

TIME TO RECONSIDER?

THE CHAOS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TURKISH SUPPORT FOR THE EU

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Abstract

Support for European integration among Turks has dropped from 67% in 2002 to 34% in 2008, with only 42% of Turks supporting enlargement in a 2011 Eurobarometer. As previous research on Turkish Euroskepticism has demonstrated, the opposition to Turkish enlargement within European states—the so-called ‘Turkoskepticism,’ as well as Turkish economic growth and identity-based concerns are likely reasons for this declining trend. In this study, we push these findings further to demonstrate the effects of Turkish foreign policy on EU support. Do the Turks find the EU more favorable as their concerns on Iran, political Islam, or the Syrian civil war increase? Using Pew Global Attitudes Project survey from 2013, we demonstrate that as Turks view their regional neighborhood increasingly volatile and threatening, they see the European Union as a more favorable actor. This effect is consistent across different model specifications, and illustrates that concerns over the international political context is just as important in explaining Turkish public attitudes toward the EU as some of the well-established utilitarian explanations of support.

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Introduction:

Turkey's weakening relations with the European Union and the decline in Turkish public support for the EU during the last decade can best be defined as a downward spiral. This trend has been complemented by the visible shift in Turkey's foreign policy especially with the second Justice and Development Party (AKP) government toward the Middle East, reaching its zenith with the Arab Spring revolts. From 2011 onwards, Turkey became a far more assertive actor in the Middle East as exemplified first by its support for leadership change in Egypt and later by its vocal support against the Assad regime in Syria. Turkish activism, however, did not come without costs. The country's assertive foreign policy in the region soon became antagonizing, thus shifting the rhetoric from "zero problems with neighbors" to Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's "valuable isolation." Terrorist attacks in southern Turkey in the spring of 2013 prompted the public and the opposition elites to criticize Turkey's political involvement in the Syrian civil war, illustrating its dire domestic security consequences for Turkey. The more the country embedded itself within the Middle Eastern regional system, it seemed, the more it compromised its national security and complicated its relationship with the EU.

Turkey's unusual path to full membership has taken many twists and turns, especially since the early 2000s, and this convoluted path has clearly affected public support for the EU within Turkey. One of the most dramatic episodes in Turkish-EU relations happened in 2004, when Cyprus was granted EU membership merely one week after they rejected the Annan Plan that proposed a reunification of the island under Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities,

whereas Turkey was still waiting to become a candidate EU country. The shock of the 2004 enlargement was soon replaced with enthusiasm when the EU agreed to begin accession negotiations with Turkey in December 2004, and opened six of the 35 chapters of the acquis in October 2005. But it was not long before the relations between Turkey and the EU began to sour. Turkey's refusal to open its ports to the vessels of Cyprus, now an EU member, resulted in the freezing of negotiations in December 2005 (Avci 2011).

Between 2006 and 2011, Turkey also had to confront a series of domestic problems. These included the comeback of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) attacks in the southeast, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) clash with the Constitutional Court over their party's possible ban from politics, disclosure of coup plots to overthrow the government that led to the Ergenekon trials, and the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink that unleashed a myriad of discussions about the “deep-state,” as well as the rise of racism in Turkey. Avci (2011) explains that these problems halted the political reforms in Turkey, which led to the weakening of Turkish enthusiasm toward the EU.

Difficulties at home were complicated by relations with EU member states. In 2007, French President Nicolas Sarkozy vetoed the opening of the chapter on Economic and Monetary Union, perhaps the most central aspect of EU integration (Bilefsky 2007). Furthermore, the EU began to discuss the possibility of putting permanent safeguards on the mobility of Turkish labor once it was granted membership (Onis and Yilmaz 2009). The rise of Islamophobia, anti-immigrationist views, and the electoral victories of far-Right politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and Jorg Haider in Austria signaled that tough times were awaiting Turkey on its road to full membership.

In this study, we ask whether it is time to reconsider Turkish public attitudes toward the European Union in light of the new security challenges specifically posed by the developments in Syria since the Arab Spring revolts of 2011. Given the rise of Turkish activism in the region and the environment of insecurity that the Syrian civil war has created, do Turks once again view the European Union favorably?

Using the 2013 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, we answer this question by testing the well-established explanations in the literature regarding public support for the EU alongside our new explanations that capture the trade-off between regional security concerns and skepticism toward the European Union. Our analyses reveal that the previous generation of studies, which highlighted the effects of utility and identity-based factors on Turkish Euroskepticism, is no longer relevant. Instead, we find that Turkish public opinion toward the EU is increasingly shaped by the extent to which the citizens see their regional environment insecure and unstable. Our results suggest that as Turks voice greater concerns about the regional turmoil in the Middle East, they begin to view the European Union as a safe harbor, an alternative political actor. The results therefore suggest important implications not only for the Euroskepticism literature but for policy-makers as well. Given the chaos in Turkey's southern neighborhood, it might be time to shift the focus of Turkish foreign policy towards Europe.

We proceed as follows. In the next two sections, we provide an overview of the Euroskepticism literature with a focus on utilitarian and identity-based explanations, and then introduce a discussion of Turkey's involvement in the Middle East in the context of the Arab Spring revolts. We present our hypotheses in these sections before we move on to describe our data and variable specifications in part four. Next, we present our findings. We conclude with an overview of our results and suggest some avenues for future research.

Explaining Turkish Public Opinion towards the European Union:

Given the European Union's historical significance as a regional economic powerhouse, focusing on the economic advantages and disadvantages of the EU has been an indispensable part of those studies that explain public support for European Union. Two variants of this utilitarian explanation predominate the literature. First, egocentric explanations use objective measures of individual economic well-being such as age, level of education, and occupation group of respondents. Tucker and his co-authors (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Herzog and Tucker 2009), for instance, adopt an egocentric approach to argue that winners and losers of integration will vary in their support for the EU. They suggest that winners of integration will support the EU, whereas those who face economic loss following integration will be more Euroskeptical, with individual-skill level acting as another crucial variable (Gabel 1998a, b). This literature has also suggested that education-level can proxy skill-level (Gabel 1998b, McLaren 2002), where respondents with higher levels of education show stronger support for the European Union.

The literature on Turkish Euroskepticism has also tested the power of egocentric economic explanations (Kentmen 2008, Carkoglu and Kentmen 2011, Yilmaz 2011). Specifically, Carkoglu and Kentmen (2011) have illustrated that perceived personal economic benefits of the European Union positively influence public attitudes toward the European Union.

The Pew Global Attitudes Survey does not ask questions to capture the occupation groups of the respondents. However, the survey does ask questions to measure the extent to which the respondents are optimistic about their individual economic well-being within the context of their national economy. Building on the preceding discussion of personal economic well-being, we therefore generate two hypotheses. First, we argue that respondents with high levels of education should have more favorable attitudes toward the European Union (*Hypothesis*

1). In other words, those who can transport their skill-sets elsewhere in the high-skilled European workforce should see the European Union more favorably. Second, we expect that respondents who perceive their individual economic well-being positively should have more favorable views towards the European Union (*Hypothesis 2*).

The second strand of utilitarian explanations focuses on the evaluations of the national economy, otherwise known as the sociotropic explanations of EU support. Indeed, sociotropic explanations of support for integration have been investigated extensively in the literature on Western Europe (Brinegar, Jolly, and Kitschelt 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2004, 2005), as well as specifically in the context of Turkish Euroskepticism (Kentmen 2008; Carkoglu and Kentmen 2011). However, these studies tend to explain support for integration by looking at the extent to which EU membership will improve their home economies. In this study we move beyond this hypothesis to ask whether Turkish respondents' view of the national economy affects their favorability ratings for the EU regardless of what they might think about the potential economic advantages or disadvantages membership may bring. Sociotropic optimists, or people who think the Turkish economy is improving, have little to fear from European Union membership; further, they may view the chance to join Europe as boosting the economy even more. As part of our utilitarian explanations, we test whether positive evaluations of the national economy increase the public favorability of the European Union (*Hypothesis 3*).

In addition to utilitarian explanations, the literature on public support for the EU has emphasized the role of cultural factors. For example, McLaren (2002) argues that individual subjective perceptions that the EU threatens the culture of a country are critical in shaping attitudes. As such, individuals who see the EU as a threat to their national culture—however defined—should be less sympathetic towards it.

Specifically in the context of Turkish public opinion, cultural factors have received significant attention, especially with how enlargement has been politicized in the EU based on the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU, of which religion is the most apparent. Kentmen (2008) and Yilmaz (2011) argue that the role of religion is important in shaping Turkish attitudes toward the EU. Their empirical results have been contradictory, however. On the one hand, Kentmen's (2008) analysis shows that attachment to Islam does not have a significant influence on Turkish support for EU membership. On the other, Yilmaz (2011) finds that those who identify themselves as "barely religious" are among the top three non-Euroskeptic groups in Turkey, following pro-Kurdish voters and those with a high-level of knowledge about the European Union.

The religious composition of the Turkish society, coupled with the growing Islamic-conservative tendencies of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) increasingly highlights the cultural differences between Turkey and the European Union. The culture hypothesis expects that these differences should translate into attitudes on foreign policy including attitudes toward the European Union. Most recently, Ciftci (2013) has surveyed university students in Turkey to find that respondents with a religious attachment "are more likely to support the AKP's increased foreign policy involvement in the Middle East" (p. 39). However, the author has also argued that this does not necessarily lead to their lack of support for the EU. "The results also show," Ciftci (2013: 39) contends, "that respondents holding the same religious identity may be supportive of active foreign policy in the EU." Overall, there are ample theoretical reasons and empirical ambiguity to study the effects of religion on Turkish attitudes toward the European Union. Following this literature, we expect that respondents for whom religion has an important role in their lives should be more sensitive to the cultural

difference between the European Union and Turkey, and therefore have less favorable opinions toward the EU (*Hypothesis 4*).

The aforementioned theoretical perspectives on public support for the EU are well-established in the literature. What we introduce next concerns the role of foreign policy and regional politics on EU support—a theoretical perspective that, despite the more recent sine-wave of developments in Turkey’s foreign and regional policies, has been so far understudied.

Turkish Foreign Policy Activism and the Chaos in the Middle East:

In addition to Turkey's growing economic strength in the region, especially vis-à-vis the economic fragility of several South European EU member states in the recent past, studies have also emphasized the new activism and multi-directionality of Turkish foreign policy (Muftuler-Bac 2011; Onis and Yilmaz 2009; Aras and Fidan 2009; Altunisik and Martin 2011). Turkey’s Prime Minister and formerly the minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu has stated several years ago that “Turkey's multi-dimensional foreign policy has been firmly established for the past 45 years, and has been largely successful” (Davutoglu 2008).

Studies on Turkish foreign policy have used qualitative evidence to show that Turkish foreign policy began to shift towards what Onis and Yilmaz (2009, 13) call “soft Euro-Asianism,” which entails “foreign policy activism pursued with respect to all neighboring regions but with no firm-EU axis as was previously the case.” Indeed, over the last several years Turkey has become a significant actor in its neighborhood. Relations with Iraq took a turn away from conflict towards cooperation through the use of economic incentives: as of 2011, Turkey has become the largest trading partner of Iraq (Muftuler-Bac 2011). As Davutoglu (2008) explains in detail, Turkey has also become a mediator between Afghanistan and Pakistan; in Iraq

and Lebanon to help amend the sectarian disputes in these countries; and invited Iranian and European officials to Istanbul to create an opportunity for dialogue to discuss Iran's nuclear activities. Turkey's activism in the Israel-Palestine conflict and President Erdogan's vociferous advocacy for Palestine (especially Gaza) at the international level is also worth noting.

It was the Arab Spring, however, that clearly marked the high point of Turkey's foreign policy activism in the Middle East. Henri Barkey (2012) defines the period that began with the 2011 revolts as "The Would-be Regional Hegemon." Specifically, Barkey (2012) has argued that Turkey's "conciliatory" and "balancing" role in the region gave way to a far more assertive role in this period that is further justified by the international community's portrayal of this country as the "model state" for countries such as Egypt (Telhami 2012), which were taken by massive revolts toward regime change. Since 2011, Turkey has become a vociferous supporter of the new government following the departure of Mubarak, and albeit slowly, aligned with other NATO countries in responding to the revolts in Libya.

Turkish activism in the post-Arab Spring environment, however, came with significant political costs. Most notably, the relations with the Assad regime in Syria—which were mended only relatively recently during the early AKP years—soured at an unsettling pace during the leadership of the same political actors across both sides of the border, eventually leading to a matter of national security for Turkey. As Turkey began to give outright political support to the Syrian rebels fighting the Assad regime and therefore publicly took sides in the civil war, scholars have contended that the country "appears to have been drawn into the perennial sectarian conflicts such as the Sunni-Shi'a rivalry" (Onis 2014: 205).

Indeed, Onis (2014: 211) argues that "the result of this over-activism [in Syria] has been to bring growing security risks for Turkey on its southern border." He gives the example of the

Reyhanli attack that killed more than 50 civilians in the city of Hatay in southern Turkey in May 2013. The attack took place mere kilometers away from the Syrian border in a town that is “home to thousands of Syrian refugees in a gathering point for rebels fighting to topple President al-Assad,” thus heightening “the fears that the Syrian conflict had moved to Turkey” (Onis 2014: 215). It is especially remarkable that the attacks happened in May 2013, only two months after the Pew Global Attitudes survey was administered in Turkey, where respondents were asked—for the first time by Pew—whether they were concerned about the war spreading to Turkey. Clearly, the post-Arab Spring created greater room for Turkish activism in the Middle East and presented several economic and political opportunities that facilitated power projection, but perhaps more importantly, the country’s assertive foreign policy behavior in the region incurred significant risks for domestic political stability let alone limiting the country’s room for maneuver in the region.

How do the developments in the region, particularly pertaining to Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian conflict, influence Turkish attitudes toward the European Union? Recently, a new wave of studies has begun to suggest that as volatility increases in Turkey’s southern neighborhood, it should give the incentive for Turkey to switch gears and shift its foreign policy axis towards the West, namely the European Union. For example, the Istanbul-based think-tank, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, has released a report based on a nationally conducted survey earlier in 2015, whose results show that almost 23 percent of the respondents believe Turkey should cooperate with the European Union “to have a stronger economy and foreign policy.” Next come the “Arab States,” though only 11 percent of the respondents believe that Turkey should focus on these actors to strengthen its foreign policy (EDAM 2015).

The results are indicative of a change of heart among the Turkish public. Support for European integration among Turks has dropped from 67% in 2002 to 34% in 2008, with only 42% of Turks supporting enlargement in a 2011 Eurobarometer. As previous research on Turkish Euroskepticism has demonstrated, the opposition to Turkish enlargement within European states—the so-called ‘Turkoskepticism,’ as well as Turkish economic growth and identity-based concerns are likely reasons for this declining trend (Canan-Sokullu 2011, Kentmen 2008, Carkoglu and Kentmen 2011). However, we argue that the instability in the country’s southern neighborhood should reverse this trend, at least among concerned citizens. Turkey’s proactive foreign policy in the Middle East is in decline, most visibly with respect to its fast-deteriorating relations with the regime in Syria. We expect that the domestic security concerns created by the Syrian civil war should alert the Turkish public and stimulate positive attitudes toward the EU. Put differently, we hypothesize that as Turkish citizens voice serious concerns about the security implications of the Syrian civil war, they should view the EU more favorably (*Hypothesis 5*).¹

Data and Methods:

We use the 2013 Pew Global Attitudes Survey to test our expectations. The Pew surveys, administered annually, collect individual-level opinion data on a number of economic and political issues ranging from perceptions of national and individual economic well-being to support for democracy, Islamic extremism, to attitudes on other cultures.

The 2013 iteration of the survey spans 40 countries across the world, including Turkey.

For its Turkey component, Pew Global conducted face-to-face interviews in March 2013 with

¹ We would like to point out that the theoretical discussion presented here is by no means an exhaustive attempt to outline Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East or the regional security challenges (such as Hezbollah, Islamic extremism, Iranian nuclear program or Al Qaeda terrorism) that the country faces. In future drafts, we would like to discuss Turkey’s relationships with Iran and the challenges posed by this country as well as Hezbollah and Al Qaeda to better situate why Turkish public opinion has reasons to develop favorable opinions toward the European Union.

1000 respondents aged 18 and older across the seven administrative regions, resulting in a sample that represents the adult population (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2013). Previous studies in the literature utilizing the Pew surveys emphasize their “consistency with other empirical data,” most importantly with “surveys performed by the Turkish polling organizations” (Kennedy and Dickenson 2013). These insights provide us with greater confidence to use the Global Attitudes Survey for an analysis of Turkish public opinion towards the European Union.

The dependent variable for the study is *EU attitude*. This variable is based on the question “Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the European Union?”, where 1 is “very favorable,” 2 “somewhat favorable,” 3 “somewhat unfavorable” and 4 denotes “very unfavorable” attitudes. For ease of interpretation, the values are reversed, so that 4 captures “very favorable” and 1 captures “very unfavorable” attitudes, and so on.

Following the literature on the effects of sociotropic and egocentric evaluations of the domestic economy on EU attitudes, we include two variables, *Sociotropic* and *Egocentric*. The Pew survey asks two questions to capture sociotropic and egocentric evaluations, respectively: “Now thinking about our economic situation, how would you describe the current economic situation in Turkey – is it very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?” and “Now thinking about your personal economic situation, how would you describe it – is it very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?” The answer categories for each question range from 1 (very good) to 4 (very bad). Following the procedure for *EU attitudes*, the values are reversed so that 1 denotes very bad and 4 denotes very good, and so on.

To test the effects of domestic and foreign policy concerns on attitudes toward the European Union we utilize a number of independent variables. First and foremost, we use the

question asking respondents their concerns regarding the *Syrian civil war*: “And thinking specifically about our country, to what extent are you concerned that the violence in Syria will spread to Turkey – very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned?” We flip the answer categories so that 1 denotes “not at all concerned” and 4 denotes “very concerned.”

The other key independent variables capture the respondents’ attitudes toward a number of regional political actors and issues. These variables include *Islamic extremism* (1- not at all concerned, 4-very concerned) as well as *Hezbollah* and *Al Qaeda* (1- very unfavorable, 4- very favorable). Finally, we include a variable measuring the Turkish attitudes on the *Iranian nuclear program*, where the answer categories range from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned).

Finally, we include in our models a series of control variables to account for demographic factors. Following the literature on Euroskepticism, we test the effects of *age*, *gender* and *religiosity* on attitudes toward the EU. We also develop three dummy variables for education, where *low education* includes respondents with up to eight years of primary education, *low-mid education* includes respondents who completed junior high or high school, or their vocational equivalents, and *high education* includes respondents with a university degree or higher. These categories correspond to the variables utilized in previous literature (Brinegar and Jolly 2005, Kentmen 2008).

We include *Southeastern Turkey* as a final control variable capturing the respondent’s region of residence. While about 10 percent of respondents are from the southeastern region of Turkey, we expect that they will be particularly concerned regarding the Syrian civil war and therefore will have a significant effect on EU favorability.

For all of the above variables, respondents who refused to answer the questions or stated that they did not know were coded missing.

To estimate our models, we use ordinal logistic regression. This is a suitable choice given the categorical nature of our dependent variable, *EU attitudes*. In the next section, we present the results of these analyses.

Results:

Table 1 below presents our results, reporting the ordered log-odds regression coefficients. We begin with a basic model, Model 1, which tests the effects of key explanatory variables of EU support with the low education category as its baseline. The results of this model show that older respondents see the European Union significantly less favorable an actor at the international level. This finding not only corroborates the findings of the existing literature but also our own previous work that has studied Turkish mass support for EU membership across 2001 and 2010 (Jolly and Oktay 2012). Model 1 also shows that respondents with a university degree or higher are significantly more supportive of the European Union compared to those with fewer years of education.

Surprisingly, Model 1 suggests that neither individual-level nor national-level evaluations of the domestic economy have significant effects on Turkish attitudes toward the EU. Put differently, Turkish respondents do not evaluate the European Union by looking at its economic utility. This finding marks an important departure from the previous sets of results reported in the literature. Kentmen (2008) and Carkoglu and Kentmen (2011) among others have investigated the sociotropic explanations of support (for EU integration) across time and multiple survey datasets to find that national and individual evaluations of the economy have significant positive

influence on support for EU membership among the Turkish public. By 2013, however, we find that assessments of the national economy have no effect on the extent to which the EU is perceived as a favorable actor.

This is an especially meaningful result in light of the positive developments in the Turkish economy since 2002. Turkey has maintained an average growth rate of almost 7 percent between 2002 and 2007, whereas during the same period the average growth rate for the EU-25 was 2.3 percent (Eurostat). Even though the trend in Turkish economic growth began to decline in the run up to the 2009 global economic crisis, the country was able to maneuver its way out of the crisis without major damages. Economic growth rate dipped to a dismal -9.8 percent in 2009, though the next year it jumped back to 10 percent, making Turkey one of the fastest growing economies along with China. Turkey is now the 16th biggest economy in the world (Muftuler-Bac 2011).

Turkey's economic growth is also indicated by increasing levels of foreign trade. Data show that the amount of total exports more than quadrupled between 2001 and 2011, and an average of 67 percent of all exports during this period were sent to the European Union (Turkish Statistical Institute). Clearly, Turkey's economic competitiveness in the global markets has increased over time, and Turkish goods found significant market opportunities in the European Union. Although this is facilitated by Turkey's Customs Union agreement, it is plausible to argue that the country's market competitiveness in the EU and the overall upward trend in economic outlook has led the public to evaluate the European Union without anchoring their opinion to an economic calculus.

Next, we include our key policy variables in Model 2, while keeping low education as the baseline category. As we hypothesized, concerns about the Syrian war have a significant positive

effect on favorability of the EU. Specifically, the likelihood of having favorable attitudes toward the EU increases as respondents are more concerned about the possibility of Syrian civil war spreading to Turkey. This finding suggests important implications for Turkish foreign policy as well as the role of the European Union for Turkish public. Clearly, Turkish respondents see the European Union as an anchor—a *balancing* anchor—when regional stability is disturbed.

Turkish proactive foreign policy towards the Middle East in recent years has received growing public support especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, leading to a concurrent loss of public as well as elite interest in the country's bid for European Union membership.

The results of our analysis suggest that this dynamic is now being challenged with the turmoil in the country's immediate neighborhood. The Syrian civil war continues to destabilize the region and threatens domestic stability along Turkey's southern border. In response to the souring environment in the Middle East, Turks increasingly see the European Union as a favorable actor. Most interestingly, this effect holds while the demographic and economic variables from Model 1 are still accounted for. On the other hand, attitudes toward Al Qaeda or the Iranian nuclear program have no significant effect on attitudes toward the European Union. The threats posed by these regional actors and issues clearly pale in comparison to the severity of the concerns generated by the Syrian civil war.

Last, we build on Model 2 and include the interaction effect, *Syrian civil war* * *Southeastern Turkey*. We hypothesized earlier that the EU's favorability ratings should vary across regions, especially with regards to those living in the southeastern region of Turkey where the Syrian civil war poses the most immediate security threats. We expected that respondents living in the southeast should amplify the effect of the concerns regarding the Syrian civil war on the favorability of the European Union. The interaction term in Model 3 shows, however, that

while the intensity of concerns over the Syrian civil war continues to increase the favorability of the EU among Turkish respondents, whether or not the respondents come from this specific part of the country does not moderate or amplify the effect of these concerns on attitudes toward the European Union.

Table 1. Turkish Attitudes toward the European Union

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-0.022*** (0.006)	-0.018** (0.006)	-0.018** (0.006)
Low-mid education	0.287 (0.169)	0.421* (0.199)	0.429* (0.199)
High education	0.827*** (0.218)	0.954*** (0.252)	0.965*** (0.252)
Female	0.068 (0.135)	-0.072 (0.158)	-0.064 (0.159)
Sociotropic economic evaluations	-0.004 (0.089)	0.007 (0.104)	0.007 (0.104)
Egocentric economic evaluations	0.105 (0.093)	0.185 (0.111)	0.181 (0.111)
Religiosity	0.046 (0.109)	-0.051 (0.133)	-0.043 (0.134)
Syrian civil war		0.237** (0.085)	0.276** (0.089)
Al Qaeda		0.153 (0.107)	0.140 (0.107)
Iranian nuclear program		-0.037 (0.202)	-0.045 (0.202)
Southeastern Turkey		-0.034 (0.313)	1.384 (0.951)
Syrian civil war*Southeastern Turkey			-0.461 (0.294)
<hr/>			
cut1			
_cons	-0.353 (0.524)	0.518 (0.672)	0.647 (0.678)
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cut2			
_cons	0.747 (0.525)	1.704* (0.676)	1.839** (0.683)
<hr/>			
cut3			
_cons	2.850*** (0.542)	3.777*** (0.695)	3.912*** (0.702)
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<i>Pseudo-R</i> ²	0.0327	0.0453	0.047
<i>N</i>	782	609	609

Coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses.

DV: Attitudes toward the European Union

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusion:

Turkey's relationship with the European Union has historically been dramatic, embedded in ebbs and flows of relative economic conditions as well as mutual perceptions of differences and doubts. Even though the AKP had made great strides in pushing the accession process forward, they were soon outweighed as a result of a remarkable shift in foreign policy away from Europe and towards the Middle East. The public opinion in Turkey by and large echoed the change in government policy. EU favorability has decreased significantly over time, reaching a new low by 2011.

The glory days of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, however, where the country was once portrayed as the model state for countries such as Egypt (Telhami 2012) were rather short-lived. The tides reversed specifically with respect to Turkey's relationship the Assad regime in Syria when Turkey chose to give support to the rebel fighters. Further political involvement in the war translated into regional insecurity and instability, raising public concerns in Turkey over whether the country could be eventually pulled into the Syrian unrest.

In this increasingly volatile regional context, we have argued that it is time to reconsider the role of the European Union in Turkish politics, specifically with a focus on the change in Turkish public attitudes. We have posited that given the regional instability in its southern neighborhood, Turks should begin to see the EU as a more favorable actor. Our analyses have illustrated that this is indeed the case: while the younger population and highly educated respondents continue to view the European Union favorably, thus echoing previous analyses, we have demonstrated that the concern over the possibility that the Syrian civil war could spread to Turkey is the key predictor of Turkish favorability towards the European Union.

This marks a notable departure from the literature on Euroskepticism. Our finding shows that it is time we move beyond utilitarian and identity-based explanations of support for the EU to better understand Turkish Euroskepticism. Public attitudes toward the EU are shaped by a myriad of factors including perceived economic benefit and culture, but these are by no means exhaustive explanations of support. The international political context is just as important as these well-established explanations—and in the Turkish case presented here, it seems that the international context is key to understanding why Turks begin to perceive the EU as a valuable actor to have on their side. This is also an important insight for policymaking as it illustrates that Turkish public opinion provides both European and Turkish policymakers with the opportunity to thaw relations.

Areas of improvement still remain. Most importantly, the analysis we provide here only highlights the regional political situation in 2013, while the historical context we discuss easily dates back to 2010, when Turkey began to become more vocal in its Middle Eastern neighborhood. The next step for our project is therefore to develop a temporal analysis of public opinion towards the European Union while taking into account the variation in public attitudes toward the regional context. Furthermore, incorporating political and economic variables measuring the foreign policy orientations of the Turkish government as well as the national economic environment should enable a more rigorous study of contextual effects alongside the individual-level explanations of support for the European Union.

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