

U TURKEY PROGRAMME

Greece and Turkey in the world today: The public's view

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Introduction

The third joint poll in Greece and Turkey took place over the first ten days of May 2022, before the recent deterioration in bilateral relations and the unprecedented attacks made by the President of Turkey against the Prime Minister of Greece. The poll highlights *inter alia* the divergence between the representations of Greek and Turkish public opinion in relation to the US and Russia, with Greek public opinion tending to be more pro-Russian, and the balanced view of the US and Russia which manifested itself in the responses of the Turks polled, which is not consistent with the perception that Turkey has aligned itself with Russia. This is the first poll conducted since the start of the war in Ukraine, which is transforming the geopolitical situation in Europe and the balance of power between Russia and the US.

The poll was supported by diANEOSIS, designed by ELIAMEP and the Istanbul Policy Center (IPC), and conducted by MRB and KONDA in Greece and Turkey respectively, with the participation of 1003 Greek and 1786 Turkish citizens. This followed the first two joint polls which took place in February and December 2021, with the participation of 1,022 Greek and 1,163 Turkish citizens in the former and 1,008 Greek and 2,731 Turkish citizens in the latter.

The findings of the survey also show that the Greek public has embraced an exceptionalist perception of Greece and Greek culture and values as constituting an exception in the Western world, while the Turks perceive Turkey as being unique.

Importantly, the findings also show that the EU and Western values and models are more popular among Turkey's opposition parties and less so among parties that support the government.

US, Russia, NATO and foreign policy

The findings also reveal an intriguing gap between the representations of Greek and Turkish public opinion, on the one hand, and the foreign policy of the two countries, on the other. While the Greek public is more well-disposed towards Russia than their Turkish counterparts, Turkish foreign policy has kept channels of communication open with Russia and refuses to participate in the sanctions imposed on that nation. Moreover, while 61.1% of Greeks believe that Russia has strong cultural and historical ties with Greece, only 33.7% consider Russia to be a key strategic partner for their country. The survey confirms that the relationship between Athens and Moscow is a relationship of identity based primarily on religion (69.1%) and culture / family values (43.5%). The belief that the Greeks have more in common with the Russians in terms of their religiosity and family values is held across the political spectrum in every age group but is more likely to be held by those on the left of the political spectrum.

In contrast, 50.4% of Turks consider Russia to be a key strategic partner for Turkey, although only 30.5% consider Russia to have strong cultural and historical ties with Turkey.

Also of note is the distrust expressed of the US and NATO, and a simultaneous refusal to view Russia as a threat, despite its invasion of Ukraine.

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The survey reveals a very low percentage of positive views vis-à-vis the EU's role in the world, at just 36.8% (in Turkey, the percentage is quite a bit lower), and a significant percentage (31.5%) of negative views on its global role (in Turkey the percentage is much higher). The Greeks polled are split virtually down the middle in how they perceive the EU's role in the world. However, though low, the percentage of Greeks with a more positive view of the EU's role in world affairs is still higher than the percentages who are positive about the roles of NATO and the US (the percentages for Greece are higher than for Turkey).

A total of 58.5% of the Greeks and 55.3% of the Turks polled believe that the European Union supports the other nation at the expense of their own.



These percentages fall slightly when the question is asked in relation to the United States. Here, 47.4% of Greeks and 50.3% of Turks believe that the United States supports the other nation at the expense of theirs. But this does not mean that Greeks and Turks are in favour of an American presence in Europe. In fact, only 26.2% of the Greek respondents and 17.6% of the Turks polled consider the United States to be a natural partner in European security and the American presence in Europe a factor which contributes to peace. In contrast, 51% of the Greeks and 47.9% of the Turks polled believe that the United States should not be involved in European security issues, since its involvement probably increases tensions and insecurity.

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And although the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlights NATO's role and historic mission in Europe, Greek and Turkish public opinion remains unmoved.

According to the survey results, the Turks are highly reticent about the US, while the Greeks reveal a wide range of perceptions of both the US, with which they feel closer in terms of security and lifestyle, and of Russia, to which they feel closer in terms of values and religiosity. In contrast to the perceptions of Russia, about which views are fairly consistent across the political spectrum, ideology seems to impact significantly on how respondents perceive the US. Those who answered that Greece has more in common with the US in the spheres of foreign policy (55%), security (44.9%) and lifestyle (52.6%) tend to be on the right of the political spectrum. Another element confirmed by the survey is that suspicion about the role of the US in Greece does not work to the advantage of other powers.

Asked which country, the US or Russia, they have more in common with, 34.4% of Greek respondents said, when it comes to security issues, Greece and the US have almost identical interests; only 14.2% said the same of Russia. Another 33.9% were somewhere in the middle. These findings show that, despite the fact that Greece has moved very close to the US on security issues, the percentage of citizens who believe that the interests of the two countries almost completely coincide remains rather low.

Similarly, in Turkey, only 16.1% of the respondents consider their nation's security issues to be identical to those of the US, while 19.2% consider Turkey to have identical security issues with Russia; a further 20.6% were somewhere in the middle. It should be pointed out here that, as might be expected, the international context and international problems impact on the way citizens perceive the concept of "security". Thus, health security was considered the most important security dimension by 79.2% of Greek respondents and 77.1% of the Turks polled, reflecting the current pandemic conditions. National security was listed as the second most important security dimension by 48.3% of both the Greeks and Turks polled, confirming that threats to national security are a consistent and long-standing concern. Employment security ranks third.

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The same and even greater divergences were apparent in the sphere of foreign policy, with 40.5% of the Greeks polled expressing the view that they have identical interests with the US in foreign policy, compared to only 15% of the Turkish respondents. Only 20.5% of the Turks polled believe that their country's foreign policy concerns and objectives are identical to Russia's, and only 11.3% of Greek respondents.

Perception of Turkey's "uniqueness"

The survey's results indicate that Turkish public opinion has not chosen Russia over the US on security and foreign policy issues, and that the prevailing perception in Turkey is that, while the US is not a key partner, Russia has not taken its place. The survey results show that Eurasianism is not a powerful force in Turkish public opinion, and this is reflected in the policies adopted by the Turkish government which, rather than definitively choosing between the US and Russia, continues to oscillate between the two, taking pains to always leave communication channels open.

An overwhelming majority of Turkish citizens (80.9%) believe that Turkey should have an independent foreign policy; this view is shared by supporters of all political parties, revealing a broader consensus.

In all, 62.3% of Greek citizens believe it is important for Greece to have an independent foreign policy. While this is markedly lower than the corresponding figure for Turkish respondents, it is still very high, given that Greece is a member not only of NATO, like Turkey, but also of the EU.

A noteworthy percentage of the Turks polled who either did not know or did not answer, with 44.1% not answering the question about shared security issues and 44.7% not providing a response to common foreign policy issues and concerns. In contrast, the corresponding percentages for Greek respondents were 17.5% and 18%. The high percentage of Turkish respondents who don't know and/or didn't answer shows that the Turks polled are less interested in foreign policy issues than the Greeks.

As far as Turkey is concerned, the above results reflect the broader view that has emerged in Turkey in recent years that the country is "unique", and that, since it is not in a position of 'weakness', it does not have to choose between two great powers. According to this predominant view, Turkey is also a great power, or at least a power with a significant international presence.

This perception is also highlighted by the results of the first iteration of the joint survey, in which 83.5% of the Turks polled expressing the belief that their country's culture is greater than the cultures of other countries. The corresponding figure for Greek respondents was 49.5%.

Who is responsible for the war in Ukraine?

Only 60% of Greek respondents, compared with 72.2% of the Turks polled, think that Russia is responsible for the war in Ukraine. In addition, 53.3% of the Greek respondents, and only 35.3% of the Turks polled, believe that NATO enlargement provides just cause for Russian aggression in the Black Sea region.

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The war in Ukraine is mainly viewed through the prism of geopolitical rivalry and is seen as a product of NATO enlargement. This is the view promoted by the Russian narrative, though it is also supported by Western analysts.

In addition, a high percentage of Greek respondents (almost 45%) believe that the war in Ukraine is "imperialist", with this view more prominent among respondents on the left (almost 55%) and less so on the right (35.5%).

Who individual respondents blame for the war in Ukraine is tightly bound up with their political ideology, with respondents on the left (64.8%) considering the US responsible and 57.4% blaming Russia. In contrast, citizens in the centre and on the right of the political spectrum hold Russia responsible (65% and 65.6% respectively), with the US blamed by 52.9% and 34.4% respectively.

Greek exceptionalism

38.5% of Greek citizens consider their way of life to be extremely similar to the way of life in the US, compared with 12% of Turkish citizens. However, 20.9% of Greek respondents consider their way of life to be identical to the way of life in Russia; a very similar percentage of the Turks polled (19%) agreed.

However, while Greek citizens feel much closer to the US in terms of security, foreign policy and lifestyle, only 16.3% feel that they have identical family values to the US, compared with 43.5% who feel they have identical values to Russia. For the Turks polled, these percentages are 8.7% and 20.8% respectively.

Significant divergences between Greek and Turkish respondents are also to be found in cultural matters, while the divergence in relation to religiosity is considerable, with 69.1% of Greeks polled feeling they have a great deal in common with Russia, as opposed to 12.2% of the Turks. Only 8% of the Greeks and Turks polled felt they had a great deal in common with the USA in these areas.

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Only 59.8% were of the opinion that Greece is a Western country. This view was held across the political spectrum. Younger generations were less likely to consider Greece Western (43.8% in the 17–34 age group) than older generations (65.4% in the 55–64 age group).

Similarly, 38.9% consider Western cultural norms to be a threat to the Greek way of life, a high percentage for a country that belongs to every Western institution and is considered the birthplace of Western values. However, in contrast, only 30.3% of the respondents in the 17–34 age group share the view that Western cultural norms are under threat in Greece, which is low compared to the 55–64 age group (45.3%).

The survey thus shows that Greeks do not consider themselves Western (although they consider themselves to have more in common with the US in terms of lifestyle). They do not consider their state to be Western, either. Nonetheless, 47.5% would prefer to live in a European country/EU and another 10.2% in the US.

The above findings reflect a broader perception that seems prevalent in Greek society that Greece belongs to the West institutionally and politically but comprises an exception among its Western partners in terms of its values and culture.

Western values in Turkey

Only 29.6% of Turkish citizens consider Turkey to be a Western country, but only 34.3% consider Western models to be a threat to the Turkish way of life, compared to 38.9% of the Greeks polled.

In all, 47.3% of Turkish respondents believe that Turkey should conform to Western standards, which is a very high percentage.

According to the poll data, there are significant divergences vis-à-vis these issues between supporters of the government, a large number of whom believe that Western models do threaten the Turkish way of life, and opposition supporters, a far smaller number of whom are of this opinion.

The same large divergence can also be seen in responses to the question whether democracy in Turkey should conform to Western models, with a much larger number of opposition supporters than government supporters expressing the opinion that Turkey should.

These findings spotlight the importance of Western models for the Turkish opposition and reflect the broader perception in opposition circles that Turkey should reorient itself towards the West in terms of its democratic and lifestyle models. This makes the West and anti-Westernism crucial elements in Turkish domestic politics.

Pessimism about the economy

The pessimism which respondents in both countries expressed in relation to the future of their respective national economy was also pronounced, although Turkish public opinion remained consistently more pessimistic throughout the sequential phases of the poll. The view that the economic situation will deteriorate over the next twelve months was shared by 57% of Greeks and 49.9% of Turks in February 2021, 48.3% of Greeks and 51.7% of Turks in December 2021, and 60.7%

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of Greeks and 68.2% of Turks in May 2022. The loss of any hope in the Turkish economy turning around, with its problems made more difficult still by the rise in interest rates in the United States, partly explains the Turkish government's shift to a more confrontational approach to a number of foreign policy issues.

Conclusions

A high degree of political and ideological ferment characterized both Greece and Turkey today, with Turkey dominated by an official narrative of "uniqueness" which is clearly reflected in the survey's findings. In Greece, these processes seem further removed from politics, and may in fact be contrary to the political decisions that have fully aligned Greece with the US and the EU, given that the perception of Greek exceptionalism is reflected in the survey results regarding cultural values and Greek identity in relation to the West.

Contrary to the prevailing view that Eurasianism is now a dominant force in Turkey, and that the country has chosen to align itself with Russia, the poll highlights the fact that Turkey has not actually chosen between Russia and the US—a fact that is also reflected in Ankara's official policy. For the Greeks polled, while the US is an important factor for their nation's security and foreign policy, they feel closer to Russia when it comes to values and cultural issues, while the majority would like Greece to have an independent foreign policy.