

# KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF TURKEY IN A COLLEGE IN THE UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to explore to what degree students from an American college are knowledgeable of Turkey and how they perceive the country. The paper also explores why some students are more likely than others to have a positive view of Turkey. Although these students represent neither the American public nor American university students as a whole, understanding their knowledge and perception of Turkey may help us gain insight into the country's distinguishability and overall image in the United States. This paper finds that most students are indifferent to and/or little informed about Turkey. It also shows that previous visitation experience, informational familiarity, Democratic Party affiliation and whether a student thinks of Turkey as a democratic country are related to their positive perception of Turkey.

**Keywords:** Perception of Turkey; Knowledge on Turkey; Turkey's Image in the United States; Attitudes towards Turkey.

## BİR AMERİKAN ÜNİVERSİTESİNDE TÜRKİYE BİLGİ VE ALGISI

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, bir ABD üniversitesi öğrencilerinin Türkiye üzerine bilgi ve algısını ölçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale ayrıca neden bazı öğrencilerin Türkiye'ye karşı daha pozitif bir tutum sergilediklerini de test etmektedir. Her ne kadar bu öğrenciler ABD halkını ve öğrencilerini genel anlamda temsil etmeseler dahi, onların Türkiye bilgi ve algısını ölçmek bize, Türkiye'nin ABD'de ki imajı üzerine en azından bir fikir verebilir. Makale, birçok öğrencinin Türkiye'ye karşı ilgisiz ve/veya çok az bilgili olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin Türkiye'yi daha önce ziyaret etmiş olmalarının, Türkiye bilgi seviyelerinin, Demokratik Parti'ye yakınlıklarının ve Türkiye'nin demokratik ülke imajının, Türkiye'ye karşı tutumlarını pozitif yönde etkilediği bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kavramlar:** Türkiye Algısı; Türkiye Bilgisi; Türkiye'nin Amerika'da ki İmajı; Amerika Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Türkiye tutumu.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article has two goals. First, it explores to what degree students from an elite American college are knowledgeable of Turkey and how they perceive the country. Although these students represent neither the American public nor American university students as a whole, understanding the degree to which they view Turkey in favorable terms and how much they know about Turkey may help us gain insight into the country's distinguishability and overall image in the United States (US). As discussed below, scholarly attention to knowledge and image of Turkey in the US is very scarce. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to the literature by presenting data on the level of factual information about and image of Turkey. It finds that most students are indifferent and/or possess little knowledge about Turkey.

The second goal of this work is to further our understanding of the factors that may be associated with students' attitude towards Turkey. Thus, the study goes beyond description, analytically examining why some students are more likely to have a positive view of Turkey than others do. The literature on image and tourism studies suggests that factors such as previous visitation experience and information familiarity explain one's attitude towards a country. However, this research adds two additional variables that are political in nature: Political party affiliation of the respondent and whether the respondent thinks the country under examination is a functioning democracy. In consistence with the literature, it is found that previous visitation experience and informational familiarity increase Turkey's positive image. In addition, the study suggests that Democratic Party affiliation and whether a student thinks of Turkey as a democratic country are related to their positive perception of Turkey.

This study focuses on Centre College, an American liberal arts college with 1,197 students as of 2010. The College was founded in 1819 and is located in Danville, Kentucky. U.S. News and World Report regularly list Centre as a top-50 liberal arts undergraduate college in the US. Similarly, Forbes Magazine, a prominent, well-circulated US business magazine, listed Centre as the number one college institution in the American South in both 2009 and 2010, ranking above such notable schools as Georgetown, Duke, and Vanderbilt. Nearly 60 percent of Centre's incoming underclassmen were ranked in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class with an average GPA of 3.7 on a 4.0 scale. Therefore it can be safely assumed that this study represents a more cultural, educated populous than the average U.S. citizen and college student.

The data used in this study was drawn from a survey which was conducted with 229 Centre students, representing approximately 19 percent of the total population, between April 28, 2010, and May 10, 2010. The survey asked students about their political orientation, service involvement, opinions of the economic crisis and policies, and background questions such as gender, age and

religion. The final part of the survey included 12 questions on Turkey that were designed to measure the knowledge and image of Turkey among students. The survey questionnaires were distributed to students in classroom and non-classroom settings such as the dining center. The surveys were coded by four student assistants and then cross-examined to minimize coding mistakes (1).

**Table 1:** Survey Participants' Demographics

Average Age	20
Male	52%
Female	48%
White	89%
Non-White	11%

The next section of the paper will firstly discuss the image of Turkey in the US and then will present data regarding how much information Centre College students possess on Turkey and how they view the country. The following section of the paper will analyze what factors are associated with Turkey's image. The final section of the study concludes the paper and makes recommendations for future research.

### **I. TURKEY'S IMAGE IN THE US**

This section of the paper descriptively analyzes to what degree Centre College students are knowledgeable of Turkey and how they perceive the country. How Americans perceive Turkey matters, as one Turkish academic and columnist claims in a newspaper article that Turkey's "semi-Arab" image is one of the leading reasons explaining why there is such little foreign direct investment coming from the US to the country (Öztürk, 2009, December 10). In fact, the Turkish Government are also aware of this image problem. For example, it is reported that the Turkish Government employed a Washington public relations firm in 1985, paying the firm \$600,000 for a 12-month period, to improve "knowledge" and "awareness" of Turkey in the US (Gamarekian, 1987, January 20).

Americans' lack of knowledge and negative view of Turkey is in some part surprising because Turkey and the US have been close political allies. Turkey is a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); Turkish soldiers fought alongside American troops in the Korean War in the early 1950s; Turkey significantly contributed to US operations in the Persian Gulf War of 1990. Although it rejected American request of deploying troops via

Turkish soils to Northern Iraq in March 2003, Turkey's contribution to the War on Terrorism also later proved to be crucial, as a significant portion of military supplies to US troops in Iraq came through Turkey by 2005 (Weisman, 2003, April 3; Hoge, 2005, June 11). More recently, President Barrack Obama visited Turkey in the first one hundred days of his presidency, which found wide coverage in the US media. Moreover, Turkey has been identified as a more active player in the world since the early 2000s by scholars and frequently shown as a model country because of its Islamic population yet democratic nature of government in the US press and among US intellectuals and politicians (Burns, 2005, July 18; Burns, 2007, September 13). Furthermore, Turkey's tourism advertisements have frequently appeared on top US TV stations like CNN, and in widely-circulated newspapers like The New York Times and the Washington Post in 2009 and 2010.

Yet, it may also be understandable to find that American people are indifferent to Turkey since it has been well established in the scholarship that Americans tend to show little interest for foreign countries. For example, a 2006 National Geographic – Roper Public Affairs study showed that 88 percent of Americans aged 18 to 24 were unable to locate Afghanistan on a map of Asia. Similarly, 63 percent could not locate Iraq on a map. These results may be regarded as unexpected if one considers the fact that the US was at war with these countries in 2006 (CNN, 2006, May 4). In addition, indifference of the American people to Turkey may also be understandable, despite the fact that Turkey and America have close political-military relations, Turkey is a geographically distant country, and Turkish-American commercial relations have been limited thus far. Therefore it would not be surprising if one found that the American people, and college students in particular, had very little knowledge on Turkey. Consequently, this study is worth conducting due to the lack of empirical evidence to evaluate to what extent American college students know or how indifferent they may be to Turkey.

Several scholars have noted in their publications that Turkey is largely viewed negatively by Americans. For example, it has been argued that Turkey was unfavorably viewed in the press and American publications in the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century, as American political leaders and intellectuals associated 'Turks' with 'despotism,' 'barbarity,' 'murder,' 'atrocities,' etc. (Çağrı, 2000). Turkey's bad image in the US was in large part due to the fact that the American public came to know Turkey through 19th century European publications that depicted the Turks in a negative light. Turkey's image in the US further depleted in the late 19th century when the Turks fought against 'Christian' Greeks and were accused of committing genocide against the 'Christian' Armenians of Anatolia, which ultimately created a 'Terrible Turk' stereotype in the US (Çağrı, 2000). It is also noted that the Turkish image in the US continues to suffer in the present-day because most

Americans consider the state a major human rights violator. This is because today Turkey's image in America is largely shaped by the popular and award-winning 'Midnight Express' movie, which was shot in 1978 and presented Turkey in a very bad light by drastically exaggerating human right violations in Turkish prisons. Furthermore, it is also argued that anti-Turkey campaigns undertaken by the powerful Greek and Armenian lobbies also negatively impact Turkey's image in the US (Çakmak, 2008, February 17).

Public opinion polls analyzing Americans' attitudes towards other countries present mixed results with regards to Turkey's image in the US. For example, a Gallup poll which was conducted in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks found that 38 percent of the participants had a favorable view of Turkey, 23 percent had an unfavorable view, and 39 percent had no opinion (Moore, 2002, March 5). A more recent poll conducted on April 3-5, 2009, few days before Obama's historic visit to Turkey, found that 61 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Turkey whereas 34 percent had an unfavorable opinion (Preston, 2009, April 7). These polls may suggest that scholarly works going beyond the simple 'favorable-unfavorable' questions may be necessary to uncover Americans' attitudes towards Turkey. However, such studies are very rare. One exemption is Kağıtçıbaşı's cross-cultural comparison of high school students in the US and Turkey, which found that 42.7 percent of the Turkish students had a positive view and 33.2 percent had a negative view of Americans in the 1970s. On the other hand, the American students displayed significantly more negative attitude towards Turkey as only 8.7 percent of the American high school students said that they had a positive view and 61.9 percent indicated a negative view of Turkey (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1973).

This article makes an attempt to improve our understanding of Turkey's distinguishability and image in the present-day US college setting by focusing on a single higher educational institution. Although Centre College is hardly representative of an average American college, the study may nevertheless help us gain insight as to what extent students from a high-ranking US college are knowledgeable on Turkey and how they perceive the country as a whole. The next section will descriptively present students' knowledge and perception of Turkey. Then, the results of a logistic regression analysis will be presented to discuss to what extent students' knowledge on Turkey, exposure to Turkey (visitation experience), students' view of Turkey as a democracy, and students' political party orientation influence their perception of the country. The study will be concluded by summarizing the findings and making policy and future study suggestions.

## II. STUDENTS' INFORMATIONAL FAMILIARITY WITH AND PERCEPTION OF TURKEY

For the purposes of this study, the questions related to Turkey in the survey have been categorized into two distinct sections: Knowledge and perception questions. Survey questions that ask students to identify Turkey's capital (Ankara), founder (Atatürk), dominant language (Turkish), or primary religion (Islam) are coded as 'knowledge,' since these questions primarily test the respondent's factual knowledge of Turkey to understand students' informational familiarity level with Turkey. Conversely, questions that ask respondents' overall view of Turkey, such as inquiries concerning their opinions of Turkey as a functioning democracy, the country's level of development and safety, are coded as 'perception' or 'image' questions. One may argue that the knowledge-image line is not as clear-cut as presented in this study. For example, Turkey's language, although examined as an indicator of one's knowledge of Turkey in this research, could also be understood as an indicator of the respondent's 'perception.' Regardless, for the extent of this study, questions that possess factual answers will be distinguished as 'knowledge,' whereas questions that are more controversial and have room for interpretation will remain labeled as 'perception.'

### A. STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE ON TURKEY

Table 2 is designed to illustrate respondents' knowledge of Turkey. The questions ask Centre students to identify Turkey's capital, founder, language and religion. Half of the questions provided multiple choice answers the respondent could select from, while the other half were formatted as 'fill in the blank' style.

**Table 2:** Students' Knowledge on Turkey

	YES	NO	Total
Does Respondent Correctly Identify Turkey's Capital?	26.2% (60)	73.8% (169)	100% (229)
Does Respondent Correctly Identify the Founder of Turkey?	18.8% (43)	81.2% (186)	100% (229)
Does Respondent Correctly Identify Turkey's Language?	54.6% (125)	45.4% (104)	100% (229)
Does Respondent Correctly Identify Turkey's Religion?	64.6% (148)	35.4% (81)	100% (229)

The first question asked students to correctly identify the capital of Turkey. The question was worded as "What is the capital of Turkey?"

Respondents were given four answer choices to select from, in the following order: Damascus, Tehran, Istanbul, and Ankara. Approximately 26 percent of the students identified Ankara, the correct answer, as the capital of Turkey. While 74 percent of the students were unable to correctly identify the capital of Turkey: Seven percent (17 students) chose Damascus; three percent (six students) selected Tehran; and 62 percent (141 students) incorrectly identified Istanbul as the capital. The results clearly confirm that an overwhelming majority of Centre students believe that Istanbul, not Ankara, is the capital city of Turkey, while nearly only a quarter of the respondent population knew Ankara was the capital of Turkey. This may be because of the fact that Istanbul, not Ankara, is the most well-known city of Turkey in the world. However, it may be also safely speculated that the correct response rate (26 percent) would have been significantly lower if choices had not been provided on the survey.

In terms of Turkey's founding father, the knowledge-indicating question was worded as: "Who was the founding father of Turkey?" There were no choices provided for this question, instead students were asked to write their answer in the blank next to the question. Only 18.8 percent of the respondents (43 students) correctly identified Ataturk as the founding father of Turkey, though 17 of these 43 students misspelled the historic figure's name. The rest of survey respondents, approximately 81 percent, either left the question blank or answered it incorrectly. It is clear from this question that the majority of Centre students did not retain the relevant knowledge.

The question concerning the predominant language of Turkey was worded as: "What is the dominant language spoken in Turkey?" Like the founder question, no choices for this question were provided. Approximately 55 percent (125 students) wrote the correct answer: 'Turkish.' Interestingly, around 18 percent (42 students) wrote 'Arabic.' While 17.4 percent (40) did not answer the question, nine percent (22) wrote in some other language other than Turkish or Arabic. It is significant that only a slight majority of students could correctly identify the predominant language spoken in Turkey. According to the results presented in Table 1, 18 percent of the respondents stated that the Turks speak Arabic, suggesting that they view Turkey as if it was an Arabic country. Therefore, considering Centre's more educated populous, it may safely be assumed that the general population who think of Turks as Arabs is well above the 18 percent level within the general US population.

The last question as an indication of students' knowledge on Turkey was worded as: "What is the dominant religion in Turkey?" For this question four choices were provided: Christianity, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism. 64.6 percent (148 students) identified Islam correctly as the dominant religion in Turkey. Three percent (seven people) selected Christianity; 29.3 percent (67 people) chose Eastern Orthodox Christianity, while one percent (two students) believed Judaism was the primary religion of Turkey; two

percent (five students) left the question blank. While it is clear that the strong majority of students correctly identified Islam as the dominant religion in Turkey, a sizable proportion of the respondents, 32 percent, or 74 students, believed the dominant religion of Turkey was some form of Christianity.

Although the conductors of this survey research do not possess comparable data to conclude that American college students, as a whole, know very little about Turkey, at Centre College at least these results clearly demonstrate that a significant proportion of the respondents were not well informed about the country. In terms of language and religion, the majority students were able to correctly exhibit their knowledge of Turkey: 54.6 percent of respondents correctly identified Turkish as the dominant language and 64.6 percent knew Islam was the primary religion of Turkey. However in terms of the Turkey's capital and founding father, the college students fell short significantly: 62 percent incorrectly selected Istanbul as the capital, and 81 percent were unable to identify the founding father. In short, Table 2 demonstrates that a significant portion of students possess little knowledge of Turkey. Following the assumption that Centre undergraduates, a college where 85% of the student body study abroad, are more globally aware, then it may be safe to speculate that the knowledge level of Turkey will be much lower in the general population.

## B. STUDENTS' IMAGE ABOUT TURKEY

This survey included questions gauging students' cognitive images of Turkey, which refer to ideas and beliefs about Turkey held by that individual. These perceptions are measured through questions asking students whether they consider Turkey a democratic, developed and safe country to travel. Students' emotional image of Turkey, which refers to students' feelings toward the country, is measured by asking them whether they view Turkey favorably or not. Thus, Table 3 was designed to display students' image of Turkey in terms of democracy, safety, level of development, and overall favorability.

**Table 3:** Students' Perception of Turkey

	YES	NO	Don't Know/ Indifferent
Does Respondent View Turkey a Democracy?	54.6% (125)	36.7% (84)	8.7% (20)
Does Respondent View Turkey a Safe Country to Travel?	56.8% (130)	40.6% (93)	2.6% (6)
Does Respondent View Turkey as a Third World Country?	14.4% (33)	81.2% (186)	4.3% (10)
Does Respondent View Turkey Favorably?	37.1% (85)	4% (9)	58.9% (135)

The first question from Table 3 addressed respondents' opinion of Turkey as a functioning democracy. Since the goal was to understand the cognitive image that Turkey has in the minds of Centre students, the question did not provide any definition of the term 'democracy.' The question instead simply asked the survey takers, "Do you consider Turkey a Democratic country?" There were no choices provided for this question, instead students were asked to write their answer in the blank next to the question. A significant proportion, 36.7 percent (84 students), answered 'no,' meaning that they did not think Turkey a democratic country. On the other hand, a majority, 54.6 percent (125 students) answered 'yes,' they did believe the country was democratic.

The next survey question explored whether students viewed Turkey as a safe destination for tourism or education. The question was worded as "Do you think Turkey is a safe country to travel for tourism/education?" Students were given three answer choices: 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I don't know.' Of 229, 130 students (approximately 57 percent) stated that they perceive Turkey as a safe country to travel for tourism or education. On the other hand, 93 students, or 41 percent, view Turkey as an unsafe location to travel. Six people either chose the 'I don't know' option or did not answer the question.

The survey also asked Centre students if they "consider Turkey a third world country." Similar to the question on democracy, the survey did not provide a definition of "third world," since the survey aims to understand the cognitive image of the country in the minds of the respondents. An overpowering majority of students, 81.2 percent, believe Turkey is not a third world country. On the other hand, 14.4 percent (33) students said they do view Turkey as a third world nation. It should be noted that 1.7 percent (four students) answered the question: 'second world.' Nine percent of student respondents left the answer blank and were thus their answers coded as missing.

The structure of the final question aimed to measure Centre College students' emotional image of Turkey and was worded as "What is your general opinion of Turkey?" Students were provided the following five options from which to choose: 1. Very Favorable; 2. Favorable; 3. Indifferent; 4. Unfavorable; 5. Very Unfavorable. Overall, 37 percent expressed a favorable opinion, while only four percent (nine students) expressed an unfavorable opinion of Turkey. The favorable rating found in this survey is consistent with a 2002 Gallup poll that found 38 percent of Americans had a favorable opinion of Turkey (Moore, 2002, March 5). However the vast majority of students, 58.9 percent (135 students), consider themselves 'indifferent' towards Turkey. Of those respondents considered 'favorable,' seven percent (16 people) said they were 'very favorable,' showing the degree of their attitude toward the country; while 30.1 percent (69 students) chose the 'favorable' option. Of those coded as 'No' in the table above, 3.1 percent (seven students) were 'unfavorable' and one percent (two students) said they were 'very unfavorable' of Turkey.

In short, Table 3 demonstrates that a clear majority of student respondents perceive Turkey as a modernized country (81.2 percent) with a stable democracy (54.6 percent), and believe the country is safe for tourists or students (56.8 percent). However, a significant portion, 36.7 percent, does not consider Turkey to be a functioning democracy, and 40.6 percent do not even regard it a safe place for education or travel. In terms of college student's emotional image of Turkey, 37.1 percent (85 students) said they view Turkey favorably. Yet, overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents remain 'indifferent' toward the country as a whole (58.9 percent). The following section will empirically analyze what factors are associated with Turkey's emotional image among students.

### C. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TURKEY'S IMAGE

The previous section has demonstrated how much students from Centre College, a prestigious US liberal arts college, know about and how they perceive Turkey. This section of the paper analyzes the factors that may affect the emotional attitudes of students toward Turkey.

What are the some things that might influence a person's attitude towards Turkey? Scholars who examine the determinants of country images suggest that a person's direct visitation experience to and informational familiarity with a country are associated with that person's perception of the country in question. For example, it has been demonstrated that Italian tourists' Turkish visitation experience improves their image of Turkey (Altınbaşak, 2008). In addition to visitation experience, Karlins, Coffman and Walters claim that American college students' negative view of Turkey is in some part related to their low level knowledge of Turkey (Karlins et al, 1969:8). A previous research has also found that increasing level of information of tourists on Turkey (informational familiarity) and direct visitation experience are positively correlated to US tourists' image of the country (Baloğlu, 2001).

Thus, the first variable that one should take into consideration when analyzing how American college students perceive Turkey is their visitation experience. The survey included two related questions. The first question asked if the respondent has been to Turkey. The second question asked students if they knew any friends or relatives who have visited Turkey. Of 229, nine students (3.9 percent) said that they visited Turkey; 218 (95.2 percent) said they did not. Also, 94 of 229 students (41 percent) said they have at least one relative/friend that they know has visited Turkey; while 132 (57.6 percent) said they are unaware of any friend/relative who has visited Turkey. Of the nine students who claimed to have been to Turkey, eight reported that they also know someone who has visited Turkey. Because of the low number of students who have visited Turkey, this paper adds students who have at least one friend or relative that has visited Turkey to students who have been to Turkey to be able to

statistically test the impact of visitation experience on students' perception. This data manipulation can be justified since students' emotional perception of Turkey may be influenced by the stories and experiences of friends or relatives who have been to Turkey. In fact, it is now well-known that word-of-mouth is a very effective technique in marketing (see Pethokoukis, 2005, December 2). In consistence with the literature, this study expects to find a positive relationship between visitation experience and favorable perception of Turkey.

Informational familiarity is quantified in this study through a 'knowledge index,' which measures how much information each student has about Turkey. The knowledge index was constructed by adding respondents' answers to the four factual questions presented in Table 1 (Turkey's capital, founder, language, and religion). Informational familiarity scores varied between zero and four: A student who knew all factual questions received a score of four, whereas a student who knew none of the factual questions received an informational familiarity score of zero (0). The knowledge index shows that 8.3 percent (19 of 229) students answered all knowledge questions correctly; 12.2 percent (28 students) answered three, 29.7 percent (68 students) answered two, 34.1 percent (78 students) answered only one and 13.5 percent (31 students) answered none of the knowledge questions correctly. Five students' responses had to be coded as missing data (2). In line with the literature, it is expected that as students get more informed about Turkey, they will be more likely to hold a positive opinion of the country.

This study adds two new political variables to visitation experience and informational familiarity to understand to what extent they are influential in shaping students' perception of Turkey. The first of these variables is 'democracy.' Because of America's self-claimed and widely advertised crusade for democratization, it may be expected – especially at a college such as Centre – that students who think Turkey of a democracy are more likely to view it favorably than do students who think Turkey undemocratic. The second political variable included in this study is students' political orientations. One may safely argue that ideological attachments of people may influence their attitudes towards other countries as it is found that conservatives in the US tend to maintain negative attitudes towards China more than liberals do (Gries and Crowson, 2010). The survey included a question about participants' political party affiliation. Accordingly, 31 percent (71) of Centre students were self-identified Republicans, while 51.1 percent (117) were Democrats. Thus, the study expects that liberal students will be more likely to have a favorable view of Turkey than will conservatives. Finally, two more variables, gender and grade point average (GPA) of students, were included as control variables.

As mentioned previously in the study, 37.1 percent (85 students) expressed a favorable opinion of Turkey and only four percent (nine students) expressed an unfavorable opinion. The vast majority, 58.9 percent (135 students), said

they were indifferent to Turkey. Because there are only nine students with an unfavorable view, for statistical purposes, the study combines the unfavorable and indifferent portions to create a binary dependent variable and runs a logistic regression analysis to understand to what extent Centre College students' visitation experience, informational familiarity, cognitive image of Turkey as a democracy and political affiliation impact their perception of Turkey. In short, the study aims to shed some light on the following questions:

1. Do students who visited Turkey or have relatives and/or friends that visited Turkey have a more favorable opinion of Turkey than those who did not visit Turkey or have no relatives and/or friends that visited Turkey?
2. Do those students who are more knowledgeable on Turkey have a more favorable opinion of Turkey than those who are less knowledgeable?
3. Do students who think Turkey as a democracy have a more favorable view of Turkey than students who think otherwise?
4. Do self-reported liberal students claim more favorable views of Turkey than self-reported conservatives?

The results are presented in Table 4. It should be noted at the outset that the coefficients of the independent variables are in the expected sign and consistent with the literature. In addition, the inclusion or the removal of variables from the model does not generate significant changes in the model. The study finds that while the control variables, gender and GPA, are insignificant statistically, the other variables (visitation experience, informational familiarity, democracy and political party) seem to be positively related to Turkey's perception. The level of significance is greatest at the informational familiarity and democracy variables, somewhat weaker at the political party variable and the weakest at the visitation experience variable.

**Table 4:** Factors associated with Turkey's image: Model estimates and model summary

Model Estimates	Coefficient	Sig.	Exp (B)	Percentage change in odds
Constant	-1,582	.241	.206	
Visitation experience	.578	.133	1.783	78.3
Informational familiarity	.506	.003	1.659	65.9
Democracy	1.283	.002	3.606	260.6
Political party	.705	.07	2.024	102.4
Gender	.058	.876	1.059	5.9
GPA	-.447	.309	.640	-36
Model Summary	Value	Sig.		
Chi-square	30,907	0.000		
Cox-Shell R-square	.172			
Nagelkerke R-square	.234			

Table 4 demonstrates that after controlling other variables, having students or their friends/relatives visit Turkey boosts the odds of favorability towards Turkey by 78.3 percent. In other words, students who visited Turkey or students who have friends or relatives who visited Turkey are 1.783 times more likely to express a favorable opinion of Turkey than students who did not visit Turkey or have no relatives/friends that visited Turkey. The significance level of visitation experience is somewhat lower than one might expect ( $p = .13$ ), which may be attributed to the fact indirect visitation experience (family/friend visitation) is taken into account in this variable due to the small numbers of students who personally visited Turkey. Still, this finding is in the same line with the literature and it therefore may be concluded that exposure to Turkey, either first hand or through a friend or relative, tends to improve to students' perception of the nation.

Also, each one unit increase in informational familiarity increases the odds of expressing favorable opinion of Turkey by 65.9 percent. In other words, after taking other variables into account, a student who knew four factual questions on Turkey correctly is 1.659 times more likely to hold a positive opinion of Turkey than a student who knew three factual questions correctly. This means that as students get informed on Turkey, their attitudes towards the country change positively. This variable is statistically significant at .01.

The two political variables, Turkey's democratic image and students' political party affiliation, are also found to be positively associated with

Turkey's emotional image. Students who see Turkey as a democratic country are 3.606 times more likely to say they are favorable of Turkey than students who think Turkey is not democratic. Thus, Turkey's democratic image increases its favorability rate tremendously, as this variable is also found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Similarly, students who identify themselves with Democratic Party are 2.024 times more likely to express a favorable opinion of Turkey than do students who claim to be Republican. The political party variable is statistically significant with a p-value of .07.

### CONCLUSION

This study was designed to examine the knowledge and perception of Turkey, from students attending Centre College, a high-ranking U.S. liberal arts college. The research has found that students overall are not well informed on Turkey. For example, of the 229 survey participants, 109, (48 percent) were only able to answer one, if any, of the knowledge indication questions on Turkey. Also, although the majority of students perceive Turkey as a safe, modernized country with a democratic government, most of them are still 'indifferent' towards the country as a whole. If one takes into consideration the highly accomplished make-up of the Centre College student body, then it can be assumed that the general knowledge and perception of Turkey would be significantly lower in the general US population. Moreover, the study has shown that overall favorability of Turkey is related to students' knowledge of Turkey, visitation experience, democratic image of Turkey and their political party affiliation. Thus, attempts by policymakers to publicize information on Turkey, attract visitors to the country for both education and tourism, and spread its democratic image may significantly help improve its overall image in the US.

Of course, in reality, an individual's image of Turkey may be related to many other variables, like religious devotions and social backgrounds, which undoubtedly are also related to people's perception of Turkey. Thus, future studies may further explore how Turkey, a strategically located regional power, is known and perceived in the US and elsewhere. Thus, considering the lack of academic studies examining the knowledge and image of Turkey in the US and in other parts of the world, this research should be a welcome addition to the literature.

## NOTES

1. Despite the perceivably small size of its sample, the survey gets close to reflect the actual population. For example, a frequency test of gender and ethnicity reveals that the sample population was comprised of 52% males and 89% White Caucasian, while the college population is comprised of 46% males and 89% White Caucasian.
2. The Cronbach's Alpha score of the construct variable (informational familiarity) is .46, which is lower than the generally accepted value of .60 or .70. This could be attributed in some part to the fact that half of the knowledge questions were designed as multiple choice and the other half were 'fill in the blank,' which understandably increases the rate of the correct answers for the multiple choice questions. Nevertheless, this doesn't create a significant problem since the exclusion of the construct variable makes no significant changes in the coefficients and their signs in the overall model.

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