areas or for special occasions, such as traditional weddings or folk dancing. The design of a costume's headdress and the type of material used indicate a person's social status; a wealthy rural woman might wear a long, red silk headscarf to her wedding, while a less wealthy woman is more likely to wear a shorter veil of satin or cotton.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

Common Turkish greetings include *Merhaba* (Hello) and *Nasılsınız?* (How are you?). 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 conservative Muslims, close friends of the same (and sometimes the opposite) gender often 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* (Hi). When parting, people say *Hoşçakal* (Stay well), *Görüşürüz* (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 *İsmail 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. “No” can be expressed by either shaking the head or lifting it upward quickly. To beckon to another person, one waves all fingers with the palm facing down. To signal something is good, fingers are brought in toward the thumb with the palm facing up. Social courtesies are valued in

Turkey. One does not put one's 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 person or someone otherwise considered to be socially superior. Public displays of affection between men and women are not acceptable in rural areas.

### Visiting

Turks typically 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 often call ahead, but unexpected visits occur more frequently in smaller villages. 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 considered 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 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 home.

### Eating

Breakfast usually is eaten around 7 a.m., or earlier in rural areas. Lunch is at midday and dinner is around 8 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 generally 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 10 percent tip should be given.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family Structure

The family is the primary social unit in Turkey. A traditional Turkish household often consists of a mother and father, any unmarried children, and in some cases, married sons with their families. The married sons remain with their parents until they are financially independent. The family may live together in one house, sometimes with each floor belonging to a different family member's family. Every important event is celebrated with extended family members.

In urban areas, nuclear families are standard. Urban families typically have two children; rural families tend to be larger. Throughout the country, grandmothers or other family members play a large part in raising children. Wealthy families have started to employ nannies from Turkey or from other countries; English-speaking nannies are sometimes employed in an attempt to expose children to English.

#### **Parents and Children**

Children in rural areas begin working at home around age seven; daughters help their mothers and sons help their fathers with daily responsibilities. In urban areas, children rarely have regular chores to do; however, daughters are expected to serve refreshments to guests. While some young adults leave home to live with friends or to study in a different city, others stay at home in order to save money. Married children are expected to visit their parents often. When family members travel far to visit each other, the visitors are expected to visit each of the family members living close by. As parents grow older, children care for them physically and financially; nursing homes are rare.

#### **Gender Roles**

Gender roles may vary depending on whether a family lives in an urban or rural area, but in general, women take care of the household, cook, clean, shop, and raise children. Men are expected to maintain the home and provide financial support for the family. There are many urban women who work outside the home.

About a third of adult women work outside the home. Paid maternity leave usually lasts 16 weeks; it almost always includes job security upon return. In rural areas, women usually work in their gardens, tend to livestock, and sew things to sell, while men work in town.

Women gained the right to vote in 1927 and the right to divorce in 1934, when civil marriage contracts were introduced. Divorce rates are slowly increasing. Turkish women face challenges such as gender inequality, especially in the workplace, and domestic violence. Significant gaps in the legal system often allow male perpetrators to evade punishment for those crimes.

## **Housing**

### **Urban**

Most urban Turks live in apartments made from concrete and steel. 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. Most homes have four or five rooms, usually a kitchen, a sitting room, a bathroom, and one or more bedrooms. Dining rooms and living rooms are increasingly common. Modern furniture and appliances are also widespread.

### **Rural**

In rural areas, homes tend to be made from concrete and brick, or in poor villages, of mud bricks. Most homes consist of one or two rooms, a kitchen and a living room, which is used as the sleeping area for the entire family at night. Rooms are typically decorated with flowers, art, paintings, and traditional ceramics and carpets; they often feature washing machines, dishwashers, and a large television.

### **Exteriors**

Building exteriors are usually colorful. Wealthier families have landscaped gardens with flowers, trees, and shrubs. In rural areas, outside areas are not as heavily landscaped, but they are frequently used for sitting, drinking tea, and chatting with family members or guests. Some rural homes feature solar panels and a satellite dish.

### **Ownership**

The cost of renting housing is high, and renting is often viewed as a waste of money because renters cannot pass a home down to their children. Home ownership is considered a sign of success in Turkey. Families who can afford to do so also 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 finding and furnishing a new home. The better off the family, the more elaborate the interior design.

## **Dating and Marriage**

### **Dating and Courtship**

Except at universities or in large urban areas, dating in the Western sense is not common. Young people associate more in groups than in couples. Young people like to gather together to chat, listen to music, drink tea, and eat *pide* (pita bread). They enjoy meeting with friends at tea gardens, coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas, shopping malls, and parks. They also gather at school functions such as folk dances or sporting events.

Dating is seen as a serious commitment; once dating becomes official, the couple and their families usually see marriage as the next step, particularly in rural areas. In rural areas, chaperones are common. When young people do pair off, they often date in secret or make sure that no one they know will see them together in public. Public displays of affection are frowned upon. Courtship—from dating to marriage—rarely lasts more than two years.

### **Engagement**

When a couple decides to marry, the groom's family arranges a meeting with the bride's family at her home. The two families eat and drink together, and traditional customs, such as giving money to the bride's younger brother in exchange for opening the door to her house, are common. In rural areas, a bride-price, called *başlık parası*, is paid to the bride's family in exchange for the promise of marriage. Engagements typically last about six months.

### **Marriage in Society**

The legal marriage age is 18 in Turkey; however, child marriages occur and are not registered to avoid government detection. Many Turks wait to marry until they have completed their education and (for men) mandatory military service. Hence, the average age for marriage is 25 for women and 28 for men. Most Turks expect to marry and have children. Rural families are heavily involved in deciding whom a person will marry, while the choice is generally left to the couple in urban areas. It is taboo for a couple to live together before marriage. Polygamy, as permitted by Islamic law, was abolished in 1930. Same-sex marriage is not legally recognized. Even though sexual relations between same-sex partners are legal, LGBTQ people often face discrimination

and sometimes face violence.

### Weddings

Traditional three-day wedding celebrations are still practiced in some rural areas. Festivities begin with the *Kına Gecesi* (henna evening), an event for women only. Female relatives 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, dancers (either professional groups or the best dancers from the extended family) often perform traditional folk dances. Once the performance is over, family and friends stand and join in the dancing; most dances are performed in one or more circles, where everyone does the same thing at the same time. Guests attach money or gold to the bride's dress and the groom's lapel.

In modern wedding celebrations, the groom often meets the bride at her house, and the couple proceeds to the wedding ceremony together in a car decorated with ribbons and messages for the occasion. The couple is married in a civil ceremony before they enter the reception venue and walk down the aisle, which completes the wedding. The couple usually has a first dance, cuts their wedding cake, and joins the guests in dancing and singing into the night. Food and drinks such as soft drinks, tea and coffee, or alcohol are served to guests. Urban weddings are more likely to serve lamb; rural celebrations usually serve mutton. Common gifts include gold, given in the form of a bracelet or nugget, and items for the married couple's new household. The wedding is usually paid for by the groom's family.

In most rural areas, wedding festivities take place in the village square, where a long head table seats the female relatives of the bride and groom on one side of the couple and the male relatives on the other. Before the wedding, the groom's female family members collect the bride from her parents' home to take her to the square, where the groom is waiting. At the end of the celebration, the male relatives of both the bride and the groom take first the bride and then the groom to their new home.

### Divorce

Divorce rates have increased in recent years. Women have the right to divorce their husbands; however, financial dependence and the fear of domestic abuse remain major challenges that limit women's choice to divorce. Further, in rural areas, the stigma of divorce affects the woman more than the man, who can more easily marry again without facing disapproval from the community.

## Life Cycle

### Birth

After a birth, friends and family gather at the hospital to celebrate, bringing gold or useful products as gifts for the baby. One of the oldest and respected family members, usually the baby's grandfather, whispers the baby's name into his or her ear. Family names are popular; for example, the first daughter in a family may receive her grandmother's name, and the first son may be named for his grandfather. Religious families often give their children religious names. The baby's grandmothers come to help care for the baby for a few weeks after birth. In rural areas, the umbilical cord may

be ceremonially buried.

### Milestones

Boys are circumcised between ages 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 age 18, though many cannot afford to move out of their parents' house at that time. Six months of military service is required for men over the age of 20, which includes one month of mandatory military training. Other milestones include completing an education, finding a job, and getting married.

### Death

After someone dies, a prayer ceremony is held in the local mosque. The body is cleansed and wrapped in a white sheet before being placed in a coffin, which is then wrapped with a green sheet with a prayer written on it. If the deceased was a member of the military or a government worker, the coffin may be wrapped with a Turkish flag. The men of the family carry the casket to the graveyard for burial. Cremation is not practiced in Turkey. Burial is followed by a memorial service, which takes place in the home. The family of the deceased does not prepare food on the day of the burial. Friends and family members bring food to the home of the deceased's family; *helva*, a dessert traditionally served on special occasions, is often dedicated to the deceased. The men then gather to pray, and the women mourn. Forty days after death, another memorial service is held, this one presided over by an *imam* (Muslim religious leader).

### Diet

Turkish cuisine is famous for the *meze*, a tray or table of small appetizers, including stuffed grape leaves, roasted eggplant salad, marinated sea bass, and a variety of other items. Turkey is also known for several unique soups, including *yayla çorbası* (yogurt soup with herbs) and *tarhana çorbası* (soup made of cracked wheat, yogurt, and fermented vegetables). Other favorite dishes are *shish kebabs* (chunks of lamb on a skewer) and *zeytinyağlı* (vegetables prepared in olive oil). A rice dish called *pilav* is common. Turkey is known for its sweet desserts, including *baklava* (nut-filled pastry topped with a sweet syrup) and *muhallebi* (milk pudding). *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. Lamb and rice are served with many meals. Seafood is more abundant along the coast.

## Recreation

### Sports

The most popular sport to watch and play is soccer, which was introduced by the British in the late 19th century. Many Turks are passionate about supporting their favorite soccer teams. Beşiktaş, Galatasaray, and Fenerbahçe, three teams that originate in Istanbul, are the most widely followed.

Basketball, swimming, volleyball, and a variety of other sports are also enjoyed. In urban areas on Turkey's coasts, water sports such as kitesurfing, windsurfing, and paragliding are available. Snow skiing in northwestern Turkey is also popular. Turkey's national sport is oil wrestling, or *yağlı güreş*, which requires wrestlers to douse themselves in olive oil before competition. Other traditional sports include camel wrestling and *cirit*, a traditional equestrian sport in which players attempt to hit each other with sticks. These traditional sports are increasingly less common but are still practiced in some regions.

Male and female students usually play soccer, basketball, volleyball, badminton, handball, or table tennis at school, though soccer is mostly played by males. Recreational resources are available and affordable in most urban areas. In rural areas, children often create balls and goal posts out of found materials such as wood, cans, and bags.

#### **Leisure**

During their leisure time, urban residents may watch television, dine out, visit friends, or attend movies. Rural women often visit one another in their homes, knit, or watch television. Men in rural areas may gather at male-only teahouses (like cafés) to socialize. When at home, they also watch television. Folk dancing and other cultural arts are popular. Picnics are common family activities. Games play a large role in socializing; backgammon is a popular game at outings with family and friends, and good backgammon players are respected. Chess, checkers, and card games such as “3, 5, 8” (similar to bridge) are also played, though mostly by men.

#### **Vacation**

Most Turks vacation in August, when schools are out for the summer. Wealthy families often go to Turkish coastal cities such as Bodrum, Antalya, Çeşme, and Marmaris. Smaller resort towns like Kaş and Olympos are popular among young urban singles. Travel outside of Turkey is also becoming more popular, though the cost and difficulty of securing a visa prevent some people from traveling abroad. England, France, Spain, Italy, and Germany are favorite foreign destinations. Young people often travel together, without their families. Vacations are not common for low-income families, who usually only travel if they are visiting family members in other areas of the country.

#### **The Arts**

Theater, both contemporary and traditional, is a popular Turkish pastime in urban areas. Traditional folk theater shows such as *Karagöz and Hacivat* (a shadow puppet play) and *ortaoyunu* (a type of comedy) are often improvised and performed live. Turkish music varies widely by ethnic group and region. The most common folk instrument is the *saz*, a kind of long-necked lute, but many 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, are popular. Among the Kurds, music is an integral part of passing on traditions. The music relies heavily on vocals and follows traditional rhythms; it

includes instruments such as the *oud* (similar to the lute) and various reeded flutes.

Turkey is recognized for handicrafts, especially carpets, which are renowned worldwide. Other crafts include weaving, metalwork (especially copper and brass), woodwork, musical instruments, glassware, stonework, and jewelry.

#### **Holidays**

Official holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), National Sovereignty Day and Children's Day (23 April), Labor and Solidarity Day (1 May), Commemoration of Atatürk/Youth and Sports Day (19 May), Victory Day (30 August), and Republic Day (29 October). Nationwide holidays in Turkey are called *bayram*.

#### **State Holidays and Public Observances**

Turkey's parliament was founded by Atatürk on 23 April; he also dedicated 23 April to the children of Turkey. On this holiday, the president symbolically hands over his duties as head of state to one child (typically chosen from among the country's top students); the child attends meetings with the president and parliament and answers questions from the press. Shops usually close, and the streets are full of people, military parades, music, and candy. Children commonly celebrate Children's Day by attending festivals and celebrations that commemorate Atatürk at school and public places. Common activities include singing the national anthem, poetry readings, and folk dancing.

Republic Day is a public holiday that marks the end of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the Turkish Republic. Urban areas hold military ceremonies and parades, usually followed by a live concert of patriotic music in a park or outdoor concert venue; friends and families gather to celebrate, eat, and play games.

On 10 November, Turkey commemorates the death of Atatürk, who remains a symbol of modern Turkey. At 9:05 a.m., sirens sound and everything stops as the entire country remains silent for two minutes. Students attend a ceremony in school to pay tribute to the deceased leader. Most of Turkey's leaders gather at the mausoleum in Ankara where Atatürk is buried to pay their respects; the remembrance ceremony is aired on television.

#### **Religious Holidays**

During *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, practicing Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. People celebrate the end of *Ramadan* by eating sweets during the three days of *Şeker Bayramı* ("Sugar Feast"). Families gather during this holiday to feast, sing, play music, and dance. Children usually wear new clothes and receive money as gifts.

Another Islamic holiday is *Kurban Bayramı* (Feast of the Sacrifice), which is held at the end of the season of pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Usually an animal is sacrificed, and the meat is divided into three equal portions: one portion is given to the poor, one portion is given to the extended family, and one is kept for the family to eat themselves.

## SOCIETY

### Government

#### Structure

Turkey is a presidential republic with a multiparty parliament. The president serves as head of state and head of government. The 600-seat *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) is the country's unicameral parliament. The president and members of parliament are directly elected to serve five-year terms. The judiciary is greatly influenced by the executive, and many judges loyal to Erdoğan are appointed.

#### Political Landscape

Turkey has many active political parties. The ruling center-right Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been in power since 2002. The far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) supports the AKP. The opposition consists of the center-left Republican People's Party (CHP) and the centrist Good Party (İYİ). Kurdish parties like the People's Democratic Party (HDP) have been accused of being affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist organization. Because of that, pro-Kurdish leaders often face harassment, arrests, and convictions. The government faces many challenges, including widespread corruption, deepening economic problems, and national security threats.

#### Government and the People

Under Turkey's constitution, freedoms of assembly, association, expression, press, and religion are guaranteed. However, those freedoms are limited in practice. Women and ethnic and religious minorities are often subject to discrimination. Though Turkey has made judicial reforms and increased individual freedoms and social rights in an effort to make Turkey more compatible with the European Union, improvements are still needed. Most elections are not free or fair, as they often lack competition and are marred by voter irregularities. On average, over 80 percent of registered voters participate in elections. The voting age in Turkey is 18.

### Economy

Agriculture was the traditional backbone of the economy. Once providing the bulk of all exports, it now employs about one-fifth 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.

The economy is increasingly driven by industries and services. Industries include textiles, food processing, auto manufacturing, 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. Oil pipelines began bringing oil from the Caspian Sea into Turkey in 2006.

Income distribution is unequal: about 14 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The national debt has decreased substantially in recent years. Inflation has increased due to the depreciation of the country's currency, the Turkish

*lira* (TRY).

### 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. Light rails, trams, and metros are also available in large cities. Buses are commonly used for travel between cities. Trains and planes may be used to travel long distances. The Marmaray tunnel, the first underwater railway to connect two continents, links the European and Asian sides of Istanbul.

Turkey has hundreds of private TV and radio stations that are broadcasted alongside state-owned stations. The press is relatively active and free; however, journalists often practice self-censorship by avoiding sensitive issues such as Kurdish separatism, political Islam, and the military. Additionally, watchdog groups have accused the Turkish government of imprisoning dozens of mostly Kurdish journalists. Telephone service is best in urban areas. Cellular phones far outnumber landlines, and internet use is common. Some web sites have been blocked by the government, but most people still find ways to access banned content.

### Education

#### Structure and Access

Education begins at age six and is required for twelve years. Primary education, which lasts four years, is public and free. Students then attend middle school for four years, followed by four years of high school. Students take an exam before applying to their high schools of choice—the schools with the best reputations are the hardest to get into. Public high schools are free, but private schools are not.

Nearly all students complete primary education, and most complete high school. Attendance tends to be higher in urban areas than in rural areas, as some girls in rural areas are pressured to leave school to help their families at home. Other than the stipends the government provides for families who enroll a child in school, there is no consistent attendance enforcement.

Families must provide books for their high school-aged students and uniforms, which are worn in most schools, for children attending primary or high school. These expenses and other school fees sometimes prevent low-income families from sending their children to school. Students from wealthier families take courses on the weekends or after school to prepare for university entrance exams.

#### School Life

Turkish grammar, history, literature, social sciences, math, and science are typically taught in all schools. Art, music, religion, and physical education are also provided. A foreign language course is required; English, German, and French courses are commonly offered. Girls and boys have equal access to these subjects. All classes are taught in Turkish, which can pose a problem for Kurdish students who speak only Kurdish at home.

Students address their teacher as *hoca* (teacher). Teaching is lecture-based and learning focuses on memorization.

Quizzes and tests are frequently given. Group work and analytical thinking becomes more common as students enter high school.

Sporting events, folk dances, and field trips to local historical landmarks and sacred sites are common at all levels of education. Parents are usually involved in most of these events and often support their children in their studies. Many parents also save money to be able to pay for their children's university education.

**Higher Education**

Turkey has hundreds of universities, the oldest of which was founded in Istanbul in 1453. The state runs most universities. Major cities contain the biggest and most prominent universities: in Istanbul, Boğazici University and Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University; in Ankara, Middle East Technical University; in Eskisehir, Eskisehir Anadolu University; and in İzmir, Doküz Eylül University. A number of specialized colleges and institutions offer vocational and other training. Some university majors require students to pass an English proficiency exam.

**Health**

Basic health care is provided by the government 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 military and state-owned enterprises provide additional care to their personnel. Turkey's 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, and other programs.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

Embassy of Turkey, 2525 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 612-6700; web site <http://vasington.be.mfa.gov.tr>. Turkish Tourist Office, phone (212) 687-2169; web site [www.goturkeytourism.com](http://www.goturkeytourism.com).

**Country and Development Data**

Capital	_____	Ankara
Population	_____	83,047,706 (rank=19)
Area (sq. mi.)	_____	302,535 (rank=36)
Area (sq. km.)	_____	783,562
Human Development Index	_____	48 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	_____	65 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	_____	\$31,500
Adult Literacy	_____	99% (male); 94% (female)
Infant Mortality	_____	19.35 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	_____	73 (male); 79 (female)
Currency	_____	Turkish Lira

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