



Is Turkey Experiencing a New Nationalism?

An Examination of Public Attitudes on Turkish Self-Perception

By John Halpin, Michael Werz, Alan Makovsky, and Max Hoffman

February 2018



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Introduction and summary

Despite sharp disagreements within the Turkish public about the overall direction of the country and its political leadership, a comprehensive new public opinion study by the Center for American Progress finds broad consensus among Turks about the dimensions of Turkish national self-perception and the nation's relationship to the rest of the world.

In the aftermath of the attempted military coup against the government in 2016, Turks remain deeply divided about the leadership, agenda, and vision of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Roughly half the Turkish population expresses displeasure with the current state of the nation's economy and with Erdoğan's overall tenure, as well as disapproves of the government's response to the attempted coup. Roughly half the population feels the opposite.

At the same time, Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) clearly benefit from—and, arguably, have helped stoke—rising nationalist sentiment among much of the Turkish population. Compared with the more secular nationalism seen under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's presidency and earlier governments, this new nationalism is assertively Muslim; fiercely independent; distrusting of outsiders; and skeptical of other nations and global elites, which it perceives to hold Turkey back. Of course, Turkish nationalist thought has long focused on independence from foreign influence, and Turkish national identity has always been grounded in Islam. But religious rhetoric and symbolism, along with a prickly obsession with national sovereignty, have been elevated in the present nationalist wave, with individual attitudes often shaped by party affiliation. This nationalist wave is further characterized by deep, cross-party skepticism and distrust toward Syrian refugees, the United States, and Europe.

Balancing these more isolationist—or, at least, go-it-alone beliefs—many Turks also express deep pride in their country's democratic reforms over the years and say that they are committed to democratic values and an open Turkey with

freedom of worship and speech for all. The precise meaning of this support for democracy, and what it means for people of different political stripes, deserves further study. But CAP's research finds that rhetorical support for democracy is a notable part of contemporary Turkish self-perceptions.

This mix of seemingly contradictory beliefs among Turks—simultaneously suspicious and inward-looking and open and pro-democratic—combined with sharp divisions over President Erdoğan, suggest that Turkish politics will remain unsettled and increasingly agitated in the years to come. Competing visions of Turkish nationalism may produce highly contentious and combative politics until new norms and leadership receive widespread public support. Whichever leader or party most successfully embodies and articulates this new nationalist spirit that combines Islam with self-determination and democracy could be well-positioned for success going forward.

The findings in this report are based on a 2,453-sample national poll in Turkey, conducted by the polling firm Metropoll from November 2 to November 12, 2017, using stratified sampling and weighting methods in 28 provinces. These provinces are based on the 26 regions of Turkey's Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics system. The survey was conducted using face-to-face questioning with a margin error of 1.98 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence. Metropoll was selected after a competitive search due to the company's regular polling and historical data on similar issues.

The report first assesses the overall context for Turkish politics today. It then explores in detail Turkish beliefs about national identity and the most important values and ideas currently shaping the nation.

Turkey is sharply divided along political lines

Examining the larger political and economic context, Turks are deeply divided along partisan and ideological lines regarding the overall direction of the country, the economy, and President Erdoğan's job performance. A plurality of survey respondents—45 percent—say that the direction of Turkey is heading “for the worse,” compared with about one-third—34 percent—who believe that the direction is heading “for the better,” and another 17 percent who say that the direction is heading neither for the worse nor for the better.

Background on political parties

Justice and Development Party (AKP)

The AKP is Turkey's ruling religious conservative political party and currently holds 316 of the 550 seats in Parliament.¹ Formed in 2001 by a moderate faction of the Islamist Virtue Party led by former President Abdullah Gül, current President Erdoğan, and former parliamentary speaker and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, the AKP enjoys the support of Turkey's conservative, religious lower and middle classes as well as much of the commercial class. Its electoral base is the rural Anatolian heartland and the Black Sea coastline; it is the only Turkish party that is competitive nationwide. In majority-Kurdish southeastern Turkey, it runs second to the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in most constituencies.

Since its founding, the AKP has been led by President Erdoğan, who won the presidency with 52 percent of the vote in August 2014.² Traditionally, Erdoğan's election as president would have led him to step back from active politics; until recent constitutional changes—pushed by Erdoğan—presidents were supposed to sever all connections with their previous party and have traditionally refrained from political campaigning and electioneering. Instead, Erdoğan hand-picked then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu as his successor as prime minister and head of the AKP but remained the de facto leader of the party, campaigning vigorously on behalf of the AKP. Since then, President Erdoğan has continued to dominate Turkish politics, picking the current prime minister, Binali

Yıldırım, and pushing through a nationwide referendum to vastly bolster the powers of the presidency. Erdoğan survived a bloody attempted military coup—including an assassination attempt—in July 2016 and has used the ensuing state of emergency to root out dissent and jail political opponents and alleged coup plotters.³ The AKP is today fully dominated by Erdoğan and his family and inner circle.

Republican People's Party (CHP)

The CHP is Turkey's main opposition party; it is center-left, secular, and strongest in western Turkey, particularly along the Aegean coast and in the cities of Edirne and İzmir. The party's base is composed of highly educated and wealthy Turks; urban liberals; Alevis, a Muslim sect regarded as a somewhat distinct religious and cultural minority in Turkey⁴; the remnants of the old bureaucratic elite; and socialists. Led by Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP has sought to emulate the social democratic parties of Europe, with limited success. The CHP is the party of modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and remains closely associated with the old secular elite, which has been sidelined in the more than 15 years of AKP rule. The CHP has softened on questions of religion in the public sphere in recent years but remains staunchly devoted to secularism at the state level. It is today generally seen as more open to the West, committed to membership in the European Union (EU) and a close relationship with the United States. It strongly opposes Erdoğan's strengthened presidency and has pledged to return Turkey to a parliamentary system if it is in a position to do so.

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)

The MHP is Turkey's far-right nationalist party and has a traditional, nationalist constituency similar to that of the AKP, though it generally abstains from the more religiously tinged politics and rhetoric of the AKP. The MHP opposes EU accession and is ambivalent toward the United States. The MHP is often described as ultranationalist and is deeply hostile to any form of Kurdish autonomy. It was once renowned for its commitment to the Turkic populations of the former Soviet Union, but that focus has ebbed considerably in recent years.⁵ The MHP emphasizes issues of national sovereignty in foreign policy. According to party leader, Devlet Bahçeli, the MHP wants two separate states in Cyprus—the Greek-Cypriot-dominated Republic of Cyprus in the south and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the north—a long-term point of tension with Europe and an intentional roadblock to EU membership.

The MHP also disagrees with the AKP's open-door policy for Syrian refugees. Bahçeli said as early as 2012 that "Incoming refugees are now up to a point that Turkey cannot handle it [anymore]."⁶ The refugee situation has dramatically worsened since then. Bahçeli and his party have called for a stricter policy at the border and, with the CHP, argue that as many refugees as possible should return to Syria. The AKP has also called for the repatriation of Syrian refugees but has done so within the context of proposed safe zones inside Syria—a proposal that the opposition parties oppose. Since losing dozens of seats in the November 2015 general election, the MHP has been split between a dissident wing opposed to Bahçeli's leadership and the remainder of the old party under Bahçeli.⁷ The dissidents are seen as more

critical of the AKP and President Erdoğan and oppose the new presidential system, while Bahçeli has been a sometime ally of Erdoğan, including helping push through the change to a presidential system; the party's rank and file are divided on these questions, according to polling. Dissident Meral Akşener, thwarted in her effort to replace Bahçeli as the MHP leader, has now founded a new party—the İYİ Party—which translates to the “Good Party.”

People's Democratic Party (HDP)

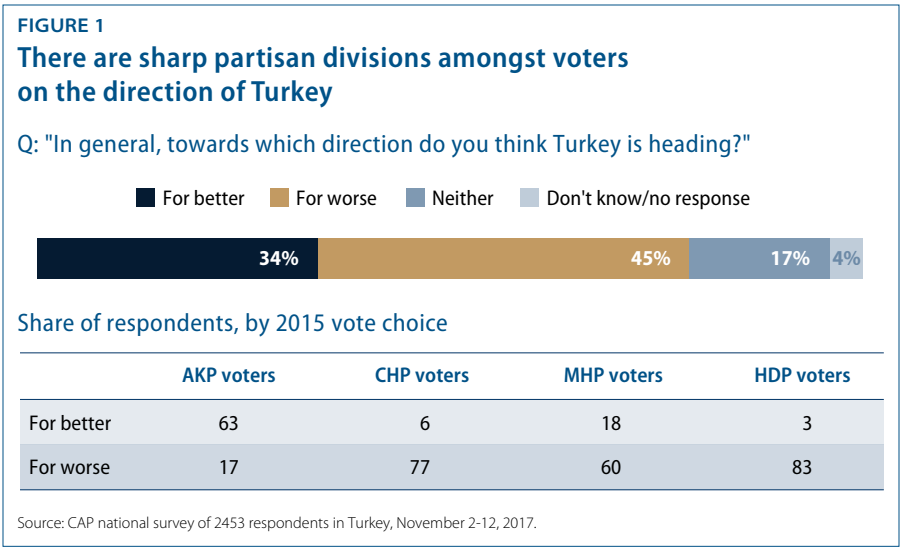
The HDP is a minority rights-focused party that draws its support primarily from the Kurdish southeast of Turkey, though it also attracts some Alevis and Turkish liberal votes in urban areas. The HDP passed the 10 percent voting threshold for representation in Parliament in the June 2015 and November 2015 general elections—the first time a mainly-Kurdish party had done so.⁸ Its professed goal is to make Turkish democracy more inclusive, and the party stresses human rights for minorities, an end to restrictions on freedom of expression, and vast improvements in Turkey's justice system.

The HDP has pushed for greater inclusion of female candidates on its party list—including moving to a system in which the party has male and female co-chairs—and has advocated for minority rights, including for the Turkish LGBT community.⁹ The HDP emphasizes the importance of government transparency, and its leaders claim that they want to end some of the AKP government's more opaque measures, such as the presidential discretionary fund. The HDP's ultimate goal is to create a federal system in Turkey, including greater autonomy for local and provincial governments as well as the popular election of governors. These shifts would allow Kurds greater control over language, taxation, education, and policing. The resumption of the Kurdistan Workers' Party conflict in Turkey, as well as the HDP's opposition to President Erdoğan, has led to politically motivated charges against and imprisonment of many HDP parliamentarians, including the party's co-chairs, and their expulsion from Parliament.¹⁰

The İYİ Party

The İYİ Party is a nationalist, conservative party founded by MHP dissidents, led by former Interior Minister Meral Akşener. The party was founded in October 2017 and is still in the process of elaborating its electoral platform, but so far, it has emphasized its secular and nationalist credentials and hewn closely to the legacy of Atatürk. The party seeks to present itself as a right-wing alternative to the AKP, likely in an effort to peel off more secular nationalist Turks from the religious conservative base of the AKP. Some observers believe that the party represents a more profound threat to the AKP's rule than the established opposition, due to its potential to split the otherwise dominant right wing of Turkish politics, but polls have also shown the party drawing more votes from the CHP and the MHP than from the AKP.

As Figure 1 shows, these perceptions are almost entirely correlated with political affiliation. AKP voters surveyed are far more positive about the country’s direction than are voters from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), voters of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and voters from the leftist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). Political affiliation was determined by self-reported vote in the last general election, on November 1, 2015; this is the standard marker of party affiliation used throughout the report.



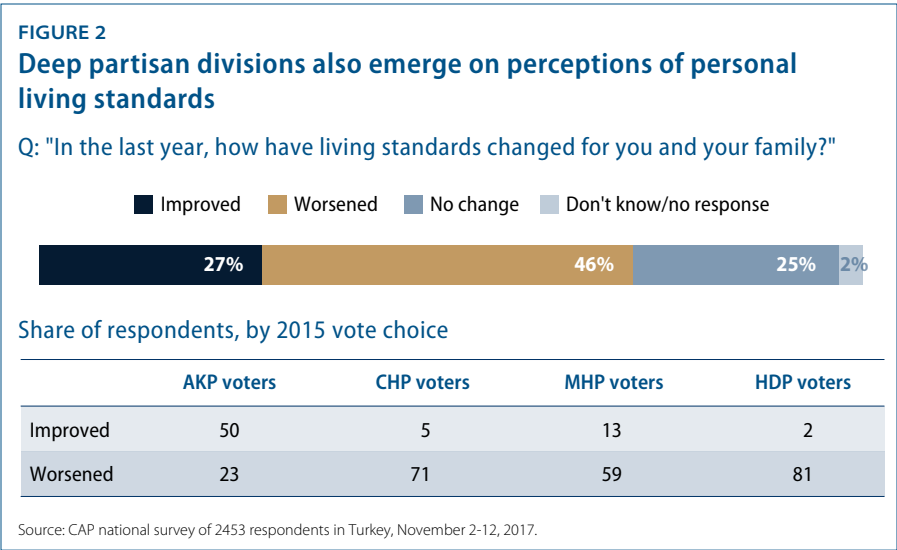
Sixty-three percent of AKP voters say Turkey’s direction is heading “for the better” and only 17 percent say it is heading “for the worse.” In contrast, 77 percent of CHP voters, 60 percent of MHP voters, and 83 percent of HDP voters say Turkey’s direction is heading “for the worse.”

These partisan divisions on the direction of the country matter much more than other demographic trends in Turkey. The survey finds little difference, for example, in perceptions of Turkey’s direction by gender, age, or education. Yet beliefs that things are getting worse in Turkey do grow steadily as household income increases.

Moving to the economy, these same partisan divisions emerge across numerous indicators. Overall, 46 percent of respondents say that their family’s living standards have “worsened” in the past year, compared with 27 percent who say

they have “improved” and 25 percent who have experienced no change in living standards. Examining beliefs by party, 50 percent of AKP voters say their family’s living standards have improved, with 23 percent saying they have worsened.

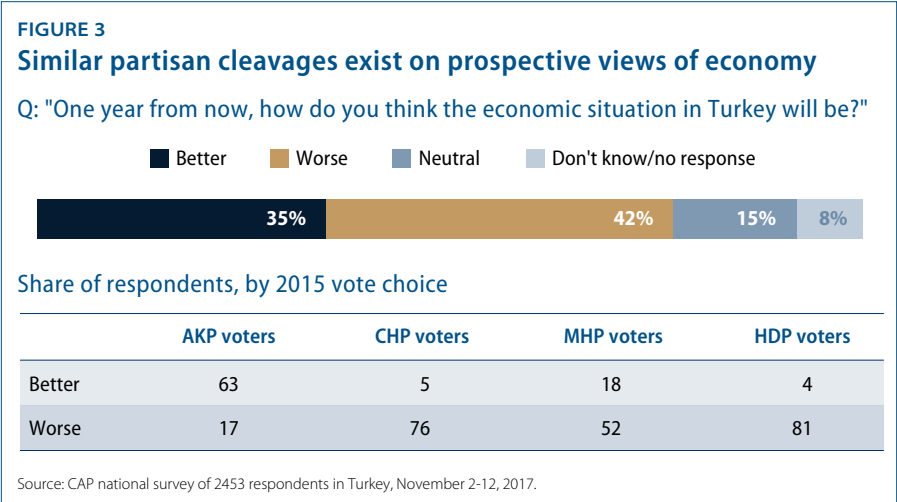
On the other hand, 71 percent of CHP voters, 59 percent of MHP voters, and 81 percent of HDP voters surveyed report that their family’s living standards have worsened over the past year. Older voters report higher levels of worsening living standards than do younger ones, but patterns are fairly stable across other demographic lines such as education and income.



When asked, “How well, or how poorly, do you think our economy is managed these days?” a majority of respondents, 53 percent, believe that the economy is managed poorly, with only 37 percent saying that it is managed well. Again, voters of the president’s party overwhelmingly believe that the economy is managed well, at 68 percent, while voters of the opposition parties express divergent opinions. Ninety percent of CHP voters, 73 percent of MHP voters, and 89 percent of HDP voters believe the economy is managed poorly.

Questions about the prospects for Turkey’s economic future produce similar cleavages along party lines. Overall, 42 percent of respondents feel that the economic situation in Turkey will be worse one year from now, with 35 percent

believing it will be better. As seen in Figure 3, 63 percent of AKP voters express optimism regarding the economy over the next year, compared with the 76 percent of CHP voters, 52 percent of MHP voters, and 81 percent of HDP voters who express pessimism.



The source of these divisions among Turks is abundantly clear when examining specific reactions to President Erdoğan. In terms of overall favorability, half of survey respondents rate Erdoğan favorably—33 percent very favorable and 17 percent somewhat favorable—while 45 percent rate him unfavorably, with 25 percent responded very unfavorable and 20 percent somewhat unfavorable. Continuing the patterns seen elsewhere, nearly 9 in 10 AKP voters, or 87 percent, hold favorable views of the president, while similar shares of CHP voters—86 percent—and 84 percent of HDP voters hold unfavorable views of him. Seventy-two percent of MHP voters rate him unfavorably as well.

The patterns are virtually identical when assessing public attitudes about President Erdoğan's job performance while in office: More than 90 percent of the president's party voters approve of his presidential duties, while 87 percent of CHP voters, 65 percent of MHP voters, and 86 percent of HDP voters disapprove. The survey reveals more interesting trends on Erdoğan's job approval in other demographics, with men and higher-educated Turks more disapproving of his tenure than are women and lower-educated Turks.

FIGURE 4

Erdoğan job approval

Q: "Do you approve of the way R. Tayyip Erdoğan is handling his presidential duties?"

■ I approve of it ■ I do not approve of it ■ Don't know/no response



Share of respondents, by 2015 vote choice

	AKP voters	CHP voters	MHP voters	HDP voters
Approve	91	5	26	3
Do not approve	6	87	65	86

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Despite these stark internal divisions about President Erdoğan, the AKP retains a strong position ahead of the 2019 Turkish general elections. In a question asking people about their vote intention, the survey finds that if the election were held next Sunday, the AKP would capture 49 percent of the overall vote—with undecided voters distributed proportionally—and the CHP would get 24 percent. This is virtually identical to what these parties received in two of the past three parliamentary elections—in the CHP's case, in each of the past three elections. None of the other minor parties currently would pass the 10 percent threshold for seats, thus further strengthening the AKP's position. The MHP and the HDP both currently poll at about 9 percent, with Meral Akşener's new party pulling around 7 percent of the vote.

FIGURE 5

General election vote, 2019

Q: "If there were to be an election next Sunday, who would you vote for?"

■ AKP ■ CHP ■ MHP ■ HDP ■ Meral Akşener's Party ■ Other



*Total percentage with undecided voters distributed.

Note: Numbers may not total one hundred due to rounding.

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

The splintered nature of the opposition in Turkey gives the AKP a marked advantage in the upcoming elections. Barring consolidation of parties or strategic voting for a main opposition force, the president and his party will remain in a solid position for victory in 2019.

No unity of opinion on the government's response to the 2016 coup attempt

As with other political and economic issues today, this study finds stark disagreement over the government's response to the coup attempt—and the motivations behind the clampdown in the attempt's aftermath.

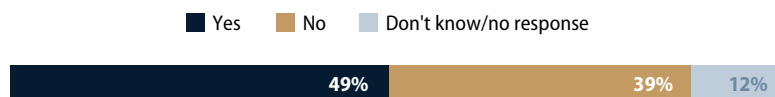
When asked, “Do you approve of the government's response to the attempted coup?” roughly half of the Turkish public—49 percent—responded “yes,” with almost 4 in 10, or 39 percent, saying “no” and the remainder offering either no assessment or ambivalence. Approval of the government's response is heavily split by party leaning, with 80 percent of AKP voters approving of the response and 70 percent of CHP voters, 51 percent of MHP voters, and 81 percent of HDP voters reporting that they do not approve of the government's response. Educational divides exist on this question, with a majority—53 percent—of Turks with a secondary school education or lower approving of the response, compared with slight pluralities of high school graduates and college-educated Turks disapproving. It is worth noting that many of the AKP and MHP voters who expressed disapproval of the coup response said in response to a further question that they felt the government “had not done enough in response to the attempted coup.”

Patterns are virtually identical on a question related to the force of the response to the attempted coup. The survey asked, “As you may know, there have been recent crackdowns on journalists, intellectuals, and other activists by the Turkish government. In general, do you think these actions by the government are appropriate or inappropriate?” Respondents were split in half: 44 percent say these crackdowns were appropriate and 44 percent say they were inappropriate, with the remainder not offering an opinion.

FIGURE 6

There are divisions amongst voters on the government's response to attempted coup

Q: "As you may know, on July 15, 2016, segments of the Turkish military attempted to overthrow the government of Turkey and replace President Erdoğan. This attempted coup was stopped by the government, other segments of the military, and citizens loyal to the government. More than two hundred people died and thousands more were injured. Do you approve of the government's response to the attempted coup?"



Share of respondents, by 2015 vote choice

	AKP voters	CHP voters	MHP voters	HDP voters
Yes, approve	80	18	39	6
No, don't approve	12	70	51	81

Share of respondents, by education

	Secondary and below	High school graduate	University/college graduate or higher
Yes, approve	53	41	42
No, don't approve	36	42	44

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Seventy-eight percent of AKP voters believe the crackdowns on journalists, intellectuals, and other activists are appropriate, while 85 percent of CHP voters, 59 percent of MHP voters, and 83 percent of HDP voters view them as inappropriate. Reactions to the crackdowns were not divided by other demographic indicators.

Echoing these findings, Turks diverge on the perceived rationale motivating the government's continuing crackdowns. We asked respondents whether they think the primary reason for the government's actions against journalists, intellectuals, and activists is "because the Turkish government believes these people are a threat to the Turkish state and its people," or if it is "because the government is trying to eliminate and intimidate critical voices." By a 42 percent-to-39 percent margin, Turks overall believe that the actions are based on a legitimate threat rather than an attempt to get rid of critics.

FIGURE 7

Strong majorities of opposition party voters believe post-coup crackdowns are inappropriate

Q: "As you may know, there have been recent crackdowns on journalists, intellectuals, and activists by the Turkish government. In general do you think these actions are appropriate or inappropriate?"



Share of respondents, by 2015 vote choice

	AKP voters	CHP voters	MHP voters	HDP voters
Appropriate	78	9	32	5
Inappropriate	12	85	59	83

Share of respondents, by education

	Secondary and below	High school graduate	University/college graduate or higher
Appropriate	48	36	40
Inappropriate	30	51	47

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

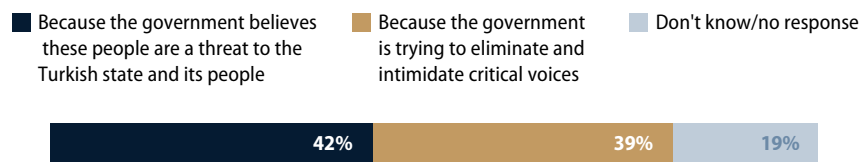
Although overall responses fall expectedly along party lines, with AKP voters more supportive of the government's stated rationale and opponents more in line with the notion that its motivations are based on a desire to intimidate others, there is notable dissent within each group from their respective party lines. For example, nearly one-fifth of AKP voters, or 18 percent, believe the government's crackdowns are designed to eliminate critics rather than to deal with legitimate threats to the state—a higher percentage of dissent against the government than is evident from AKP members on other questions. At the same time, more than one-quarter of CHP voters—27 percent—and one-third of MHP voters, or 35 percent, believe the government is acting in response to real threats to Turkey and its people.

It is possible that these findings among AKP voters do not represent dissent against the government's approach, but rather indicate that AKP voters believe that the government is trying to eliminate critics and that these voters do not have an issue with that approach. On the other hand, the data show a consistent one-fifth

to one-third of AKP voters with less enthusiastic support for Erdoğan and AKP policies across different lines of questioning—perhaps hinting at genuine dissent and potential vulnerability from a center-right challenge. These trends among AKP voters require more examination and research to understand fully.

FIGURE 8
Rationale for government crackdown

Q: "Which of the following do you think is the primary reason the government has cracked down on journalists, intellectuals, and activists?"



Share of respondents, by 2015 vote choice

	AKP voters	CHP voters	MHP voters	HDP voters
Real threat	62	27	35	10
Trying to eliminate critics	18	65	50	73

Share of respondents, by education

	Secondary and below	High school graduate	University/college graduate or higher
Real threat	45	37	34
Trying to eliminate critics	36	43	44

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Higher-educated and higher-income Turks are much more likely than lower-educated and lower-income Turks to view the crackdowns as an attempt to eliminate and intimidate critical voices. By a 45 percent-to-36 percent margin, the lowest educated bloc of Turks says that the government is cracking down because of real threats to the Turkish state, while college-educated Turks—by a 34 percent-to-44 percent margin—believe that the government is cracking down because it wants to eliminate critics.

Summary of attitudes about Turkish identity

How important is this to your conception of what it means to be a Turk? Ranked by percent reporting "very important"

A belief in strong families

68 percent very important; 90 percent very/somewhat important.

Speaking the Turkish language

68 very important; 89 percent very/somewhat important.

Being Muslim

67 percent very important; 91 percent very/somewhat important.

Supporting the Turkish military

65 percent very important; 90 percent very/somewhat important.

Being a citizen of Turkey/holding a Turkish passport

61 percent very important; 87 percent very/somewhat important.

Being born in Turkey

59 percent very important; 86 percent very/somewhat important.

Supporting democratic values

59 percent very important; 86 percent very/somewhat important.

Being open and tolerant of different religious and ethnic groups

55 percent very important; 87 percent very/somewhat important.

Taking pride in the Ottoman Empire

53 percent very important; 79 percent very/somewhat important.

Supporting kinfolk outside of Turkey

49 percent very important; 82 percent very/somewhat important.

Believing Turkey is better than other nations

47 percent very important; 75 percent very/somewhat important.

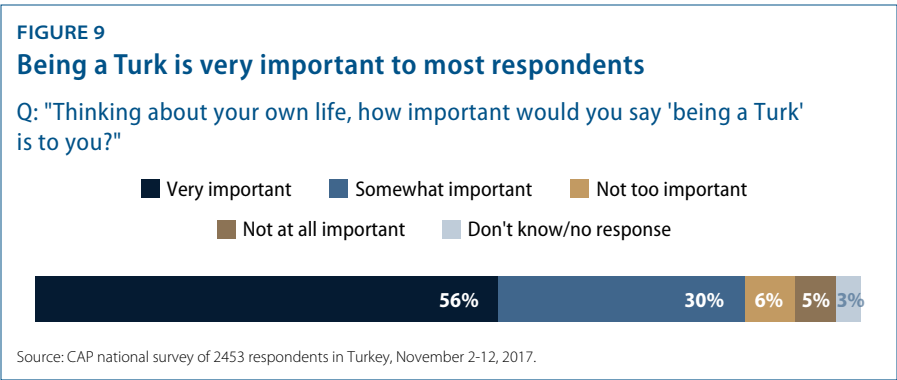
Supporting the current government

34 percent very important; 58 percent very/somewhat important.

What does it mean to be a Turk?

The heart of this study involves questions around Turkish identity and how the public views the most essential elements of Turkey’s national self-image. Study participants were asked, “Thinking about your own life, how important would you say the concept of ‘being a Turk’ is to you?”

An overwhelming 86 percent of respondents say that being a Turk is important to them, including 56 percent of them saying that being a Turk is very important to them. The notion of being a Turk is considered very important to a majority of all party members—with the exception of HDP voters. Sixty-one percent of AKP voters surveyed, 54 percent of CHP voters, and 73 percent of MHP voters report that being a Turk is very important to them, compared with only 14 percent of HDP voters. This 14 percent figure might represent HDP’s ethnically Turkish voters. Majorities of men and women, as well as majorities of all age and education groups, feel that being a Turk is very important to them.



In terms of the components of Turkish identity, the survey finds an interesting distribution of ideas that make up this national self-perception. As seen in the text box above, the study presented respondents with a series of ideas and concepts and asked them how important each item was to their conception of “what it means to be a Turk.”

Looking at the most intense responses—those receiving a rating of “very important”—a hierarchy of national identity emerges. A number of items directly related to citizenship rank in the top tier of most important concepts for being a Turk: “speaking the Turkish language,” with 68 percent saying “very important”; “supporting the Turkish military,” with 65 percent responding “very important”; “being a citizen/holding a Turkish passport,” with 61 percent responding “very important”; and “being born in Turkey,” with 59 percent saying “very important”. “A belief in strong families,” with 68 percent responding “very important,” and “being Muslim,” with 67 percent saying “very important” also rank high.

A second category of important concepts centers on beliefs about democracy and historical memory. “Supporting democratic values,” with 59 percent responding “very important”; “being open and tolerant of different religious and ethnic groups,” with 55 percent of respondents answering “very important”; and “taking pride in the Ottoman Empire,” with 53 percent responding “very important,” make up an important set of principles underlying a Turkish commitment to democracy, reform, and secularism. The rough equivalence of support for “pride in the Ottoman Empire” and other key indicators of “Turkishness” suggests the revival of Ottoman history is no longer a phenomenon confined to the religious right, as was largely the case in Turkey’s Republican era.

Notably, national chauvinism and backing of the current government receive much lower levels of intensity in terms of their importance to Turkish self-perception. Less than half of Turks—47 percent—say that “believing Turkey is better than other nations” is very important to their conception of what it means to be a Turk, and only about one-third, or 34 percent, of Turks believe that “supporting the current government” is a very important component of national identity.

This 34 percent is mostly the hardcore base of AKP and Erdoğan supporters. Of course, there are big partisan divides on the importance of supporting the government to Turkish self-perception, with AKP voters in favor and opposition party members largely opposed. One interesting note on this question is the plurality of MHP voters, with 23 percent responding “very important” and 47 percent responding “very/somewhat important,” who agree that support for the current government is important to being “Turkish”—a striking figure for a party not included in the government.

Additionally, while it should not necessarily be attributed to ethnic chauvinism, there does appear to be considerable sentimental pan-Turkism, visible in the 49 percent of respondents who feel it is very important—and 82 percent responding very or somewhat important—to support Turkish people and kin living outside of Turkey.

Summary of attitudes about Turkish nationalism

List of all 11 agree/disagree statements ranked by total agreement

Turkey should produce its own military and industrial goods and avoid relying on other countries.

58 percent strongly agree; **88** percent total agree.

Global economic and political elites have too much power over Turkey and should be resisted.

48 percent strongly agree; **84** percent total agree.

Islam plays a central role in my own life and is essential to my understanding of Turkish identity.

51 percent strongly agree; **80** percent total agree.

Turkey spends too much time and money caring for refugees from other countries and should focus more on its own citizens.

49 percent strongly agree; **78** percent total agree.

Turkey is a natural leader for the Muslim world.

41 percent strongly agree; **72** percent total agree.

Democratic rights such as a free press, free speech, and the right to speak one's views are vital and should not be sacrificed for any reason.

49 percent strongly agree; **70** percent total agree.

Turkey should be a secular state that respects the rights of people from all religious backgrounds to practice their faiths with no official state religion.

38 percent strongly agree; **70** percent total agree.

A strong leader like Erdoğan is necessary to protect Turkey's interests, and he should be free to do what is necessary to keep the country safe and prosperous.

32 percent strongly agree; **55** percent total agree.

The political reforms that Atatürk first brought to Turkey are under assault.

30 percent strongly agree; **54** percent total agree.

Turkey under Erdoğan is fulfilling Atatürk's ideal of a strong and independent nation.

26 percent strongly agree; **51** percent total agree.

Immigrants and refugees in Turkey have much to contribute to Turkish society and deserve our support.

23 percent strongly; **49** percent total agree.

Consensus elements of a new Turkish nationalism

For a nation with such deep partisan cleavages in opinion about the direction of Turkey and its government, the study finds strong consensus across party lines about Turkey’s overall identity and its relationship to the outside world. This harmony of attitudes reflects a new nationalist spirit grounded deeply in Islam and opposition to Western nations and non-Turkish citizens. It favors Turkish military and economic self-sufficiency and is strongly committed to democratic values, though Turkish voters’ ideas of what constitutes democratic values may vary across the political spectrum.

Centrality of Islam to Turkish identity

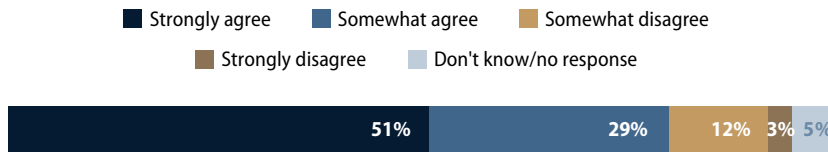
As seen in the previous sections, “being Muslim” emerges as a critical component of what it means to be a Turk in the minds of many Turkish citizens. A follow-up to this assessment finds that 80 percent of respondents agree with the statement that “Islam plays a central role in my life and is essential to my understanding of Turkish identity,” with only 15 percent disagreeing.

Although people across party lines agree with the centrality of Islam to Turkish national self-perception, the intensity of agreement is noticeably higher among both AKP and MHP voters. More than 6 in 10 AKP voters, or 63 percent, and MHP—62 percent—strongly agree with this statement, compared with less than 40 percent of CHP voters and less than 30 percent of HDP voters.

FIGURE 10

For large majority of Turks, Islam is central in their lives

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Islam plays a central role in my own life and is essential to my understanding of Turkish identity?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

In terms of Turkey's larger role in the region, Turks are pretty much in agreement that the nation should play a bigger international role. Seventy-two percent agree that "Turkey is a natural leader for the Muslim world," with about one-fifth—22 percent—disagreeing. Support for the idea that Turkey is a natural leader in the Muslim world is strongest among conservative and nationalist parties, with 54 percent of AKP voters and 44 percent of MHP voters strongly agreeing with this statement. Notably, 27 percent of CHP voters—usually regarded as more supportive of a traditional, restrained Turkish regional policy—strongly agreed with this notion, and a majority of CHP voters agree to some degree.

FIGURE 11

There is widespread agreement that Turkey is a natural leader for the Muslim world

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Turkey is a natural leader for the Muslim world?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Skepticism toward the West and outsiders

Turks across party and demographic lines express profound dislike of the United States and Europe. Only 10 percent of Turks overall hold a favorable view of the United States, with 83 percent expressing an unfavorable opinion of the United States. HDP voters, college-educated Turks, and higher-income Turks are the only groups with favorability toward the United States at 15 percent or higher. Favorability toward “the American people” is barely higher, with just 18 percent of Turks expressing favorable opinions of Americans. Attitudes toward Europe are equally tough among Turks: Only 21 percent of Turks overall hold favorable opinions of Europe, with favorability rising slightly with age, education, and income levels.

TABLE 1
Favorability toward nations and groups

Q: “For each one, please tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable view that particular person, place, or group?”

	Share of respondents	
	Total favorable*	Total unfavorable**
Russia	28%	63%
Christians	25%	69%
NATO	24%	67%
Europe	21%	73%
The American people	18%	72%
Jews	16%	78%
Syrian refugees	15%	79%
The United States of America	10%	83%

* Combined very and somewhat favorable

** Combined very and somewhat unfavorable

Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

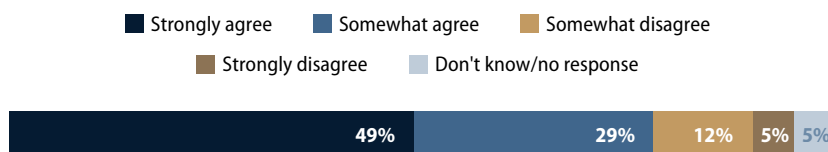
Other major nations, religious groups, and institutions also receive low favorability ratings, including Germany at 18 percent, NATO at 24 percent, Christians at 25 percent, Jews at 16 percent, and Syrian refugees at 15 percent. Although Turks are more unfavorable than favorable in their attitudes toward Russia in this survey, it is notable that at 28 percent, Russia receives the highest favorability of any non-Turkish nation or group tested in this research.

Furthermore, Turks overwhelmingly agree that the government does too much to help refugees. Asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that “Turkey spends too much time and money caring for refugees from other countries and should focus more on its citizens,” 78 percent say they agree, with only 17 percent disagreeing. Overwhelming majorities of voters from all of the major and minor parties agree that Turkey should stop spending as much time and money on refugees and more on Turks themselves.

FIGURE 12

Turks believe that Turkey spends too much time and money caring for refugees

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Turkey spends too much time and money caring for refugees from other countries and should focus more on its own citizens?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

At the same time, harsh positions on assistance for refugees are balanced by more moderate beliefs about the role of immigrants and refugees in Turkish life. By a slight plurality margin, 49 percent of Turks agree that “immigrants and refugees have much to contribute to Turkish society and deserve our support,” compared with 45 percent who disagree with this statement. Opinions on the relative contributions of immigrants and refugees are divided equally across major partisan and demographic lines.

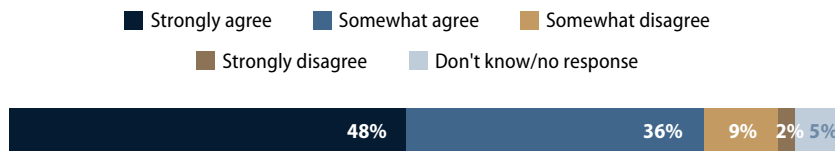
Anti-globalism and the desire for national self-determination

Complementing the consistent disdain for the West and other nations, Turks across the board express strong agreement with the following statement: “Global and political elites have too much power over Turkey and should be resisted.” Eighty-four percent of Turks overall agree either strongly or somewhat with this anti-globalist or nativist perspective. Strong majorities of every partisan and demographic group examined in this research agree with this statement, suggesting genuine consensus of public opinion in opposition to global elites.

FIGURE 13

Turks are strongly against global elites

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Global economic and political elites have too much power over Turkey and should be resisted?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Given the antipathy to global economic and political elites, it is not surprising that Turks are also in broad agreement with the notion that “Turkey should produce its own military and industrial goods and avoid relying on other countries.” Eighty-eight percent of Turks agree with this statement, including strong majorities of every partisan and demographic group analyzed.

On the larger issue of Turkey’s relationship to other nations, a majority—55 percent—believes that “Turkey is better off making its own decisions and avoiding entanglements with other nations,” while 37 percent believe that “Turkey is better off working cooperatively with other nations to address common challenges and needs.”

Majorities of AKP voters—70 percent—and MHP voters, at 58 percent, prefer the more go-it-alone position. Meanwhile, majorities of CHP voters, at 53 percent, and HDP voters—59 percent—favor cooperation with other nations. Support for cooperation with other nations rises with education and income levels. How this attitude interacts with the strong AKP and MHP belief that Turkey is a natural leader for the Muslim world—shared by many in the CHP as well—deserves further study.

FIGURE 14

Turks prefer isolationism over international cooperation

Q: "In terms of Turkey's relationships and position in the world today, which of the following statements do you agree with more?"

- Turkey is better off making its own decisions and avoiding entanglements with other nations
- Turkey is better off working cooperatively with other nations to address common challenges and needs
- Don't know/no response



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

On the specific issue of Turkey's relationship to the United States, the survey finds similar patterns in public attitudes. A plurality of Turks—46 percent—say the government should do more to confront the United States, while 37 percent want the government to do more to maintain an alliance with the United States, even if the two countries do not always agree. As expected, given other nationalist tendencies and general hostility toward the U.S., majorities of AKP voters—56 percent—and MHP voters, at 51 percent, want Turkey to do more to confront the U.S., while pluralities of CHP voters—49 percent—and HDP voters—48 percent—want the government to do more to maintain the Turkey-U.S. alliance.

FIGURE 15

Turks think their government should do more to confront the United States

Q: "As you may know, the Turkish government has recently been in disputes with the United States of America on a variety of issues. Do you think the government should do more to confront the United States or should it do more to maintain its alliance with the United States?"

- Confront the U.S.
- Maintain alliance with U.S.
- Don't know/no response



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Commitment to democratic values and secularism

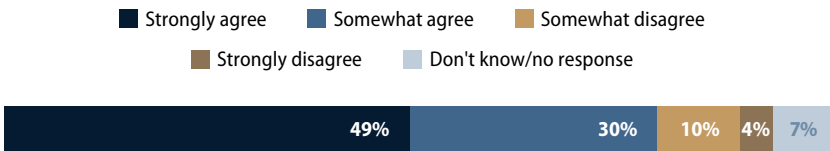
Despite deep divisions about the government’s response to the attempted coup and the subsequent crackdown, the survey finds unity of opinion about the importance of democratic norms and commitment to diversity of views and religious practice.

Seventy-nine percent of Turks overall agree that “democratic rights such as a free press, free speech, and the right to speak one’s views are vital and should not be sacrificed for any reason,” with only 14 percent of the public disagreeing. Support for democratic norms crosses all party and demographic lines in Turkey.

FIGURE 16

Turks maintain strong support for democratic values and rights

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Democratic rights such as a free press, free speech, and the right to speak one's views are vital and should not be sacrificed for any reason?"



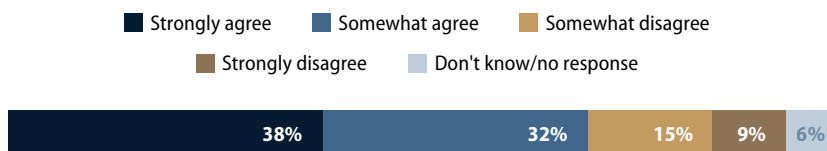
Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Likewise, 70 percent of Turks overall agree with the idea that “Turkey should be a secular state that respects the rights of people from all religious backgrounds to practice their faiths with no official state religion.” Support for pluralism and religious tolerance crosses all party lines, but there are stronger pockets of disagreement with secularism among AKP voters—34 percent disagree with the statement—and MHP voters, with 26 percent disagreeing with the statement.

FIGURE 17

Turks maintain strong support for secularism

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Turkey should be a secular state that respects the rights of people from all religious backgrounds to practice their faiths with no official state religion?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Despite recent events and acrimony surrounding the coup attempt, Turks remain united in a fundamental commitment to democracy and the individual rights that accompany a free and pluralistic society. Public divisions are based on attitudes about the government's ability to uphold these principles and rights, not on the values themselves.

Dissension about Erdoğan's position as leader of a new Turkish nationalism

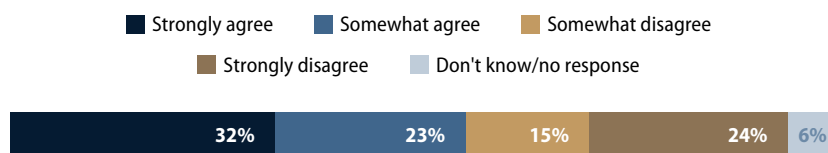
Although the survey finds strong, broad consensus around a number of critical themes underlying what could be an emerging new nationalist spirit in the Turkish public, there is little agreement about President Erdoğan's position as the leader or embodiment of this nationalism.

In terms of his dominant hold on power, a slight majority of Turks—55 percent—agree with the idea that “a strong leader like Erdoğan is necessary to protect Turkey's interests, and he should be free to do what is necessary to keep the country safe and prosperous.” But these opinions are sharply divided along party lines. While 86 percent of AKP voters agree that a strong leader such as Erdoğan is needed, 70 percent of CHP voters, 54 percent of MHP voters, and 73 percent of HDP voters disagree with this notion. Agreement with this strong leader concept goes up with age and goes down with education and income.

FIGURE 18

Most Turks believe a strong leader like Erdoğan is needed with notable disagreement from opponents

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: A strong leader like Erdoğan is necessary to protect Turkey's interests, and he should be free to do what is necessary to keep the country safe and prosperous?"



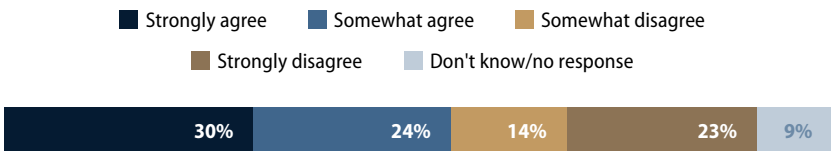
Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

Erdoğan's actions clearly influence public perceptions about his relative position in Turkey's revered history. A majority of respondents—54 percent—agree that “the political reforms that Atatürk first brought to Turkey are under assault,” while 51 percent of Turks agree that “Turkey under Erdoğan is fulfilling Atatürk's ideal of a strong and independent nation.”

Partisan splits are noticeable on these two measures. Eighty-six percent of CHP voters agree that Atatürk's political reforms are under assault, compared with 60 percent of AKP voters who disagree. Conversely, 80 percent of AKP voters agree that Erdoğan is fulfilling Atatürk's ideal of a strong and independent nation, compared with 74 percent of CHP voters who disagree with this idea.

FIGURE 19
Most Turks believe Atatürk's political reforms are under assault

Q: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The political reforms Atatürk first brought to Turkey are under assault?"



Source: CAP national survey of 2453 respondents in Turkey, November 2-12, 2017.

As seen throughout this report, consensus among much of the Turkish population about the ideas and beliefs that underlie a new nationalism falls apart entirely when filtered through a partisan lens. Simply put, if Turks back Erdoğan and the AKP, they feel they are doing what is necessary to uphold Turkish national identity. If Turks are opposed to the president and his party, they feel they are failing to represent proper Turkish nationalism.

Conclusion

This study of contemporary Turkish opinion provides a rich and compelling overview of the attitudes most likely to shape Turkey's political future over the next few years. The study finds that Turks are quite united in their commitment to a set of nationalist ideals: the importance of Islam to Turkish identity; skepticism and distrust toward the West and other perceived outside groups; disdain for global elites; the desire for more economic and military self-determination and might; and a strong belief in Turkey's democratic values and history.

Some of these ideas have been central to Turkish nationalist thought for generations; Islam, for example, has always suffused Turkish culture and has had political proponents. But the transfer of religious rhetoric and symbolism from the cultural or private realm to the center of the public sphere stands in stark relief to Atatürk's original republican vision. Likewise, Turkish republican thought was always fiercely independent but was also traditionally animated by a desire to bring Turkey in line with Western norms. There have also always been political constituencies skeptical of Turkey's place in the West or attempts to emulate global trends and desirous of a parallel model. But the current centrality of anti-Western thought and the widespread desire to go it alone is remarkable. Only time will tell if this is a durable shift or a passing current driven by domestic, regional, and global dynamics.

Turks are also clear that President Erdoğan and the current government do not fully represent and embody this new nationalist sentiment. On just about every measure related to the president, half of Turks back him and his positions and half oppose him and his actions. Given the structural barriers to unified opposition to AKP rule in the near term, particularly with the 10 percent threshold for party representation in Parliament, it is likely that Erdoğan and his party will keep their hold on power for the time being until and unless his opponents and their supporters can get behind a more centralized challenge to his conception of Turkish nationalism.

Based on this study's findings, the authors expect Turkish politics to remain highly turbulent and antagonistic to the West through the next elections. Turks know what they believe about themselves and the world around them. Yet they are divided on who or what party can best manifest this new nationalism and carry out their desire for policies that respect Turkey's past and help build greater independence and strength on the world stage.

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Endnotes

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