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THE PERCEPTION OF TURKEY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE LAST DECADE: THE
CASES OF EGYPT AND TUNISIA

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors affecting the perception of Turkey in the Middle East from 2002 onwards by analyzing the combination of media, political elite discourse and people's political predispositions in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia. The research is separated into two parts. In the first part of 2002-2010, the factors of democratization, economic development, foreign policy activism, Islamic Oriented Government as well as Turkish TV series were found to be critical in the explanation of Turkey's popularity.

In the second part of 2010-2013, democratization and foreign policy activism were the most effective factors while the other variables still had some effect. In particular the study looked at the news titles, articles, headlines in newspapers, as well as the views of journalists, activists, bloggers, politicians, and academics, which together shaped public perception. A brief historical background is also given in regards to the mutual prejudices and stereotypes between Arabs and Turks during Ottoman rule and the 20th century.

The thesis concludes by emphasizing the continuation of democratic progress and reforms in Turkey as well as the need for foreign policy adjustment according to crisis situations as a policy recommendation for the government. The present study also seeks to contribute to both the public opinion theory of Zaller and the recent literature on the “Turkish Model”.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Turkey's modernization sped up with the start of the 21st century and the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in Turkish politics. The government swiftly implemented many economic and political reforms, and many developments occurred in terms of democratization, such as the normalization of civil-military relations, constitutional changes enabling civil rights and liberties, and judicial reforms that reduced the role of the secular-nationalist Kemalist military-bureaucratic establishment. Turkey's economy reached a GDP per capita of almost \$15,000 with a growth rate of approximately 8% and became the 17th largest in the world.

A new wave of activism also emerged in the foreign policy field which included peace-building efforts between Syria and Israel and Israel and Palestine. A largely independent foreign policy emerged with the rejection of the Bush administration's plan to move American troops to Iraq through Turkish territory in 2003, opposition to the sanctions against Iran, and harsh criticism of Israel for its killings of Palestinians and the Gaza blockade. Critics have blamed the AK Party for a shift from Western-oriented foreign policy to one directed towards the Middle East. Critics have also labeled the government as Neo-Ottomanist because of its goal of improving relations with the Arab Muslim countries of the Middle East. All these factors constituted a new "Turkish Model" which emerged first in Western circles and gradually spread through the region and was debated amongst various scholars of Turkish foreign policy.

The main purpose of this thesis is to find out the impact of the democratic dimension of this so called "Turkish model". While agreeing that all factors (such as economic development, an Islamic-oriented government, and regional activism) are likely important for

the rise of Turkish influence in the region, the aim of this study is to explain to what extent and how democratization inside Turkey has affected its regional influence. Other variables have merit in helping too. The admiration of Turkey in the Middle East occurs not just because of its democratic governance but also for other reasons, such as regional activism, which together form Turkey's soft power. Other variables may also play a role as important determinants of regional influence.

It is important to clarify the definition of regional influence. It is soft power coming from positive regional perception among the Arab public and elites rather than influence through military power and economy. Turkey has a limited capability, in terms of economic and military power, to exert influence in the region. So Turkey is left with only soft power through offering an admirable example and inspiration due to the aforementioned qualities. However, this image of Turkey as an Islamic country with democratic government has deteriorated in recent years, especially after the AK Party's third term. There have been many criticisms of the government because of a slowed down European Union membership process. Also, it has been argued that the government has shown a tendency towards authoritarianism by reversing democratic gains. Critics focus on the government's refusal to give the Kurds their natural language and cultural rights, handling the Kurdish issue from only a military-security perspective, and declining press freedom with some journalists fired for criticizing the government. Therefore, democratization has been selected as the main independent variable. This is not only because of declining democratization in Turkey but also because the region has experienced important democratic changes with the Arab Spring. Before the Arab Spring one could argue that public opinion did not matter since many of the countries in the Middle East were ruled by authoritarian regimes. These dictatorships did not take into account whether their subjects had favorable opinions in regards to Turkey, and they

decided what kind of foreign policy to pursue, independent of public opinion. However, with the Arab Spring and increasing democratization in the region, public opinion has become more important, and regimes are likely to better reflect Arab people's views. In this type of environment, the perception of Turkey will significantly matter. Now, it is not just about elites ruling the country arbitrarily, but the opinions of people who are very much interested in and following the developments inside Turkey matter, too.

Hypothesis

Because of the aforementioned realities, the following hypotheses have been derived;

H1: As the level of internal democratization increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will become more positive.

H2: As the level of foreign policy activism increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will become more positive.

H3: As the level of economic development increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will become more positive.

H4: As the level of Islamic orientation or policies of the government increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will become more positive.

H5: As the number of TV series widespread in the region increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will become more positive.

As one can see from these hypothesis, other independent variables include economic development, Islamic-oriented government, foreign policy activism, and Turkish TV series.

In line with the hypothesized effect, there is likely an important positive relationship between internal democratization and regional perception. It can also be argued that with the

rise of authoritarian tendencies and the reversal of democratic reforms in Turkey, the Arab public's perception of Turkey will become more negative, and that, in turn, will lead to the decreasing influence of Turkey since, in the long term, many countries in the Middle East will be in a democratic trend and care about the opinions of their citizens.

It is important to understand the extent of the effect of democratization on Turkey's regional perception because it will have important policy implications on behalf of Turkey, if the findings of this research support the hypothesized effect. Turkey will have to be careful about its democratization and domestic politics, since it is closely followed by Arab publics, and this, in turn, will have consequences for Turkey's regional influence and foreign policy.

In the area of popular culture which is directly linked to perception, it cannot be said that there is a conscious government effort to spread Turkish culture to the Middle East. In public diplomacy the government was inadequate in providing the necessary tools to increase popularity among Arab publics. While it is undeniable that Turkish TV series have a huge role in spreading popular culture and popularity, the government did not have a role on that.

Data/ Methods

My methodology consists of case studies of Turkey's period of successful democratization as well as its period of declining reforms and democratization. I will test H1 accordingly. I will look at The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV)'s 2009-2012 perception of Turkey report which includes surveys and data about many important issues regarding Turkey's regional influence. I will compare the different years in which TESEV's research is conducted and see the percentage difference in Turkey's popularity and perception levels and other questions related to Turkey's regional influence/soft power/"Turkish Model". For example, if one compares 2011 and 2012's

favorable opinions of Turkey, one will see a decline, on average, from 78% to 69%.¹ I argue that this is due to the decline of democratization in these years.

TESEV which was founded in 1961 is Turkey's leading civil society organization. It is an independent non-governmental think tank which produces knowledge on social, political, and economic issues mostly related to Turkey. Based in Istanbul, TESEV attempts to be a bridge between academic research and the policy-making process in Turkey. It organizes seminars and conferences and releases project reports, books, and policy-watch briefings aimed at general readership. Democratization, foreign policy, and good governance are three general program areas under which TESEV conducts research. Since 2009, TESEV has been publishing reports on the perception of Turkey in the Middle East under the Foreign Policy Program.² According to their website, TESEV "aims to promote the role of civil-society in the democratic process and seeks to share its research findings with the widest possible audience. TESEV focuses on the most urgent and important policy questions facing Turkey and its neighbors in the new century."³

For the 2009 report, "simultaneous interviews were conducted by telephone in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and face-to-face in Iraq. A total of 2,006 people were interviewed."⁴ The survey's questions were prepared by TESEV's Foreign Policy Program and KA Research Company with the support of political scientists from various universities in Turkey. When we look at the respondents in TESEV's 2009 report, we see that the majority of the respondents belong to the 18-44 age groups where the young people interviewed comprise the majority at 26%. The majority of the respondents are also well educated with 39% having medium and 45% high education. The majority of the respondents are also regular or daily TV viewers, newspaper readers and daily internet users.⁵

According to TESEV's website “The 2010 survey was conducted in the same seven Arab countries but, unlike 2009, it was also conducted in Iran. In total, 2,267 people were surveyed by telephone or face-to-face. These results show a statistically significant increase in positive opinion of Turkey.”⁶

According to the 2010 report from TESEV, “The Image of Turkey Survey in the Middle East is a cross-country survey conducted by the mixed mode method including Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and Face-to Face Interviewing (F2F) by KA Research Limited of Istanbul. Interviews were conducted among a random sample of approximately 286 individuals aged 18 and over in the major 3 or 4 cities of the survey countries. The questionnaire consisted of 40 substantive questions 12 demographic questions, and 20 quality control questions. The poll has a +/- 2.06% margin of error at the regional level and a +/- 5.8% for individual countries at the 95% confidence level.”⁷ In the following years, the number of countries and people included in the TESEV survey increased.

As an indication of its independence, TESEV has been supported by many diverse institutions including the Soros foundation, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth office, the World Bank, Freedom House, the European Institute, and the National Endowment for Democracy. Despite some arguments made against the objectivity of TESEV saying that its views are the reflection of Soros' Open Society Foundation, a major funder, I suggest these are biased and prejudiced opinions of people who made their decisions without even reading the content of TESEV's reports.⁸ According to the newspaper article, Erdogan supported TESEV's work and his daughter even worked as an intern in TESEV. However it is definitely not possible to argue that it is under the control of the government. It is generally deemed to

be a liberal institution, far from the interests and ideologies of certain parties in Turkish society.⁹

Moreover I will also look at Fatih University`s Department of International Relations` 2011 and 2013 research project on the perceptions of Turkey amongst its neighbors, again involving surveys and data about this issue. Likewise, I will use many other polls and opinion data about the perception of Turkey. In addition to this, I will look at news titles, articles, and headlines in the newspapers as well as the views of politicians, journalists, academics, activists etc. and do a qualitative and interpretive analysis of journalistic and expert opinions in selected information outlets to understand the perception of Turkey in Egypt and Tunisia.

Fatih University is a private independent research institution based in Istanbul. In 2011 its Department of International Relations published a project called “Perception of Turkish Foreign Policy of the Elites in Neighboring Countries”. As a continuation of this research they published another project in 2013 called “How do elites in the Middle East Perceive Turkish Foreign Policy” but this time with an increased number of countries and focusing on the Middle East. With the help of the department's research assistants, phone and face to face interviews were conducted with educated elites such as academics, journalists, graduate students, politicians etc.

In the first project, interviews were conducted with approximately 50 persons from each country except Iran and totaling 318 persons. These people, according to the authors, “were directly or indirectly effective individuals in the decision making process and above the average in terms of education, economic and social status.”¹⁰ The first project included twenty one survey questions while the second had sixteen. In both projects survey questionnaires were directed to the respondents asking them to choose among multiple

options given in the survey, and the data was derived from these answers. After analyzing the data the results were obtained by taking percentages of respondents' answers.

The importance of democratization in Turkey will be highlighted by using several indicators to understand the level of democracy in the different periods of AK Party's rule. Reports and projects evaluating Turkey's human rights, civil liberties, freedom level, press freedom etc. will be used to understand and operationalize my main independent variable: democratization of Turkey. By looking at reports such as Freedom House, Press Freedom, democracy ranking etc., it will be determined whether there is declining or increasing democracy in the respective time periods. Then a comparison will be made by showing if an increasing or declining democracy resulted in positive or negative public perception of Turkey. The results of public perception reports about Turkey in the Middle East will be used in this process. Instead of conducting an independent quantitative study, this study will utilize existing quantitative studies and their results to test the hypotheses. Various primary and secondary sources will be employed to show the importance of the independent variables. The study will also try to demonstrate the further importance and hypothetically exceptional role of democratization.

While there is enough evidence to support that democratization advanced in the first period(2002-2010) and declined during the latter (2010-2013), there is no data (in terms of surveys and polls) for my dependent variable showing that in the early 2002-2010 period, perception of Turkey in the Middle East was actually favorable. My data starts from 2009 with TESEV's reports on perceptions of Turkey. This suggests that, in terms of concrete data with polls and surveys, this study will only look at the 2009-2013 period. However, I will refer to other resources such as books, articles, and newspapers to see if there is an increase

in positive Arab public perception of Turkey in the 2002-2010 period the lack of reports from this period.

Along with Egypt, Tunisia is another good case study for examining perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East. Since it was the first country to experience the Arab Spring, and since it has an educated middle class and democratic political culture, it is a perfect fit for this study's purposes. Tunisia is also the most successful example of the "Arab Spring" in terms of democratic development. I previously argued that interest in Turkey, the "Turkish Model", and Turkish democratic developments increased greatly after the Arab Spring. In Tunisia it is very likely that perception of Turkey will improve or worsen depending on the condition of rights and freedoms in Turkey.

The lack of sectarian considerations is another reason why I chose Tunisia. I designed my research to be a qualitative induction, generalizing and making arguments about the whole Middle East. However, I had to control for the Z variable which is not included in my original variables. It is hard to include various other factors that might have affected perception in a limited scope study like this one. Sectarian ideologies and predispositions are excluded from my research, thus barring the study from including countries such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. Whether or not Ankara would become involved in sectarian politics, it is seen as a predominantly Sunni country and as a "Sunni Power" in Shiite majority countries in the Middle East¹¹. This might limit Turkey's influence and cause negative perceptions. Also, the bloody civil war still continuing in Syria is another reason not to choose this country. Likewise, the decades old Israeli-Palestinian conflict may cause problems with using Palestine as a case for this study. It was very important to keep these additional factors constant to better test the hypotheses.

The question of why the researcher picked the two case studies of Egypt and Tunisia arises as well as whether there was any bias in regards to the selection of these cases. In response to this, first of all, the researchers face the problem of selection bias more commonly in quantitative studies rather than qualitative case studies such as this one. Apart from many other reasons of selecting Egypt and Tunisia, I already indicated the importance of democratic movements and changes in the region recently, especially the role of “Arab Spring”. I argued that after the “Arab Spring” demands and interest in democratization increased in the region. It also put Turkey (as the most successful democracy in the region and the example of harmony between Islam and democracy) on the agenda, and Arab publics and elites started to closely follow developments in Turkey. In that sense, the selection of Egypt and Tunisia as two countries that both experienced the “Arab Spring” with an educated and enthusiastic youth favoring democracy and human rights becomes meaningful. There are also a lot of cultural and historical ties between Turkey and these countries. I also argued as a finding that, from more democratically experienced countries to less democratically experienced ones, interest in democratization inside and out of those countries will decline in the Middle East. For this reason, we might not observe similar interest and demand for democracy in the countries that never experienced the “Arab Spring” or any other rights movement in the region. Therefore, for example, in Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates, people might not closely follow the condition of Turkish democracy as in Egypt and Tunisia. This will in turn make democratization less relevant as a factor causing better perception in contrast with other variables such as economic development or Islamic-oriented government.

One must point out that, in order to understand the perceptions of Turkey in Tunisia, it can be necessary to analyze more than just Tunisian newspapers. The articles and news appearing in widespread regional networks like Al-Jazeera and the Middle East Broadcasting

Center (which includes Al-Arabiya) also reflect Tunisian opinion since these networks are widely followed in the Middle East. This is supported by a Gallup poll from 2007 which reveals that citizens rely on many types of media to receive information about other countries. Sixty six percent regarded International TV as very important while 51% said the same for National TV, and only 38% found newspapers to be important.¹² There are many Tunisian intellectuals writing in these international and regional networks like Larbi Sadiki and Oussama Romdhani. Another reason to examine these regional newspapers like Al-Jazeera is the fact that most of the newspapers in Tunisia are either in Arabic or French causing translation difficulties in this research.

Goals and Significance of the Research

The goal of this study is to test the initial hypothesis that democratization is an important explanatory factor for Turkey`s regional influence, operationalized as Arab public perception of Turkey. It must be noted that, this study does not look at regional perception in terms of the effectiveness or success of its foreign policy in the eyes of regimes or authoritarian leaders. Positive or negative reactions of the authoritarian regimes can be misleading, since they may not represent public opinion. This suggests that the current research will not be a standard foreign policy analysis; it will rather take the form of an inquiry which purports to understand the factors affecting the public perception of Turkey and which may cause success or failure of its regional influence.

It must be noted that all the factors are important and combine for a larger cumulative effect. For example, economic development without an Islamic-oriented government supporting the Palestinian cause and favoring a brotherhood policy based on culture and religion will not give rise to a positive perception of Turkey. To be an inspiring example and admired by the Arab public and for these publics to even label Turkey as “one of us”, Turkey

certainly has to show that it is a similar country in terms of values and culture. Otherwise there will be no difference between Turkey and other countries that are much more economically developed, such as France and Germany. It naturally follows that, to have a positive perception, countries must see something common and similar and then think that the same achievements could be applied in their countries as well. For instance, one is not going to find a positive perception of France, the UK, or even the US in the Middle East if a public opinion poll is made, although they are more advanced than Turkey economically and democratically. Even the democratization factor does not carry much weight without factors such as Islam, economic development, and regional activism, though it is this study's main hypothesis that democratization is more important than the others. Why would Turkey be an inspiring example in terms of democracy, while there are many advanced democracies ahead of Turkey and with Turkey showing signs of authoritarianism recently, according to many scholars?

However there are good reasons to believe that, democratization matters a lot by itself. Many scholars have argued that: "To solve problems with one's neighbors and moreover to be accepted as a mediator abroad, Turkey needs to solve its conflicts at home."¹³ In the age of the Arab Spring and trends of freedom which shook the region from its roots, Turkey, with a troubled democracy and increasingly authoritarian government, will no longer stay as a point of reference for the Arab public. In that respect, going back to old Kemalist-style rule which excludes and oppresses minorities (Kurds, Alawites etc.) and authoritarianism which is not tolerant to different views and opinions criticizing the government will seriously harm perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East. While my argument says that between 2002 and 2010 there is more or less successful democratization

and reforms, after 2010, and especially during 2012, according to critics, there emerged an authoritarian tendency in the government's policies.

There is a change in Turkish foreign policy according to a research project from Fatih University. With the help of surveys and data and the results found by TESEV and Fatih University, we know that there is a positive change in perceptions of Turkey in neighboring countries. However, Fatih University's 2011 project is before the Arab Spring. This must be taken into account. While a majority of respondents in this study answered that Turkey can be a model for the countries in the Middle East, after the Arab Spring it is clear that demands of democratization increased and these positive perceptions may decline. When asked what the fundamental explanatory factor is for the positively perceived change, the highest factor found is Turkey's European Union accession process. It is quite apparent that this factor can be seen as synonymous to Turkey's democratization since Turkey made most of its democratic reforms during this process. The second most important factor, according to respondents is AK Party's rise to power in 2002 at 35%, and the third is liberalization of Turkey's economy at 18%.¹⁴ This tells us a lot since it demonstrates the importance of two of this study's independent variables: democratization and economic development.

It is possible to argue that this study is quite significant and worth considering in the sense that soft power as defined by Nye is the easiest way to convince countries to do what one wants and follow one's lead. According to this thesis, if the democracy factor is the main element explaining the soft power potential of Turkey and, therefore, just by perfecting its democracy, Turkey can make Arab public opinion favorable, especially after the transformations in the region called the Arab Spring, then my research is worth attention since it shows many possible implications for Turkey's regional power status. With the Arab

Spring, demands for freedom and human rights are at record highs, and people are closely following Turkey. It is interesting that, according to TESEV's 2009 study,¹⁵ democratic deficit did not even appear as a problem in the region. According to the question, "In your opinion what is the most urgent issue facing your country and the Arab world today?" democracy was not even an answer mentioned by the respondents among others such as, economic problems, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and terrorism.

This study will discuss the role of the other independent variables such as economy, Islamic-oriented government, and regional activism in the third and fourth chapters together with democratization. In the first part of the thesis, which is a case study of the period 2002-2010, I plan to mention and elaborate on each variable. In the second part, which is a case study of the period from 2010-2013, I will talk more about the absence of democratization and its consequences. Finally, in the conclusion and findings section, I will discuss what kind of future research might arise out of this study and what consequences follow. Policy recommendations will also be made for the government.

Many other factors might be effective in the decline of Turkey's general perception amongst neighboring countries in the 2012 survey by TESEV. Turkey's ambiguous position towards the countries of the Arab Spring and the deterioration of the relations between Iran, Iraq and Syria might be part of the explanation. It would be too bold to say that Turkey's heavy handed approach towards democratization, and its recent authoritarian tendencies are the only factors leading to this fall. However, they surely important factors which play a role in this decline.¹⁶

The other important aspect of this research is that Turkey's regional perception is likely dependent on its successful democratization. Advanced democratization can possibly

cause Turkey to have real regional influence where Turkey can affect policies and cause concrete transformations in the region in favor of democracy, peace, and stability. However, it must be noted that better perception does not necessarily mean regional influence. In other words there must be an extra effort to achieve it since there is no direct transition between the two. Popularity or soft power is not an end in itself, and it must give rise to something meaningful. The absence of influence on the part of Turkey with even 100% popularity will not help Turkey's cause. To establish real influence Turkey needs a serious and consistent (discourse and action) agenda of democracy promotion in the region¹⁷, which is doomed to be unsuccessful without legitimacy. This legitimacy surely depends on Turkey's own democracy.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE AND THEORY

Theoretical Approach

There will be three main theoretical approaches that I am going to use to understand the regional perception: the Soft Power theory of Joseph Nye, the Democratic Peace Theory, and Public Opinion Theory of John Zaller respectively.

The theories or literature on perception in International Relations cannot exactly be applied to my research. For example there are theories borrowed from psychology explaining the link between foreign policy and perception. They are using perception as an independent variable to explain foreign policy. Mainstream IR theories are of limited relevance to my research. This thesis uses a general deductive theory to explain the perception of a country around its neighbors.

Most of the works in the literature have focused on the change in Turkish foreign policy that allegedly occurred. The bulk of the research addresses the reasons for this change, using mainstream IR theories such as realism, constructivism, liberalism etc. For this reason, I believe there is a void in the study of perception. This gives rise to the uncertainty of whether the same theories can be applied for this research as well. For example, there can be an argument that those systemic and structural forces (as an argument of the realist theory) affect Turkish domestic and foreign policy behavior. However we do not know if one can also assert that those forces of the international system give rise to better regional perception of Turkey. In fact, the dearth of research in this particular area can present a problem in determining where to place this work among different theoretical schools.

Regional perception is an interesting research area, one that raises questions about existing IR theories and looks at them from an original perspective. While it is a well-known assertion of constructivism that ideas, values, and identities are used to explain foreign policy behavior, can it be taken further to see if it is also useful for explaining regional perception? Or there might be a line of thinking with the inclusion of an intervening variable which looks like this: identities, values, and ideas ==> foreign policy activism ==> regional perception.

First of all, I would like to refer to grand foreign policy theories. The Innenpolitik School, and Liberal Theory are in line with the arguments that I am going to make. As Gideon Rose argued, these schools highlight the importance of domestic politics in the explanation of foreign policy.¹⁸ My research falls into these schools. Variables such as democratization, economic development, Islamic oriented Government, Erdogan's charisma and criticism of Israel, are all domestic factors which many scholars label as the "Turkish Model."

Democratic Peace Theory

Democratic or liberal peace theory came to be known through the work of Michael Doyle and is an important reference providing insight into my research. It is relevant to my research in the sense that it explains the peace or lack of war between democracies and makes the argument that democracies do not fight with each other, with some exceptions, and therefore a liberal zone of peace will emerge with the increasing number of liberal democracies. This observation is a law-like situation for some as Jack Levy argued when he said: "This absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations."¹⁹ Along similar lines, Doyle argues that "Many scholars judge that international relations are governed by perceptions of national security and the balance of power; liberal principles and institutions, when they do intrude, confuse

and disrupt the pursuit of balance of power politics”²⁰ and also that liberalism is an “ideology and set of institutions that has shaped the perceptions of and capacities for foreign relations of political societies that range from social welfare to laissez faire.”²¹ He also argues that “Republican democratic representation, an ideological commitment to fundamental human rights and transnational interdependence could be seen as three necessary causes of the tendencies of liberal states simultaneously to be peace prone in their relations with each other -with a very few exceptions- and unusually war-prone in their relations with non-liberal states.”²²

Though Doyle does not directly address the role of perception and took it as a causal mechanism for peace, he touches on the issue of perception when he discusses the respect that liberal countries show each other due to their representative governments. Similarly to his argument that there are many reasons not to go to war apart from liberalism²³, I argued that there are many reasons for a better perception of Turkey (or any other country) other than liberalism or democratization. However, my thesis can be seen as a study of “perception” as an intervening variable which gives way to “peace”. Hence this offers another causal explanation to the democratic peace theory: Since they have better perceptions towards each other, democracies do not fight. This approach can be an important contribution to the democratic peace theory. Also relevant to my thesis is the more parsimonious and exclusive definition of liberal democracy by Doyle. Apparently a liberal democracy has a distinct set of principles and institutions and is not just any electoral democracy. Hence, Doyle determined the conditions for a democratic state. I also argued in my thesis that the perception of a democratically advanced Turkey will be positive in the Middle East. However, a regime with a majoritarian understanding of democracy will not help Turkey's cause.

The Theory of Soft Power

For a more specific theoretical approach, let me refer to Nye's Soft Power Theory which explains power as "the ability to influence the behavior of others in order to get the outcome one wants." There are several ways to do this: "You can coerce them with threats, you can induce them with payments, or you can attract and co-opt them to want what you want." He further argues that: "power always depends on the context in which the relationship exists."²⁴ He describes international politics as a three-dimensional game: "Obtaining favorable outcomes on the bottom transnational board often requires the use of soft power assets while the top board requires military assets and classic military solutions."²⁵

Nye defines soft power as the "power of attraction" and "agenda setting."²⁶ He points out that "a country may obtain the outcome it wants in world politics because other countries -admiring its values, emulating its example, or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness -want to follow it."²⁷ When he talks about the sources of soft power he points out that it depends on three resources: "Its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)."²⁸ For instance, he points to 1950s racial segregation in the U.S to demonstrate how this policy cut its soft power in Africa²⁹ and argues that domestic or foreign policies that appear to be hypocritical can undermine soft power.³⁰

This theoretical perspective clearly informs my hypothesis that the democratization in Turkey will increase its regional perception in the Middle East. As Nye argued, if Turkey can live up to its political values at home, its soft power as an example of successful democracy with a big Muslim population will increase. If the perception of Turkey improves, it will become attractive to other countries. Nye's theory also supports my other variables which

relate to the culture and foreign policy dimensions of soft power. The variables such as popular culture, economic development, and regional activism can be considered as important in the improvement of Turkey's position in the region and also in its regional influence.

Theory of Public Opinion

The theory which most helped me to develop my arguments is Zaller's theory of public opinion. In his book called *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Zaller talks about the so-called marriage of political awareness and political values which together with the information coming through mass communication and elite discourse determine public opinion. He shows how “across a very wide range of issues, variations in the information carried in the elite discourse, individual differences in attention to this information, and individual differences in political values and other predispositions jointly determine the contours of public opinion.”³¹ As one of the components of factors shaping public opinion he also highlighted the role of political elites on which public perception depends. He included “politicians, higher level government officials, journalists, some activists, and many kinds of experts and policy specialists” as political elites. He also highlights the “effects of elite discourse” and argues that “the shift in mass attitudes roughly coincides with the shift in elite attitudes.”³²

Zaller further emphasized the effect of attentiveness or awareness to elite behavior or media on public opinion and voting behavior.³³ He argued that “Understanding the effects of elite discourse on preference formation requires modeling the effects of awareness in mediating exposure to each of the major campaign messages in the environment, a task that presents serious complications.”³⁴ This indicates how important the attentiveness of the public is to the information given in the media or through the discourse of elites.

He highlighted the effect of political predispositions or political values as well. He argued that: “It is never “just information,” because it is unavoidably selective and also enmeshed in stereotypical frames of reference.”³⁵ This suggests that the political values or political frames or ideologies that people have before they hear from the media or elites also shape public opinion.

Finally Zaller summarized his theory as follows: “Interactions among three broad classes of variables. Aggregate level of variation in the information carried in elite discourse, including elite cues about how new info should be evaluated, individual level differences in attention to this discourse, and individual level differences in political values determine the mix of “considerations” that gets into people's heads. Which of these considerations is available at the top of the head at the moment of confronting survey questions determines the responses to the questions.”³⁶

Literature

There are only a few articles written specifically on the relationship between Turkey’s democratization and its popularity in the region. Therefore we can say that there are gaps on this particular topic in the scholarly literature. The majority of the sources that I am going to employ in my research will be after 2008 and particularly works written after the Arab Spring. These pieces have touched the issue by giving sections on democratization of Turkey and its consequences. There will be also a few older works that pointed to Turkey’s future role in its region used in my research.

Cengiz Candar and Graham Fuller, for example, talk about Ataturk’s principle of peace at home and abroad that could not be realized because of the conflicts and instability inside the country for a long period. This instability started in the 1980s with a military coup

and with rising PKK terrorism in the 1990s. The authors point to the lack of democracy and damaged civil liberties in Turkey, as well as bad relations with almost all of its immediate neighbors.³⁷ They argue that there needs to be a “resurrection of Atatürk’s concept and a new active foreign policy for an emerging great power coupled with new domestic policies and a harmony between them.”³⁸ They proposed a principle in line with this idea: “Turkey should actively encourage the emergence of democracy as a basic principle of governance throughout the region.”³⁹ They advocate this as they anticipate the broadening of Turkish democracy itself.⁴⁰ Specifically related to my hypothesis, the authors argued that: “If Turkey can take a few important measures to meet Kurdish aspirations (democratization by giving Kurds their basic rights), it will emerge as a powerful and stable state.”⁴¹

In line with the above expectation, Meliha B. Altunisik, in her article “The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey’s Soft power in the Middle East”, argued that because of Turkey’s internal transformations, its attractiveness has increased. She argued that Turkey’s reform and democratization process, which accelerated after the AK Party came to power, caused an increased interest in Turkey and its role as an example in the Arab Middle East.⁴² “Turkey’s reform process and the parallel progress in Turkey-EU relations have had an impact on how Turkey is perceived in the Arab world”⁴³. Also the “AK Party’s coming to power comprises an asset for the Turkish model, as it demonstrates both the evolution of the Islamist movement in Turkey, and the potential for reconciling democracy and Islam.”⁴⁴

Osman Bahadır Dincer and Mustafa Kutlay, in their report on Turkey's soft power in the Middle East, argued that: “The measurement of soft power is still problematic in the literature, although Joseph Nye uses variables like the numbers of foreign students and foreign visitors, and the power of the media in a country. They used the numbers of Arab

students in Turkey, Arab citizens visiting Turkey, the power of Turkish media, and the Arab perception toward Turkey to examine soft power.”⁴⁵ This suggests that perception and soft power are two different phenomenon and perception is considered more under the general umbrella of soft-power. In other words, perception is one of the factors which should be taken into account when talking about the soft power of a country. Yet we must acknowledge that it is still complicated to determine which phenomenon causes the other when we consider the two. For example, it is not clearly identified in the literature whether we must consider indicators such as foreign students studying in Turkey or powerful Turkish media as factors affecting perception or vice versa? However, for my research purposes it is sufficient to say that perception is a subordinate concept that might affect or be affected by soft power.

Omer Taspinar, in his comparison between Kemalist and Neo-Ottoman policies, argued that: “In an ideal world, Ankara would address Kurdish discontent with democratic reforms, take bold steps toward EU membership, and continue its constructive engagement with the Middle East.”⁴⁶ According to the author, “much hinges on Turkey’s success in becoming a more liberal democracy. A stable, Western-oriented, liberal Turkey on a clear path toward the EU would serve as a democratic example for the rest of the Muslim world. An authoritarian, resentful, and isolated Turkey, on the other hand, would be the opposite in every case. If its domestic politics were to go wrong, Turkey would not only cease being a democratic success story but also could become a destabilizing factor in the Middle East.”⁴⁷

Alper Dede, analyzed the reasons that contributed to the rise of the “Turkish Model” in the region. Supporting almost all the variables included in this research, he argued that “Turkey’s process of democratization, rising economic performance, Erdoğan’s popularity in the Arab world regarding the Palestinian issue, Turkey’s gradual distancing from Israel, and

the AK Party's cultural-religious affinity with the people of the region in contrast to the Kemalists and secularists in Turkey have also contributed to its attraction to people in the Middle East."⁴⁸

Saban Kardas, also emphasized the importance of democracy inside Turkey. He mentioned the fact that: "Liberal commentators have argued rather persuasively that what made Turkey a unique source of inspiration for the Arab streets was its integration into the European and global economic and political networks and its own democratization experience. They seek to drive home the argument that if Turkey is intent on continuing to serve as a model or source of inspiration abroad, it has to remain committed to the path towards deepening democratization at home, especially when it is preparing to discuss rewriting its constitution."⁴⁹

Losing Reform Spirit and Majoritarian Understanding of Democracy

Although not mentioning the democracy-regional influence relationship, Duncan Mccargo and Ayse Zarakol pointed out the rise of authoritarian tendencies and the slowdown of reforms in Turkey and tried to explain its reasons. They argued that despite many democratic reforms, as well as coming to terms with existing Kemalist military-bureaucratic establishment, Erdogan has recently "practiced a highly personalized form of rule."⁵⁰ Implying the AK Party they argued: "The previously disenfranchised have been empowered through electoral politics despite constraints imposed by the military, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary, but they have not necessarily emerged from that process with a stronger belief in liberal-democratic values and the hyper nationalist political-development trajectory may not provide the most fertile ground for liberalism."⁵¹

More importantly, Zarakol in her article on problem areas for the new Turkish foreign policy touched directly on what she called “domestic international feedback loop.” She argued that: “Though much progress has been made, more calcified problems in Turkish domestic policy remain unresolved, and the AK Party government, in its third term, is showing signs of reversing some of the hard-earned gains vis-à-vis the authoritarian tendencies of the Turkish state.”⁵² All of these factors appear as “obstacles for Turkey’s plans to wield soft power in the Middle East.”⁵³ She explains the reasoning as follows: “The more Turkey acts like the old Turkey of the military-bureaucratic elite (albeit this time with an Islamic flavor), the less likely is it to influence its region.”⁵⁴ Turkey’s source for regional influence is its soft power rather than economic and military power. Turkey cannot compete with Russia and the West in the region in terms of economic and military power and with Saudi Arabia in terms of oil.⁵⁵ Like Nye, she argued that: “If Turkey is to have soft power, it needs legitimacy first, and it cannot have legitimacy if it does not treat its own citizens well.”⁵⁶

Finally in “Turkey and the Arab Spring,” Ziya Onis argued that despite governmental denial, Turkey has been seen as increasingly getting away from its EU membership goals and reforms.⁵⁷ He also argues that “although the European Union is in a state of crisis, it still has the combination of economic and diplomatic resources to affect change in the Middle East in a significant direction that far outweighs the resources that Turkey could marshal on its own initiative.”⁵⁸ This could happen in the case of convergence of interests towards the Middle East and in the case of increased standards of democracy in Turkey.⁵⁹ Furthermore he argues that: “Developments in domestic politics and foreign policy are intrinsically interrelated. The relevance of the Turkish experience to the rest of the Arab world will rest not only on the depth of its economic modernization, but also on the quality of its democracy. While the AK

Party era has been quite successful for the growth and expansion of the Turkish economy, still major questions exist concerning the quality of its democracy. To criticize Israel and its maltreatment of the Palestinians is perfectly legitimate. Yet for this kind of criticism to be effective, it is important for Turkey to overcome deep divisions within its own polity and move towards a genuinely open and pluralistic political order.”⁶⁰ By this way, I argue Turkey could get the support of the EU both in its status as an advanced democracy and in its efforts of democracy promotion in the region.

Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy

Since my research does not look specifically at the reasons for this foreign policy change, I am simply going to incorporate the factors leading to Turkey’s popularity, which is mentioned in the existing literature. It has been argued widely by many scholars that Turkey’s popularity increased with a new brand of foreign policy recently in the Middle East. Among the many, Perthes, argues that a change emerged in TFP with the foreign minister Ismail Cem (1997-2002) which put some of the bases in place. Nonetheless major changes have occurred since 2002/2003.⁶¹ He also talks about democratization and argues that: “Turkey’s foreign policy architects understood that in order to be considered a mediator abroad, Turkey needs to solve its conflicts at home, and democratic initiative towards Kurdish population being an important first step.”⁶² It is certainly pertinent to my research that, in order to be deemed positive by Arab countries, Turkey has to fix its internal problems and most importantly its democratic deficit and issues related to human rights. The author further mentions the fact that: “Turkey has a limited capability in bringing a change or deal in tough cases since its role is like the EU which is preparing the ground with diplomacy and soft power but does not involve military by giving security guarantees.”⁶³ He summarizes this approach as: “For the political culture of the region, it is very important that Turkey has begun to define strength

not in military capabilities and military power but in terms of its ability to bring about diplomatic solutions.”⁶⁴

The Ambassador of Turkey to Lebanon, Inan Ozyildiz, also addresses this issue of change which is regarded by some as a shift of axis. He mentions that some tried to explain this change by political and ideological transformations of the government. However he gave importance to the global and regional conditions that forced Turkey to play a more active role in the Middle East.⁶⁵ What is striking about his views is how he argues that “The economic growth, political and sociological transformation and strengthening of democracy and democratic culture of foreign policy made Turkey more confident. Thus Turkey has built a trust and contributed to confidence building in the region.”⁶⁶ This suggests that all of these factors contributed to Turkey’s popularity as a country which can be trusted with its economy and political system.

Svante Cornell, in his article “What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?” also talks about the issue of change in Turkish Foreign Policy and its explanation. He mentioned that the focus of AK Party changed from West to East and he evaluated the axis shift arguments. He gave ample space to Turkey’s economic development arguing that it caused a self confidence on the part of the Turkish government. He also talks about the role of ideology which is “Islamist” according to him. He pointed to the Foreign Minister Davutoglu’s views which underlie the Islamic brotherhood policy of the AK Party.⁶⁷ He clearly indicates this view as: “The tendency of the AK Party government to side increasingly with Islamic causes, its growing attention to non-Western powers combined with its increasing criticism of the West, can be fully understood only if the ideological background of Turkey’s top decision-makers is taken into account.”⁶⁸

When Cornell talks about Arab Upheavals he highlights Turkey's regional activism and how "Erdogan's hardline on Israel has indeed made him a darling of the Arab street."⁶⁹ Also he argues that despite all the mentioned factors, "the country's leadership has been unable to gauge its true level of influence since this is a process which gradually takes place and is not an immediate result of hyperactivity of foreign minister Davutoglu's diplomacy."⁷⁰ This also suggests in my view, neither regional activism nor a good perception of Turkey in the Middle East will turn into regional influence necessarily. Rather it implies that Turkey will have to harness these resources well in order to gain that "influence." Finally he argues that: "As the AK Party's recent authoritarian tendency has become increasingly acknowledged, its credibility as a force of true democratization in the Middle East has suffered concomitantly. Also AK Party in his view has adopted a rather simplistic understanding of democracy as a majority rule."⁷¹ It is striking to see how, in his view, Turkey's own democratic deficit causes the deterioration of its credibility and soft power in the Middle East.

Also giving an idea of how the AK Party understood democracy, Ihsan Dagi (a well-known IR scholar in Turkey), in his newspaper article also argued a similar view by calling it postmodern authoritarianism. He puts it as "I don't believe Islamists have solved their ontological problems with democracy."⁷² By viewing democracy as a majority rule it takes them to the understanding of an unlimited power.⁷³

Moreover Fareed Zakaria, in his book on illiberal democracy, also touches this issue, by stressing the importance of reforms to have constitutional liberalism which necessitates "rule of law, independent judiciary, liberal democracy, press freedom, and competitive political parties, among others."⁷⁴

As an example of using securitization theory for the explanation of foreign policy change, Tarik Oguzlu argued in his article “Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy” that “there is a close relationship between the degree of securitization of issues and whether the power used to deal with them is hard or soft in nature.”⁷⁵ It automatically follows from his argument that for example a specific foreign policy of the AK Party - i.e., zero problems with neighbors - is actually the result of the change of mentality on the part of government elites which involves politicization of issues. This securitization approach commonly used in the European literature can be considered as related to constructivist approach. The author concludes that: “These internal and external developments have contributed to Turkey’s soft power potential.”⁷⁶ These internal and external developments, I argue, involve the democratization and European Union accession process of Turkey, economic growth, Islamic oriented government, and also regional activism of the AK Party government.

Soft Power/ “Turkish Model”

Importantly, Oguzlu argues that “the concept of soft power underlines the significance of perceptions others hold vis-à-vis the agent/actor.”⁷⁷ Also, “for soft power to exist, legitimacy/credibility is a must.”⁷⁸ This implies that Turkey must be an advanced democracy in itself to maintain its soft power or to have it in the first place. And Turkey needs the legitimacy and credibility first by perfecting its democracy to involve in a democracy promotion agenda outside. Oguzlu supports this argument by saying that “Turkey’s democratic deficit and structural fragilities at home combine to deny Turkey the capability to play a ‘big brother’ role in Central Asia and Caucasus.”⁷⁹

Oguzlu also directs attention to the importance of the EU’s relations with the Muslim world and thereby the significance of Turkey’s EU membership as that would imply that there can be peace or harmony between civilizations. This understanding on the part of Turkey

according to him has positively influenced Turkey's soft power.⁸⁰ This has a kind of symbolic importance which will mean a harmony of Islam and democracy. This also brings to mind the fact that some Western countries like the U.S. supported Turkey's EU membership and offered Turkey as a model to emulate. A question rises as to whether this suggestion of Turkey serving as a model can be an alternative argument with which to increase its popularity in the region? The answer to this question is obviously "no." The Arab public does not think that Western countries are sincere in their effort to promote democracy in the region since the history of Western country's foreign policy apparently contradicts with this claim, especially the United States' notorious record of supporting Middle Eastern dictators financially and militarily.

Contributing to the study of perception, Dietrich Jung looks at the reasons for Turkey's negative image in the Middle East. He argues that historical factors explain a lot. Historical prejudices and stereotypes between Arabs and Turks, shaped by actions and policies in the course of twentieth century, reinforced this negative image.⁸¹ According to the author: "It is this historical burden has so far prevented Turkey from playing more successfully the role of a mediator between Europe and the Middle East."⁸² Jung's argument brings a different and original perspective to this current research. It makes the claim that, aside from Turkey's democratization and other factors outlined in this study, Arab-Turkish history has its own role in the explanation of Turkey's popularity. But I do not believe that this factor has too much significance since it has become clear with the AK Party government that with the right policies and activism, this "burden" can easily be avoided. But surely it has merit in illustrating the negative role of the policy of the early republican regime, which was based on forgetting the Arab Middle East.

Further Jung analyzes Turkey's foreign policy by using two theoretical lenses, realism and constructivism respectively. Like Zarakol, he also argued that Turkey has limited capability in terms of its military and economy and can only be considered as a "middle power," a term labeled by William Hale.⁸³ So it is hard to adopt a realist form of power politics for Turkey and have it act independently with these limited capabilities. According to Jung "therefore the state centered rationalist approach must be completed by elements of so-called constructivist theory that originates in what has been called the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences."⁸⁴ This suggests that constructivism helps to analyze foreign policy approach of Turkish elites to the Middle East, which is not only based on strategic considerations but also ideas and identities. This further opens the way for Turkey to pursue soft power politics and have popularity in the end. As a source of this historically negative image, the author mentions that "it was not the experience of centuries of Ottoman rule, but the short-sighted and chauvinistic policies of Turkification by the Young Turks that destroyed the bonds between Arabs and Turks and thus engendered the independence movement among Arab nationalists."⁸⁵ This suggests that it even predates Kemalism and may even be its inspiration. Also these kinds of policies hurt the relations in the first place and the continuation of these policies will reverse the current situation.

Furthermore Gamze Cavdar, looks at performance of the AK Party in Turkey, which successfully implemented democratic reforms in the first election term, and how surprising it is for some, since the AK Party is an Islamist party. For Cavdar, "the AK Party's performance in government has led some observers to argue that Turkish Islamism can be a model for Islamists in the region."⁸⁶ She addresses the exportability of the Turkish model to the other countries in the Middle East and concluded that it "is unlikely to be adopted elsewhere since it is the specific product of a transformation based on a set of distinct political and economic

conditions.”⁸⁷ Cavdar addresses what I call the successful democratization period of Turkey with the help of the EU accession process and swift implementation of liberalization reforms. She explains it with the political learning process of the AK Party and argues that it was this political learning that changed the elite’s view of how to govern. It also made them think pragmatically and be able to make domestic and foreign adjustments. This suggests for all these changes in foreign policy and international activism and as well as internal policy, political learning has an important effect.⁸⁸

Cavdar asserts that: “Major developments in Turkey have been followed with considerable interest by Arab Muslim thinkers and activists. Those who hold positive views about the AK Party have these opinions because of the AK Party’s foreign policy, which is perceived as independent, as well as its agenda for democratic reforms.”⁸⁹ In particular, there are two policies that have been viewed positively: “Turkey’s objection to the U.S. war in Iraq, and Erdogan’s characterization of Israeli incursions in Palestine as state terrorism.”⁹⁰ What is especially significant is that Erdogan’s policies are more pronounced than those of many Arab countries. I suggest these factors cause the admiration of Arabs. Also she argues that, “For others, Turkish experience was worth examining because of its success in holding reliable, open, and free elections while achieving democratic reforms and more civilian control over the military.”⁹¹ However, Cavdar also talks about limitations of the AK Party’s political learning by addressing the issue of uncertainty. It is important to consider “to what extent the AK Party’s moderation has been internalized by the whole party”⁹² and whether the AK Party is going to continue these democratic reforms as well as how committed the AK Party is to the democratic values.⁹³

This point has particular merit, if one looks at the recent discussions and arguments about authoritarianism in Turkey. It was also indicated by a prominent columnist and university professor in Turkey in a TV program. Mehmet Altan, argued that: “Turkey captured a great opportunity to transform the regime. Government came so close to having a real democracy with the policy of change developed by the AK Party. But through the years the situation that the country found itself in has become a policy of survival of the AK Party. The party moved away from the goal of making the welfare and freedom that Turkish people deserve permanent as well as a radical system change.”⁹⁴ He also criticizes Erdogan as a leader who thinks that only he can rule the country and knows best. Erdogan, he argues, is trying to change the system in a way leads to his absolute power and serve his interests. Altan contends that recent instability and bombings in the country is the inherent result of these policies.⁹⁵

Finally Cavdar makes a similar point by asserting that although it is unlikely that Turkey’s experience will be copied elsewhere, these discussions and the fact that Turkey is now closely followed by the Arab public offers a chance for Turkish politics to advance toward greater democracy.⁹⁶

Moreover Kadri Kaan Renda, also analyzes the change in Turkish Foreign Policy which is observed as regional activism and an effort to get closer with Turkey’s neighbors. He tries to explain this activism by the neo-liberal theory of Robert Keohane, which underlines the importance of interdependence and cooperation among states. He also looks at Nye’s soft power approach.⁹⁷ This article of Renda can be seen as representing a soft power dimension of the TFP, which is based on economic relations and trade, as well as better neighborly relations. The article gave ample space to Turkey’s regional activism efforts and its effects on

Turkey's image and credibility.⁹⁸ He points to this as: "Turkish Foreign Policy has lately transposed to a liberal and cooperative standpoint owing to the transformation of domestic politics through the process of democratization and the assumption of power by a new political elite. Turkey's soft power increased and it has gained a strong foothold in regional politics."⁹⁹ This suggests that aside from making Turkey an inspirational example, democratization has also caused a transformation in the TFP with regional activism and cooperation which in turn has given rise to the regional influence.

Turkey's Potential and Responsibility

Also an important article by Paul Salem includes all the independent variables that I am going to use as underlying factors that contribute to a positive image of Turkey in the Arab World. He touched on democracy, economic development, compatibility of Islam and democracy, popular culture, the importance of Turkish TV series, and Erdogan's alleged charisma as well as his criticism of Israel.¹⁰⁰ Very importantly, Salem argues that: "The recent Arab pro-democracy uprisings, as well as pro-democracy protests in Iran, would indicate that Turkey's democratic political system is an important factor behind its popularity as a model. Also as the people of the region rebel in favor of democratic change, Turkey certainly has even more potential - and responsibility."¹⁰¹

In contradiction with this potential and responsibility, Suat Kiniklioglu argues that: "The dynamism behind the AK Party's drive to transform Turkey into a full democracy, to harmonize Turkey's laws and standards with those of the EU, and to draft a new social contract in the form of a constitution seem to have faltered."¹⁰² He adds that: "Conservatives have selective understanding of democracy. They prioritize religious/conservative values over democratic reforms. Secondly, Turkey's conservatives saw that once the regime's strongholds were overrun, being dominant was not such a bad thing."¹⁰³ He argues that they have a "biat"

culture; a culture of homage/obeisance to leadership, which can also be termed as a patrimonial political-culture.¹⁰⁴

Moreover Omer Caha, in his article “Turkey in the Middle East: Roles and Perceptions,” argues that there are several reasons behind a positive perception of Turkey in the Middle East. First of all, he relates the effect of being globally active with a proactive foreign policy to its perception in the region.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, like Salem, he points to the recent decline in Turkey's perception in the TESEV report and argues that: “It was not because Turkey is pursuing a sectarian foreign policy but because of Turkey's policy of supporting opposition in Syria and its negative effect on Shiite regimes and peoples in Iran, Syria, and Iraq.”¹⁰⁶ He also points out that there are criticisms towards the government due to the slowing down of negotiations with the EU. However recent polls show that: “There is a huge public support for this policy of the AK Party as people in Turkey have a negative attitude towards the EU.”¹⁰⁷ However, I argue that the shortcomings in democratization are not justifiable since democratization in Turkey must continue even if the EU process completely ends and it can go on independently from the EU.

Finally, Kemal Kirisci talks about a “demonstrative effect”¹⁰⁸ of Turkey while trying to explain why a demand among the Arab public for the “Turkish model” emerged. He points to the role of a trading state, democracy in progress, and a positive image of Turkey's new foreign policy. Apparently he also touches on my research, by pointing out why there emerged a demand for the “Turkish model.”

CHAPTER THREE: PERCEPTIONS OF TURKEY IN EGYPT

Introduction

It has been a common assumption among the scholars and literature of Turkish Foreign Policy that a negative image of Turkey existed in the Arab World before the start of the 21st century. However there are few surveys or opinion polls that showed a negative perception of Turkey among the Arab public before the AK Party government came into power in 2002.

Before analyzing the perception of Turkey in Egypt, it is helpful to provide some brief information about the historical facts and legacies as well as the common history between the two countries.

First of all, the historical legacies offer an alternative argument that partly explains the perceptions of the Arab public. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jung addressed the origins of Turkey's negative image in the Middle East and the mutually constituted stereotypes and negative perceptions of peoples held by one another in his article. He talked about the mutually constructed narratives, the “Terrible Turk”¹⁰⁹ by Arabs and the “deceitful Arab”¹¹⁰ by Turks, and also how these narratives prevented Turkey from playing an active role in the Middle East. While acknowledging that his research (which includes talks with elites from Egypt) cannot claim to be totally representative, he points to the arguments of some who consider Turkey to be an instrument of Western politics. Also there is a negative perception cast upon Kemalist Westernization project by the Arab public because it denied Turkey's Islamic heritage. Jung explains the background of the term “terrible Turk,” which involves violent suppression of Arab nationalism by the Ottoman state, and a tendency to show Ottoman rule as a foreign domination, calling it either “imperialism” or “colonialism.”

“Barbarians” was another negative connotation cast upon the Turkish, along with the label of “cruel and despotic power addict.”¹¹¹

The Ottoman rule of the Middle East during the 19th century, according to some scholars of late Ottoman history, resembled colonial rule since it coincided with the heavy Westernization efforts by the Ottoman elites.¹¹² This caused alienation of the Arabs and also gave rise to nationalist movements all over the empire. Especially after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, a negative image emerged. Jung agreed, noting that “It was not the experience of centuries of Ottoman rule but the short-sighted and chauvinistic policies of turkification by the Young Turks that destroyed the bonds between Arabs and Turks and thus engendered the independence movement among Arab nationalists.”¹¹³ I acknowledge the role of this historical burden, which goes back to Ottoman period and which was also reinforced by the “Kemalist neglect”¹¹⁴ policy of the Cold War era. I further agree that Egypt is no exception to this historical context, and that these negative images may still constitute a part of the predispositions of the Egyptian public about Turkey.

While it is undeniable that historical legacies have an effect on relations, I argue that it can be dismissed currently since it is subject to change. Jung admits this by saying that the “Constraining power of these historical legacies also has its limits.”¹¹⁵ It can be argued that after the AK Party government, a clear change in Turkish Foreign Policy emerged that gradually destroyed this negative image. These policies included not allowing the US to use Turkish soil in the invasion of Iraq, and harshly criticizing Israel for its actions against the Palestinians. This argument of “historical burden” is important in the sense of acknowledging outside factors which can continue to be present in the subconscious of certain segments of

the Egyptian people and which is impossible to control despite the clear recent departure of former Turkish policies.

Historical prejudices that appeared before WWI are not the only part of the negative image of Turkey. We can observe a policy of total neglect and indifference of Turkey towards the Middle East and Egypt, particularly during the Cold War. As argued by Aydin: “through 1945-60, Turkey's foreign policy was dominated by total Western dependence.”¹¹⁶ He talks about “Turkey's political and economic alignment with Western countries after the Second World War because of its desire to become a fully modernized country.”¹¹⁷ Putting aside various reasons for this decision, such as the change in the structure of the international system and the reaction to Soviet threat and pressures, Turkey chose to be an ally of the West during most of the Cold War despite some changes in the level of alignment and dependency with the West. As a natural outcome of this, relations with the Middle Eastern Arab countries were an extension of Turkey's Western-dependent foreign policy and that is why the deterioration of Turkish-Arab relations followed. Particularly: “Ataturk's reforms and general secularization of Turkey in the name of modernization created profound resentment and mistrust among Arabs.”¹¹⁸ Turkey was seen as the pawn of the West by the Arabs during this period, which was quite a normal reaction if we consider the fact that Turkey became the first Islamic nation to recognize Israel and exchange ambassadors.¹¹⁹

In his article, Aydin talks further about the effect of the Baghdad Pact on the negative image of Turkey in Egypt.¹²⁰ Aside from the reasons that pushed Turkey into the arms of the West that were mentioned above, it is also possible to talk about the role of Kemalist and secular military-judicial bureaucracy and its approach towards the Middle East and especially its fear of Islamization. Kemalist ideology involves the total rejection and also forgetting of

the Ottoman Past with its culture and values, as well as its territories, since it deems Ottomans responsible for the loss of lands, and it also saw Islam as the source of backwardness. The image of the “deceitful Arab,” which is already discussed above, supports this attitude of disinterest. It is possible to observe this attitude during the early Republican era and through the early 21st century.

It is also significant to talk about the recent history of Islamic movements in Turkey and how they evolved over time, eventually giving rise to the AK Party and its rule. In his article, Yilmaz talks about how a partial opening of the authoritarian system in Turkey paved the way for Turkish Islamists to take part in the democratic process and also caused a process of learning and moderation for them.¹²¹ He further mentions the long exclusion and closure of Islamist parties in Turkey and the experience of AK Party founders, explaining how it produced both caution and a change in their Islamist agenda. It is important to recall that Erbakan, who is respected by current AK Party rulers, had to resign in 1997 with a postmodern coup by the military, while the current premier Erdogan was imprisoned because of a poem he recited during the same period. All these experiences, according to Yilmaz, gave rise to the “successful change in the vision and political ideology of formerly intolerant and exclusivist Islamists, as they became Muslim democrats. They were able to convince even non-Muslim citizens of the country of that fact. Also, the successful transformation of the AKP has been noted in Middle East circles.”¹²²

I do not agree with the term “Muslim democrats” while describing the AK Party government in Turkey, looking at the recent developments in the country. But it is nevertheless impossible to deny the democratic achievements of the AK Party in its initial years and how it still serves as an example for other Muslim movements in the region, such

as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Yilmaz highlighted the similar nature of both movements and gives his hope that, if given similar opportunities, the MB will transform as well.¹²³ Mentioning the history of Islamic movements in Turkey is also important because their experiences engender an interest and expectation from the Egyptian public, who compare and contrast these experiences and who develop a positive or negative view of Turkey by looking at the democratic governance that exemplifies the successful harmony of Islam and democracy.

Testing

After mentioning the factors that possibly influenced the perception of Turkey in Egypt, we should now turn to the first two terms of AK Party rule, which I call a successful era in terms of improvement of perception. I will look at the factors such as democratic reforms, economic developments, Islamic oriented Government, foreign policy activism and how these factors increased the perception of Turkey in Egypt.

2002-2010

Coming to power by taking the majority of the votes in 2002 election, the Justice and Development Party government started a reform process which swiftly changed the status-quo and confronted the existing bureaucratic-military establishment. The reform process accelerated with the effect of the European Union as well, for which the majority of the Turkish public have had a positive opinion until lately. Together with the public support and encouragement from the EU, the AK Party changed many laws and constitutional articles in favor of democratization. This was unprecedented and not predicted by many since the AK Party had Islamic roots and was seen as not very friendly towards democracy. It is even considered, by some voters of the Republican Party, to be an enemy of the Republic, one with clandestine intentions to bring Sharia to Turkey. But it seems to me, as Cavdar argued, there

was a political learning process on the part of the elites of the AK Party who founded the party. This political learning process occurred after they saw the dramatic closures of their parties as incompatible with the secular principles and system of the country.

The AK Party changed the civil-military relations and reduce the role of military in politics by referring to the EU accession process and by using the same arguments that Kemalist secular elites used. One of these arguments is as follows: Turkey must always be oriented towards Europe in order to reach the contemporary level of civilizations. The AK Party government reduced the role of the military, not just in domestic politics but in foreign policy as well, by decreasing the number of generals in the MGK (National Security Council). This is critical, since it allowed the government to implement its own foreign policy independently in the Middle East. This policy is mostly based on the culture, religion, and identities that brought close relations with the regimes and countries in the Middle East. Therefore, it can be argued that the democratization factor has an enormous importance in bringing a positive perception of Turkey to the Middle East. It can be argued that without those reforms, the AK Party would not be able to pursue its own policy and that regional activism and even harsh attitude towards Israel would not have been possible. In that regard, an ontological sense of democracy reveals much. If democracy with free and fair elections in Turkey did not exist, parties like the AK Party, which represents the public with a huge percentage (it took 49% of the votes in the last election), would not have come to power. Additionally, the reforms that made radical changes in the first and second terms of the AK Party certainly opened the way for a better regional perception of Turkey.

Table 1 Specific Democratization Steps that Caused an Improvement in the Arab Perception of Turkey in the time period 2002-2010

2002	Emergency rule Lifted
2003	MGK (National Security Council) reform made, military's influence limited, the fourth Harmonization Package including freedom of association and deterrence against torture and mistreatment brought, amendments enacted to the anti-terror law
2004	Constitutional amendments made for women's rights, freedom of press and gender Equality, state security courts abolished
2007	Democratic opening for solving the Kurdish issue initiated, improvements in the rights of Alawites, non-Muslims, as well as other ethnic groups
2009	TRT 6 in Kurdish started broadcasting, first channel in a different language

Many articles and books argue that a positive perception of Turkey in the Middle East skyrocketed after the AK Party came into power and during its two terms. However, my purpose in this section is to find evidence to this argument from the Egyptian media and from speeches of politicians, as well as scholarly work.

The reason I chose this period, especially the fact that it ended with 2010, is that it roughly coincides with the broad uprisings which had shaken the Arab World dubbed as the "Arab Spring." After the year 2010, interests and demands for democracy and freedoms boomed in the region. Also it coincides with the start of a decline of democracy in Turkey and a trend towards authoritarianism. I am not arguing that, in the period 2002-2010, there was no evidence of anti-democratic practices of the government or that, from 2010 to today, there was a total drift towards authoritarianism. Rather, I argue that the gravity or weight from 2002-2010 was more towards democratic improvement and that, from 2010 onwards, there was less democratic improvement or more authoritarian practices. And the perceptions respectively were more positive in 2002-2010 and more negative from 2010 onwards in terms

of gravity. There was a gradual increase in the perception from 2002 onwards. Apparently, it is not a hypothesis of this paper that between 2002-2010 perceptions were high at all times.

In this chapter I will have an opportunity to test my hypotheses that the perception of Turkey was generally positive in the first term and negative in the latter. Understandably, as argued in this paper, many other factors affected perception of Turkey in the Middle East during this period, including the ones that I took as my independent variables, and as general parameters that determine perception. But, in particular, my aim is to test the effect of democratization in Turkey.

Azzam points to the relations between Turkey and Egypt and mentions the close ties that have been forged between the post-revolutionary Morsi government and Turkey. The author also mentions how Turkey has supported Egypt financially and has been a supporter of the Arab Spring as well as the importance of the shared historical ties between the two countries.¹²⁴ This suggests that it is needless to say how Turkey's own democratic achievements, and its general image, matter in the eyes of the Egyptian public. According to Azzam, "The presidency has looked at examples across the world for inspiration and direction."¹²⁵ Also it is important to emphasize how the perception of Turkey matters (if Morsi is looking for inspiration and direction¹²⁶) for Egypt's own democratic trajectory, since if the Egyptians perceive a celebrated democratic example in Turkey, they might move to a similar direction. Azzam also highlights the vitality of this issue for Egypt by arguing that: "The consolidation of the democratic process needs to continue."¹²⁷

First of all, in the literature Uysal pointed to older studies on the perception of Turkey and mentioned Bayumi (1989) and Dakuki (2001).¹²⁸ He argued that both studies are outdated because important developments happened since, such as 9/11, the invasion of Iraq

in 2003, and the AKP's rise to power in Turkey.¹²⁹ Also, although he is one of the pioneers in the literature concerning the perception of Turkey, Uysal focused solely on Egypt to measure the perception of Turkey. He gave his reasoning by pointing to the central place and importance of Egypt in the Middle East, arguing that it can be representative and reflective of the opinion in the region. However, I believe that in order to better test the perception, we need to look at multiple case studies in the region. By looking at multiple cases I will sacrifice precision in order to have a broader comprehension. For example, I will analyze the role of the Islamic-oriented government and will focus on the active foreign policy of Turkey as two general parameters. Also, over the last three years there have been many developments in the region which might have affected perception of Turkey, such as the Gezi Park events in Turkey and the military coup in Egypt.

Opinions on “Turkish Model” or Experience

First of all, the momentous 2002 elections, which brought the AK Party into power in Turkey, can be considered a significant development. The democratic election of an Islamic-oriented party attracted great attention to Turkey as well as boosted its perception in the Middle East. This is agreed by Uysal, who highlighted the secular nature of Turkey.¹³⁰ He further notes that, according to the *El Misr el Yevm* (which is considered an independent newspaper) columnist Eymen El Cundi, Erdogan made Turkey a brand new country. Improvements in the areas such as the economy and human rights, as well as Turkey's struggle for regional stability collectively created a positive perception. Erdogan is consequently considered a leader who is trying to carry out Islamic brotherhood in the region. Also, it is argued that, thanks to Erdogan's charisma and experience, a “Turkish Model” emerged in the region.¹³¹ While also accepting the negative connotations in the eyes of Arab people (because of the Greater Middle East Initiative, and relative anti-Americanism in the

region after the Iraq War), after 9/11 it is widely known that Turkey was put forward as a model for the other countries in the region by the Bush administration, who declared war against extremism. Turkey must be considered by the West as a good example, with its secular system and electoral democracy, for other Muslim countries to copy. This, I argue, attracted great attention to Turkey and caused a positive perception in general.

Another factor that made Turkey significant according to Uysal is its new and more dynamic opening to the Middle East. The emergence of Turkey as being an important power in the region with its active foreign policy based on zero-problems with neighbors revived the Neo-Ottomanist debates and this role was perceived positively by the Arabs in general.¹³²

Moreover, according to *El-Gad* (newspaper belonging to the Opposition party that started the Kifayeh movement for the democratization of the regime in Egypt), Turkey is a good model for the Arabs who try to solve their economic and political problems. This is especially important in light of the discussions of moderation among Islamic parties and the making of peace with the secular regime, and the regime's tolerance to the Islamic parties. Also, Turkey's more independent foreign policy is appreciated among the Arab left, which has a dominant nationalist and anti-West discourse. In particular, the implementation of legal reforms towards basic rights and freedoms desired by the Arab left and the progress in fighting against poverty was admired. It is further argued that when it is time to show an example for the democratic rights and freedoms in the Arab and Islamic World today, the Turkish Model pointed first.¹³³

Also, Islamists in the Arab World and Egypt have gotten closer to the AK Party and see it as a model since the founders of AK Party originated in "Milli Gorus," which is considered an Islamic movement. However, seculars were more wary of the AK Party.¹³⁴ This

is consistent with my hypotheses that a better perception of Turkey emerged because of an Islamic-oriented government, though not very much among seculars. I believe this was the case for the majority of the Egyptian public, as reflected in the opinion polls.¹³⁵ However there are of course others who might have negative views of Turkey's Islamic AK Party, which was pointed by Uysal that a "Secular opposition party of Egypt El-Gad argued that Islamic model in Turkey is not yet complete and still in the process of evolving."¹³⁶

Also, it has been highlighted by Uysal where he cited Celal El-Azm that before the AK Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, or in general, the Arab Right's view of Turkey was negative due to the fact that the Caliphate was removed in the new Turkey. It was also because of the harsh Kemalist secular policies, which included a strict Westernization project as well as close relations with Israel. Nevertheless, after they saw how the AK Party successfully incorporated its Islamic background into a secular democratic structure peacefully (without sacrificing its independence in foreign policy with actions that clearly contradict Western interests, including harsh criticism of Israel), they were greatly inspired by it and changed their slogans.¹³⁷ This is reflective of the MB's positive image of Turkey. Also, as a political elite view which certainly affects the perceptions of a large percent of Egypt's population, the MB's point of view must be taken into account.

Another widespread positive view given by Egyptian media and intellectuals in this period is that Turkey's success lay in its fusion of Islam and democracy.¹³⁸ And more importantly, for some Turkey is the only country that can balance Islam and Secularism.¹³⁹

Also secular and nationalist party El-Vefd's newspaper compared Turkey and Egypt, arguing that while Egypt was exposed to poverty, bad governance, and corruption, Turkey attracted attention with its developments in economic and political fields. The Turkish model

has been mentioned in Egypt with Turkish democracy, secularism, foreign policy, economics, diplomacy, as well as a moderate Islamic government. Furthermore El-Vefd's leading article reveals a surprise and envy towards the "Turkish model," with a radical change from 1980's military coup (which brought so many obstacles to freedom of speech) to a democratic country ruled by a party with Islamic roots and increased regional-international influence and economic development. Most importantly the success of the AK Party with democratic rhetoric instead of an Islamic one resonated in Egypt.¹⁴⁰

"Erdogan Factor"

When I ask Middle Eastern people their opinion about Turkey in my conversions, most of them mentioned Erdogan and how charismatic and successful he is and how he has provided development and prosperity to his country. This factor which I call the "Erdogan factor" or "Erdogan's charisma" reveals a lot in terms of Turkey's image in the region, and I can say that it is still effective.

Heper analyzed Erdogan as a leader in his article and talked about "Erdogan's contribution" (which he also defined as reconciling tradition and modernity)¹⁴¹ as putting "an end to the undue influence of the military and the judiciary in politics."¹⁴² These actions of Erdogan in the first two terms of his government are very critical in the sense that it led to a better perception of Turkey in the region. It is very significant and relevant especially when we consider the military takeover of the Morsi government in Egypt recently. The issue of the military's involvement in politics in the Islamic World is widespread and the success of a Muslim majority country in this issue clearly is a good example for the others and it has arguably improved the perception of Turkey.

Uysal's piece, which basically looks at the period until 2010, conforms to my hypotheses that the perception of Turkey was generally positive until 2010. His findings say that, in general, Turkey emerged as a model country in Egypt during this period. His reasoning for this is as follows: "Progress towards democracy in Turkey in recent years, cultural, political and economic openings to the Arab countries, support of Ankara to the Palestinian cause, and developing economic relations with Egypt."¹⁴³ He also argues that primary reason why the "Turkish Model" attracted attention in Egypt is the active and multifaceted foreign policy of Turkey.¹⁴⁴ It goes without saying that starting with the refusal of joining and helping in the invasion of Iraq, actions and incidents such as mediation efforts between Israel and Syria, the Davos crisis, Mavi Marmara, and the role played with Brazil in the Iranian nuclear crisis have had clear results towards the end of positive image.

Another indicator or a way of measuring perception of Turkey in the Middle East and Egypt is to look at the number of people coming to Turkey between the years 2002-2010. A table¹⁴⁵ in the Dincer and Kutlay piece shows that: "While the number of visitors coming from the Middle East was 975 thousand in 2002; it exceeded 3.6 million in 2010."¹⁴⁶ Especially in the countries Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria, there is a tremendous increase. Also in Egypt if we look at the numbers in 2002 the total number of citizens coming to Turkey was 21,583 and then in 2010 it became 61,560, which show a clear rise.¹⁴⁷ It shows that during these years Turkey became a favorable tourist destination which implies an improving perception of Turkey, of which Egypt is no exception.

As an interesting argument and similar to mine, some scholars also have pointed to the role of Turkish media like "Arabic-broadcasting TV channels(TRT Arabic), print media, and show business (television series and movies) as a component of soft-power."¹⁴⁸

While all these important developments happening in Turkey between 2002 and 2010, beyond assumptions and my particular hypothesis, it is critical to look at Egypt and see how Egyptian and Arab media reflected Turkey. It is also important to look at how political elites talked about Turkey as well as how people perceived Prime Minister Erdogan.

The theory of Zaller, which I talked about in the theory section, is a combination of people's predispositions, political elite discourse, and the information provided by the Media. The opinion of Egyptian political elites (politicians, journalists, academics, intellectuals, writers) is as clearly observed in the Uysal (2010) piece, was generally positive as reflected by (El-Baradai, Kifayeh Movement, El-Vefd Party, Arab Nationalists as well as MB). The image reflected in the Egyptian media about Turkey was also generally positive. Finally the public predispositions (as a product of historical legacies) toward Turkey during the start of the period which I call successful were negative. However, I argue that with a positive change in the policies of the AK Party government, which includes active engagement with the region and its Islamically-sensitive approach, these negative feelings or perceptions also gradually vanished. Then, I argue that overall we have a combination of Turkey's image, which I find out to be positive as an outcome of all these factors. The public predispositions was the only negative factor which was particularly dominant during the first few years of the AK Party government but it entered to a trend of decline after the positive developments in Turkey and the way in which it was handled in the Egyptian media and by the political elites.

2010-2013

While in 2009 and 2010, favorable opinion of Turkey in the Middle East in general was 75 and 85 percent respectively; in 2011 it decreased to 78 percent. Then it declined to 69 percent in 2012 according to TESEV's report.¹⁴⁹

Consistent with my hypothesis, there are some scholars of Turkish foreign and domestic policy arguing that there is a decline in Turkish democracy in the recent years of AK Party government. Onis, for example, mentioned arguments that claimed: “A “civilian tutelage” has replaced “military tutelage” of the Kemalist era, and the later phase of the AK Party era is a kind of a limited or majoritarian understanding of democracy with new elements of exclusion built into the democratic system.”¹⁵⁰ It was further argued that: “This has manifested itself in terms of controls over the press and freedom of expression, the lack of tolerance for opposition, and the notorious malfunctioning of the judicial system.”¹⁵¹

Onis also talks about the AK Party's loss of reform momentum, and he tries to explain its reasons. He looks at Turkey's democratization process in 1999-2010 and compares its achievements and limitations. As limitations, he argues that: “The dominance of the ruling party limits the space available for genuine pluralism.”¹⁵² Also because of this dominance recent “Kurdish opening” plunged into deadlock.¹⁵³ This dominance, the author adds: “Raises concerns about creeping authoritarianism of the government, as domestic politics turn into a more conflict driven and antagonized sphere and elements of continued polarization also attempt to side-track the ongoing constitutional process towards the institutionalization of a presidential system with weak checks and balances.”¹⁵⁴ With the help of Onis, I created my own table to show these trends (see Table 2 below). These discussions of the presidential system obviously show intent on the government's part to change the current system, which, according to Onis, would “help to enhance executive power at the expense of the legislature and the judiciary. This in turn, would be hardly conducive to the process of democratic consolidation and deepening in the Turkish context.”¹⁵⁵

Table 2 Decline in the Democratization Process Which Caused a Negative Perception among Arab Public in the time period 2010-2013

Government's spirit and enthusiasm for reforms waned
Dominance of the ruling AK Party and the weakness of the opposition
Restrictions over the freedom of expression, and fairness of the judicial process
The pressure over judiciary and media tended to increase
Jailed journalists, fired dissenting columnists, showing signs of creeping authoritarianism
Discussions of presidential system and plans to bring it to Turkey show signs of increasing the power of executive with weak checks and balances on the side of the government

Erdogan does not tolerate criticism of any kind, according to Heper: “In recent years certain media owners have had to pay enormous amounts of taxes; some argued that these taxes represented a penalty for outspoken critics of Erdogan in the media. This indirect censure of the media has even led to certain journalists losing their jobs.”¹⁵⁶ Also when looking at Erdogan's life, Heper argues that he “has a basic respect for democracy.”¹⁵⁷ He continues, adding that “He has not been equally accommodating to the Alawites in Turkey, who have requested that their temples (cemevleri) should be given the same legal status as that of the mosques and similarly granted state funds. On this issue Erdogan has stated that Alawiism is not a religion separate from Islam.”¹⁵⁸ He also points that “Both Erdogan's belief that the goal of democracy is that of finding Allah's consent (riza) regarding what is ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ and his related ideal of communalized piety may not bode well for democracy.”¹⁵⁹

Turkey's active foreign policy also involves a democracy promotion agenda. It is so important that Ankara even sacrificed her vital national interests in Syria by urging Assad to step down. As an example of this policy, in a long interview with the *Cairo Review*, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu “urged Egypt to write an inclusive constitution with liberal and

minority protections.”¹⁶⁰ While we acknowledge that promotion of democracy and democratic values in the Middle East will be welcomed by the Egyptian Arab public who started the protests in 2010 and the perception of Turkey will be generally better, the deterioration of democracy inside Turkey will put the image in danger especially when Arab people see that Turkey lacks the liberal democracy which it eagerly advertises in the region.

While mentioning the positive developments in Turkey with the AK Party in power, its success and how it contained the role of the military as well as Turkey's economic improvements, well-known Palestinian journalist Al-Atwan (2013) also argues that “recently, Erdogan has started to implement Islamic measures, with a ban on the sale of alcohol recently rushed through parliament. Restrictions of the media and freedom of expression have also increased.”¹⁶¹

Public opinion

Perfectly aligned and appropriate with my research, Zaller argues that public opinion is shaped by the interaction between information and predispositions. It is clear that the way to get information is through the media and political elites.

It is naïve to expect the ordinary public to have detailed -- or any -- information about political issues. This suggests that when we say public opinion, we actually mean political elites, because the opinion of the public is shaped by these elites. In my case, most of the people in the Middle East do not have much information about Turkey's economy, government ideology, or democracy. Usually political elites like politicians, journalists, and activists, follow Turkey and have these ideas. Of course we cannot rule out some interested and knowledgeable members of the public as well. These ordinary citizens reach their opinion as a result of what they hear from these elites and also by their own predispositions.

So it is very crucial to appreciate the role of elites who shape public opinion. At the start of this research, I assumed that if we take into account the “Arab Spring” and democratic trends in the Middle East, in the long term these elites will be mostly pro-democracy. This suggests that pro-democracy elites who closely follow the developments in Turkey, which they see as a model or at least as an inspiring example, will have positive perceptions about a democratic Turkey. Contrarily, they will have negative feelings and attitudes towards Turkey if Turkey's democracy deteriorates in the future.

With the widespread events like Taksim Gezi Park¹⁶² in Istanbul and violent police crackdown, together with images that lend the appearance that there is another Turkish spring emerging because of government suppression and crackdown on dissent, one can argue that, with the international media coverage towards those sorts of events, especially through networks like Aljazeera which are well-received in the Middle East, the image of Turkey as a country that projected itself as a democracy and as an example for the burgeoning democracies in the region will worsen. It is normal that the masses that watch TV will get a negative image of Turkey when they see violent protests in the streets. Then the positive image of Turkey in their minds, which previously evoked notions of a peaceful harmony of Islam and democracy, will change. The fact that even the brutal Assad regime in Syria ironically criticized Erdogan to listen to people's demands damaged Turkey's image in the region.

All the criticisms and evidence, which I mentioned above from books and articles, point to a trend towards authoritarianism in the period after 2010. From 2010 onwards the perception on the part of Egyptian elites and the image displayed by the media started to worsen.

Examples from the Media

Prominent journalist and longtime editor-in-chief of the London based newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, Bari Al-Atwan also displays the declining perception in his article: “Erdogan's Turkey has until now been the template for coexistence; seeing moderate Islam and democracy flourish side by side. It also presented a role model for economic reforms which have seen the average income of a Turkish citizen rise to more than \$13,000 a year, a four-fold increase in less than ten years. These achievements are at risk if the present unrest (meaning Gezi Park events) is not dealt with by dialogue, wisdom, and restraint from using security solutions and violence.”¹⁶³

Abdulrahman al Rashed, who is the general manager of the *Al-Arabiya* newspaper, argued that protests in Taksim square in Istanbul attracted great attention. He admits that it is not like the situation in Tahrir square or the revolution in Tunisia. He also maintains that Turkey is not Egypt or Syria. However, the attention given was the same as the other countries and it was as if a Turkish spring was underway.¹⁶⁴ He says that: “An Egyptian hopes that Erdogan falls, while Syria's information minister mockingly advised Erdogan.”¹⁶⁵ On the one hand he pointed to Erdogan's legitimacy and his election successes. On the other hand, he argued that: “Erdogan does not completely adhere to the rules of democratic work like Britain's premier or Germany's chancellor do. He jailed journalists, pursued competing media outlets and attempted to restrict people's freedoms. Perhaps this is what led his rivals to gather against him in Taksim Square under the excuse of rejecting to uproot trees.”¹⁶⁶ This clearly suggests that the Egyptian and Arab media in general followed the situation in Turkey (by which I mean the anti-democratic trend), and they reflected it to the Arab public. This in turn caused a declined perception.

Before the “Arab Spring,” I read much news about Egypt that shows that Egyptian leadership does not approve of Turkish policies and criticizes the Turkish government. This is the case, even when the perceptions about Turkey skyrocketed in general in the Arab World and especially when Egyptian public opinion of Turkey was also at its top according to the surveys. It was quite normal for the Egyptian regime to criticize Turkey for inspiring Islamist movements inside Egypt. It might also be normal for the regime to not like Turkey as a democratic country and for many other reasons and motives such as strategic or ideological reasons, or as a rival/opponent for regional influence. While speeches of politicians also manipulate or lead some segments of the population, usually its real radius is limited in authoritarian countries. Still, I will provide some examples of speeches of leaders.

As I will discuss more in detail in the Tunisian case, the foreign policy factor was also very effective in the explanation of the declining perception of Turkey in the Middle East in 2010-2013 period. In Egypt, after the coup which ousted President Muhammed Morsi, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and the AK Party decided to take sides and support the Muslim Brotherhood. I argue that this is a foreign-policy mistake and instead Turkey and the prime minister should have emphasized the reestablishment of democracy in Egypt as soon as possible. This preference on the part of the Turkish government in turn negatively affected perception of Turkey among the broad segments of the Egyptian society. This also appeared in the Tunisian media:

“Turkey has emerged as one of the fiercest international critics of what it has called an “unacceptable coup” after the military toppled Mursi last month. Erdogan’s peculiar attitudes toward the events in Egypt urged many Egyptian TV channels to launch a boycott on Turkish drama series to express their refusal of the Turkish Prime Minister’s stance and to protest against his interference in the Egyptian affairs. A number of TV channels, including Al-Hayat, Al-Nahar, and Al-Kahera Wal Nas, responded to the call by boycotting Turkish series. Al-Hayat TV

channel informed its viewers that starting Saturday there will not be any Turkish drama TV series due to Erdogan's stance. Many Egyptian Journalists, actors, writers and filmmakers appreciated the call for the boycott and welcomed the idea of stopping the airing of Turkish TV soaps, which are widely popular in the Arabic world. Al Hayat TV owner stated in an interview with Al-Arabia channel that he decries Turkey's intervention in Egypt's internal affairs, describing Ankara's position on the situation as "narrow minded." He highlighted how the soaps have helped Turkey lure more tourists from Egypt and the region, foreseeing that the boycott will result in "huge losses" for Turkey."¹⁶⁷

Mona Eltahawy, an influential Egyptian-American journalist and political commentator, shared a post in her twitter account: "Solidarity with Turkey protestors bec[ause] I support the right to protest everywhere and I oppose police brutality everywhere."¹⁶⁸ She also shared the famous hashtag #occupygezi which shows her clear support to the protestors. I also argue that views of intellectuals and journalists like her give a negative image of Turkey and greatly affect the public opinion in Egypt.

Finally in *Al-Ahram* weekly an article by Sayeed Abdel Maguid appeared with the title: "Erdogan Ignores Fresh Protests." In the article Maguid draws attention to the protests that happened again in Turkey two months after the Gezi protests. The author argued that: "Turkey's Erdogan blusters on in blind ignorance that public dissent in the country could be based on real grievances."¹⁶⁹ He continued, noting that:

"Turkey is once again haunted by the same turmoil that engulfed it in May. But this time the protests are focused in the Hatay region on the borders with Syria. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is still in denial about it all. For him, the disturbances are but abnormal occurrences, having nothing to do with how the majority of the population feels. He even threatened those who "attempt to sow disorder," without admitting the veracity of the underlying grievances. Many were incensed when Erdogan, instead of tackling the mounting discontent at home, developed an obsession with hosting the 2020 Olympics. The Turkish minister for EU

affairs, Egemen Bagis, even warned demonstrators that, “If Istanbul loses; it will be your fault.”¹⁷⁰

He also pointed to the foreign policy failures of the government as: “Meanwhile, Erdogan’s policy on Syria bombed and his support for Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood bordered on the embarrassing.”¹⁷¹ Abdel Maguid clearly did not draw a positive picture of Turkey and indicated the signs that the Arab public opinion of Turkey is declining because of the Turkish Government's recent policies.

CHAPTER FOUR: PERCEPTIONS OF TURKEY IN TUNISIA

There are a lot of similarities between Tunisia and Turkey. First of all, there are cultural similarities and a common history between the two countries. Tunisia was ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries along with the other countries in the Maghreb and stayed under its rule until the beginning of French colonialism in 1881. Also, one could argue that debates about the Turkish model of government started earlier with the first President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba took secular Turkey as a model and envied Ataturk (the founder of modern Turkey) very much. He followed a similar path to Ataturk in terms of modernizing the country and passing reforms. Bourguiba made many reforms in regards to women's rights, family planning, education, economy, and other issues. He tried to reduce the role of Islam in the country, much like Ataturk. For a long time, headscarves were banned in Tunisia at schools and public places, similarly to Turkey.

I am referencing Zaller's theory and indirectly applying it in this study. I felt the need to make some modifications in my research. For example, unlike with Egypt, I prefer not to give much space to the politicians and leader's perception and speeches about Turkey. There is likely a huge discrepancy between public opinion and policy-makers in the Arab World since the majority of these regimes rule arbitrarily, thus inhibiting political representations of the populace. This creates situations unlike an average Western democracy. Zaller's theory might be a perfect fit for Western liberal democracies, but probably not for Middle Eastern autocracies. In a functioning democracy, the elected officials are deemed as legitimate, and, thus, their views/discourse can affect and represent public opinion. However, in a Middle Eastern dictatorship, why would people care about and shape their opinion according to the views of a leader that they did not vote for? Of course we cannot neglect the ruler's coalition

of interest, made up of select individuals who care about what the leader has to say, but this constitutes a very limited percentage of the population.

In Tunisia currently, a democratically elected government has been ruling the country for only around two years. Before, the country's history was full of unaccountable leaders. It is therefore normal for Arab decision-makers, in authoritarian states, to criticize Turkey for political and strategic reasons, rather than because of public opinion. For this reason, the views of other political elites (journalists, academics, etc.) were considered more than those of politicians. The views of influential writers, academicians, journalists, intellectuals etc. are more reflective of public opinion when a dictator is ruling the country. For example, in Tunisia, when he was still in power, Zein el Abidin Ben Ali could criticize Turkey just because he perceived the success of Turkish Islamists as a threat since it might encourage Tunisian Islamists as well. Likewise, in Egypt, the Mubarak regime criticized Turkey for strategic reasons such as perceiving Turkey as a rival for regional influence and power as well as for the same reasons as Ben Ali. By the same reasoning, one can argue that the media, including newspapers, will also reflect the government's position since they are under the control of the regime. However, I argue that it is not logical for dictators to apply pressure to newspapers and writers just because they praise Turkey and its achievements unless they are critical of their own government and its actions. Thus, I suggest it is safe to focus on newspapers and columnists to examine perceptions of Turkey.

As previously pointed out, I use perception of Turkey as a general term denoting perceptions of foreign policy, domestic politics, and as a country in general. Mustafa Ellabad describes this by saying that perception is, "Standing in the world, region"¹⁷².

Testing

To make this case study as representative as possible, I took views from sources with different political predispositions and from various segments of society in Tunis. I examined the views of Leftists, Islamists, secularists, and Salafists, etc., especially elites, who are respected in society. I will do qualitative and interpretive analysis to understand the perception expressed in these statements.

2002-2010

An initial observation is that Arab opinion towards Turkey in 2002 was generally negative. According to a poll measuring Arab opinion of thirteen countries, “Turkey also did quite poorly, receiving only slightly net positive ratings in two of the eight countries surveyed.”¹⁷³ The most favorable opinion of Turkey was in Morocco with 52% and the least favorable was in in UAE with 11%.¹⁷⁴

Similarly to perceptions in other Middle Eastern countries, the perception of Turkey in Tunisia in the 20th century was generally negative because of the aforementioned reasons such as Turkey's alignment with the West and the image of Turkey as the servant of Western interests in the Middle East. However, with the AK Party's rise to power and the active engagement of Turkey in the region both economically and politically, perceptions began to become more positive throughout the Middle East. Tunisia is no exception. According to the Ministry of Economy,¹⁷⁵ while the foreign trade volume between Tunisia and Turkey in 2005 was \$387 million, it increased to \$1.1 billion in 2008. Turkey's own economic development during the AK Party's rule was also a great factor in creating more positive perceptions of Turkey in Tunisia.

As an example of the official rhetoric about Turkey in Tunisia in the Ben Ali era, Ghazi Jomaa, the Tunisian Ambassador to Turkey in 2008, did not say anything about the

Turkish Model or Turkey's democratic improvements, and about whether these could offer an example for Tunisia. Instead he highlighted factors such as economic relations and increasing trade between the two countries¹⁷⁶. Nonetheless, Turkey's soft power was on the rise at that time. Sami Orhan, the host of *Ayna* (Turkish TV travel program) pointed to this positive perception of Turkey in 2008:

“You get a real sense of the affection Tunisians have for Turks when you stroll through the open markets here. People repeat the phrases and words they know in Turkish for you as you pass through. They tell us, “Türkiye kardeş ülke” (“Turkey is a sibling country”). Many of the merchants here tell us of past trips they have made to Turkey. As we pass through the marketplace, we are invited into many shops. We hear the word “arkadaş” or “friend” repeated everywhere we go, and people count the names of Turkish soccer players they know. They tell us how happy they are that Turkey is heading toward European Union membership. As we learn, traveling from here to visit Turkey is a major trend, especially for those involved in international trade.”¹⁷⁷

As previously indicated in the Egypt case, another example of increased positive perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is the rise in the number of tourists. According to Turkish tourism agencies, “the number of tourists from the Middle East and North Africa to Turkey is increasing, and they said the number of tourists from that area to Turkey was up between 20 and 50% in the first six months of 2009. Around 10,600,000 tourists visited Turkey in the first half of 2009. The number of tourists from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, Lebanon, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan was up in the mentioned period.”¹⁷⁸ This increase also coincides with the rising popularity of Turkey and Erdogan in the Middle East due to the Turkish government’s active foreign policy and other actions giving the impression of Turkey as a regional super power.

Opinions on the “Turkish Model” or Experience

In light of these factors, it is also possible to talk about the influence of the “Turkish Model” on the “Arab Spring” and the revolution in Tunisia. Many scholars¹⁷⁹ have previously pointed to the role of Turkey in this sense. In the 2002-2010 period, Turkey showed that a Muslim country can be democratic and remain secular. This period also showed how a democratically elected government representing the people's voice achieved an economic success and maintained active engagement in the region as a rising power. This rise follows the trajectory of the Turkish people's values and concerns. These developments in Turkey definitely inspired the Tunisian youths who were oppressed under a dictator and who were deprived of freedom of expression under terrible economic conditions.

“Returning to Tunisia after nearly 20 years in exile, Ennahda’s leader Rachid Ghannouchi declared that he had taken Turkey’s AK Party as a model; also Ahmed Najib Chebbi, founder of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party, argued that Tunisia should embrace democracy in Turkey as a model. There is a historical sympathy for Turkey in Tunisia, Chebbi says, stressing that the previous decade’s developments in Turkey have also been closely followed in his country. “Today, there is a phenomenon in Turkey that increases our sympathy for this country: The participatory democracy model that is being successfully implemented by moderate Islamic politicians in Turkey. We are closely following the policies of Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan who has united Muslim culture with Western-oriented democratic culture,” said Chebbi, while declaring that Tunisians had taken the democratic struggle in Turkey as a model. “Turkey has economically made a huge jump and gained a huge prestige within its own region. In the past, Arab countries have been skeptical towards Turkey since its image was being a country that is affiliated with the policies of the United States and Israel. Today, Turkey has found its place, and Arabs are very glad to see Turkey coming back,” Chebbi elaborated, stressing that Turkey’s firm stance and support in the Palestinian cause had totally changed Arabs’ perception of Turkey.”¹⁸⁰

Also, “Yadh Ben Achour, a prominent lawyer who is the head of Tunisia’s Higher Political Reform Commission, underlined that in Turkey, Erdoğan has shown that a person

who originates from an Islamic wing can reconcile Muslims with a democratic and secular regime. Erdoğan's rising popularity among people in recent years is the reason behind politicians' intense interest in Turkey"¹⁸¹. These remarks show how positive the political elite's perceptions of Turkey were in the 2002-2010 era. This positive perception is the outcome of Turkey's economic development and active foreign policy with Muslim sensitivities as the reflection of Turkey's conservative electorate. Most significantly, it is also the outcome of Turkey's combination of Islam and democracy in a harmonious way. Perceptions will be less positive if Turkey loses that virtue.

Moreover a leftist and longtime exile interim president of Tunisia, Moncef Marzouki, in his visit to Turkey, told the reporters that: "The Turkish experience of developing its democracy is a good example for his country and added that Tunisia will follow the same path that Turkey did."¹⁸² It is striking that he says "the Turkish experience" instead of "model," and he stresses the democratization part of this experience the most alongside other factors such as the Turkish economy.

2010-2013

This section will discuss the argument that there is a gradual decrease in positive perception of Turkey starting from 2010 to the present. Favorable opinions of Turkey in Tunisia dropped from 91 percent in 2011 to 80 percent in 2012 according to TESEV's survey¹⁸³. This is evidence of a declining trend in positive perceptions of Turkey in Tunisia. There are two critical junctures that put the perceptions of Turkey to a litmus test in the Middle East. These are: 1) the Arab Spring and Turkey's reaction to it and 2) the Gezi Park events.

First, some background about Tunisia and the region will help illuminate the discussion in this section. According to Pew Global Attitudes: “As conditions have deteriorated, Tunisians’ faith in democracy has weakened over the past year. Nonetheless, broad majorities still prioritize key democratic principles and institutions.”¹⁸⁴ This is consistent with my assumption that interest in democracy in the Middle East, including Tunisia, has increased after the Arab Spring. Another poll by Pew Research also illustrates this issue:

“In 2012, When asked which is a better model for the role of religion in Tunisia’s government – Turkey or Saudi Arabia – the majority named the more secular Turkey as the ideal, while just 18% chose Saudi Arabia. Sixty three percent said Turkey is a better model. While the majority still sees Turkey as a model, the percentage of respondents with this opinion has dropped from the higher levels before 2010. Also, most of those surveyed believe Turkey favors democracy in the Middle East, including roughly three-in-four in the newly democratic nations of Egypt and Tunisia. In Tunisia 74% and in Egypt 78% considered Turkey as favoring democracy in the Middle East.”¹⁸⁵

This reflects the agenda of democracy promotion in Turkish foreign policy, especially after the Arab Spring. However, this could have negative consequences if Turkey's democracy at home worsens. This would be a clear contradiction and will give signs of lack of sincerity in Turkish democracy.

In a different survey conducted in the spring of 2013 called “How Middle Eastern Elites Perceive Turkish Foreign Policy”, when respondents were asked if Turkey's democratization experience can be a source for inspiration for the Middle East 67% of Tunisians said yes in contrast to 33% who answered no. Still, these indicators signal a decline in the perception of Turkey compared to previous years like 2009 and 2010 when Turkey was considered by many (higher than 80% of respondents) as a model.¹⁸⁶ There are also other

questions showing bad signs for Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) in this survey. For example, 43% of Tunisians agreed that Turkey is pursuing foreign policy goals that exceed her economic and military power and capabilities. In addition, close to 60% in general in the Middle East and more than 50% of Tunisia elites thought Turkey is pursuing a Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. This implies that in the eyes of elites, Turkey is trying to be the leader of Middle Eastern countries instead of pursuing a principled democratically-oriented foreign policy.¹⁸⁷

Another interesting factor that gives us an idea of the conduct of Turkish foreign policy in the post-“Arab Spring” era is people's reactions of how Turkey handled the Arab Spring. According to TESEV's 2012 report, the percent of respondents from Tunisia who thought that Turkey had a positive effect on the “Arab Spring” dropped to 42% in 2012 from 56% in 2011.¹⁸⁸

“Arab Spring”

One can analyze TFP by looking at the “Arab Spring” which started in December 2010 in Tunisia, spread to other countries, and is still continuing today. The “Arab Spring” also put Turkey's foreign policy to a test. Along with democratization, the foreign policy variable is also very important in explaining the decreased positive perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East in the 2010-2013 time period. Turkey's handling of the “Arab Spring” cannot be considered as a total failure; however, some actions of the decision-makers in Turkey caused negative feelings among the Middle Eastern public. In terms of first reactions, some authors¹⁸⁹ even considered Turkey as more successful than the Western countries since many European countries and the United States waited too long and hesitated to urge Mubarak to leave when millions gathered in Tahrir Square. Nevertheless, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan sent a swift message to Mubarak: “Hear the cry of the people and their extremely humane

demands. Meet the people's desire for change without hesitation. No government can stand against the people."¹⁹⁰

However, after Egypt, Turkish leaders started sending mixed signals. Especially in the cases of Libya and Syria, they sent mixed signals since many Turkish interests were and still are at stake. Turkish foreign policy took the form of a wait and see approach. Turkey's attempts to maintain its active foreign policy with trips by Erdogan to Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt after the fall of their dictators, only lasted for a short period. After that, Turkish foreign policy began to show signs of inaction and isolation. For example, Turkey should have understood more swiftly that it needed to make alterations to its zero-problems with neighbors policy after the Arab Spring. It was no longer possible to maintain good relations with regimes like Bashar Al Assad's, and Turkey should have turned to a clear agenda for democracy promotion. Instead, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu tried to convince his counterparts in Syria to adopt democratic processes until it was obvious that the regime would continue killing its own people.

Turkey was caught unprepared by these uprisings as many other countries were, and Turkey, despite its democratic achievements in recent years and its activism in the region, did not have what Kardas calls "a clear democracy promotion agenda that would have pitted them against the authoritarian or monarchic regimes."¹⁹¹

The Turkish government was also quite confused and could not generate a consistent foreign policy in the Libyan case. As Barkey rightly puts it: "Ankara first objected to a no-fly-zone and any form of military intervention as Erdogan also argued in late February as "what is NATO doing in Libya?" However, in March, Turkey backtracked from its initial position and eventually agreed to NATO taking over command and control of the no-fly-

zone. Turkey sent a number of ships to evacuate wounded Libyans, and, finally, Turkey came around to the idea that Gaddafi should leave power.”¹⁹² Although it has been stated by the prime minister that from the beginning of the crisis in Libya he made phone calls to Colonel Gaddafi urging him to give power to a person with widespread support and agree to stop the violence and killings directed at Libyan civilians, Erdogan only declared publicly on May 3, 2011(after more than two months) that Gaddafi must immediately leave power. All of these signs show a lack of a clear agenda of democracy promotion in Turkish foreign policy. It also shows a lack of adjustment to the crisis situation. This in turn negatively affected perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East.

The economy variable in Hypothesis 3 is also important as an explanatory factor. However, it will not be prominent among the determinants of perceptions of Turkey in the 2010-2013 periods unless Turkey endures an economic crisis similar to Greece and other European countries. This is because Turkey still has a strong and growing economy and currently is the 17th largest economy in the world. Of course, the economic losses and obstacles to trade with Egypt, Libya, and especially Syria, which occurred because of the “Arab Spring” and instability in the region, might have negatively affected the perception of Turkey (though in a limited way) in the eyes of the respective publics. As an example of an economic incident which might affect perception, Dawisha says that “In November 2011, Turkey, which had upward of \$2.5 billion in bilateral trade with Syria, suspended all financial credit dealings with its Southern neighbor, and froze all its government's assets in Turkey.”¹⁹³

Gezi Park Incident

The Gezi Park incident started in May 28, 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey, as peaceful protests against the government's urban development plan for Gezi Park (which is among the few green public places left in Istanbul) calling for the construction of a shopping mall. A few

environmental groups started a sit-in protest after a few trees were removed. The police used excessive force and tear gas against the protester, leading to protests spreading all across the country. In various cities of Turkey, like the capital, Ankara, Izmir, Hatay, Bursa, Eskisehir etc. the demonstrations included diverse groups including radical leftists, Islamists, liberals, and secularists, all protesting against the government and Prime Minister Erdogan. For days, until late June, thousands of people gathered every day in Taksim Square, Istanbul, where the Gezi Park is located. The protests were broadcast all over the world by many global networks like BBC and CNN and attracted a lot of global attention. Many people compared it to Tahrir Square, in Egypt, although acknowledging large differences between Turkey and Mubarak's Egypt or Ben Ali's Tunisia. After all, there is a democratically elected government ruling Turkey. However, the protestors used the same tools, such as social networks like Facebook and Twitter, as in the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. Thousands of pictures of alleged government violence were shared. Pictures of atrocities committed by some protestors were also shared by people supporting the government. The country was too polarized after this incident.

No matter the motives behind the protests, the uncompromising position of Erdogan and government officials (i.e. heavy handed tactics, Erdogan's calling the protestors looters (capulcu) etc.) caused them to last a long time. Turkey's image and reputation, both regionally and globally, were damaged. Also, since the situation was abused by extremist groups, many private and government buildings and stores were damaged. Like many protestors (including actors and artists) later agreed, the government's reaction turned protests stemming from environmental concerns into anti-government or anti-Erdogan protests. There is a reason for this. As I previously argued, there were many undemocratic government actions before the start of the Gezi Park protests that caused anger and frustration on the part of secular and

liberal citizens of Turkey. There were many authoritarian actions conducted by the government in recent years. For example, a kiss protest was organized in Ankara after a couple kissing in the subway station were warned by municipal officials. In addition, the government tried to regulate the sale of alcohol, and this action was deemed wrong by many secular people in Turkey. Gezi Park is a perfect case showing how the perceptions of Arabs will become negative when Turkey becomes or appears undemocratic. With the Gezi Park events in May 2013, perceptions of Turkey appeared to be generally negative in Tunisian media and newspapers.

Gezi Park in Arab Media

The repercussions of this event in the Tunisian and Arab media must be discussed. In regards to the recent Gezi Park protests in Turkey, famous Tunisian blogger, Haythem el Mekki, wrote using his Facebook and twitter accounts: “This would not have happened had the Turkish government done a good job in protecting the different-minded. Turkish government not only doesn't protect its minorities, it tries to destroy them. Welcome to the Turkish model... Of fascism.”¹⁹⁴

Tunisialive (one of the few English language online newspapers in Tunisia) handled the events by writing the following:

“Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan defended actions that led to mass protests in Turkey and vowed to continue his plans to develop a controversial park in Istanbul. Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Tunisia comes in the wake of mass demonstrations that erupted in Taksim Square, and which spread throughout Istanbul and Ankara. The mass movement has gathered force, with protests so far continuing for nearly a week in opposition to the perceived authoritarianism of Erdogan and his AK Party. While his visit was intended to center around Tunisian-Turkish relations, journalists’ questions shifted the focus to the tenuous situation currently unfolding in Turkey.” When the journalists asked questions about the excessive use of

force by the police and the use of tear gas, one of the Turkish officials apologized, however, the newspaper writes, Erdogan did not offer a full apology. “There is no country that does not use tear gas,” he asserted.¹⁹⁵

It is obvious from the inclusion of this statement that Tunisialive portrayed Erdogan as a stubborn and reckless Turkish prime minister who is not giving any signs of compromise or concession to the thousands of protestors while still insisting on doing what he wanted to do in the first place. This coverage of Erdogan’s statements by the newspaper further hurt Turkey’s image which was already damaged by the widespread coverage of the events through television and other visual media.

Another headline from Tunisialive is as follows: “Protestors Await Turkish Prime Minister's Arrival in Tunisia”. It goes on:

“Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will face protests here related to the serious unrest against his government that has arisen in Turkey. In a letter published on the Nawaat website, a group of Turkish protesters in Istanbul addressed the Tunisian people, asking them to protest the prime minister’s arrival. According to them, Erdogan chose “to ignore those who died and were injured because of the police brutality implemented at his orders.” Members of the Turkish community in Tunisia and Tunisian sympathizers will stage a protest this Thursday in front of the headquarters of the UTICA trade union.”¹⁹⁶

It is really striking to see Tunisian people, along with Turkish citizens living in Tunisia, organize a protest against Erdogan in solidarity with the people of Turkey. It shows the interest of Tunisians in democracy and human rights as well as how closely they are following Turkey. Also, it is a measure of how negative perceptions of Turkey became when people started protesting against a country which they long held as a model.

In addition to the above examples of coverage, Al-Jazeera gave ample space to an article by Tunisian political scientist, Larbi Sadiki, titled “From Taksim to Tahrir: A Turkish 'Arab Spring'?”. Sadiki summarized the protests in Turkey:

“The factors that have detonated the people’s power protest in Turkey call for special attention: authoritarian space, single leadership cult, neo-liberalism, and youth dynamism. The Gezi Park protest served simply as a detonator; it is both a cause and an effect. That is, it is a cause in the sense it has quickly become a rallying symbol for channeling public outrage against central authority and because the cumulative frustration and disaffection came to the fore all at once. These did not only concern draconian laws about displays of affection in public space and consumption of alcohol, but also what kind of ‘public space’ citizens are entitled to in a democracy.”¹⁹⁷

Sadiki conceded that Erdogan is no Ben Ali or Mubarak and that he owes his position to the ballot, not the bullet.¹⁹⁸ He also acknowledged that:

“Erdogan is credited with many political feats in Turkey: economic success, the fight against the deep state or *derin devlet*, taming the historically dominant military, peace-making with the Kurds, and, of course, solid economic performance. He has prevailed in ways that have definitely changed Turkey: more tolerance of ethnic minorities, acceptance of Kurds and peace-making with them, diverse media representing different views and ideologies, and confrontation of past tragedies, including persecution of Alawites, amongst others, and the attempt to use diplomacy to resolve questions over historical Armenian issues.”¹⁹⁹

However, he argues that: “Erdogan’s opponents find all kinds of faults, including the imprisonment of secular opponents and some abuses of human rights and public freedoms – including recent laws to ban the sale of alcohol from 10pm to 6am or around mosques and school precincts and prohibitions on displays of affection in public spaces.”²⁰⁰ Sadiki further pointed out that: “The spirit of solidarity and defiance in the face of brutality and draconian government reactions could not be extinguished by police riot control vehicles’ water-

hoses.”²⁰¹ Most importantly, at the end he makes an argument regarding the “Model” position of Turkey:

“One week is a long time in politics, as it is always said. The uprisings of Turkey have proved this to be a truism. A week before the ruling AKP and its charismatic leader, Prime Minister Erdogan, were paraded as ‘models’ for Arab Spring fledgling democracies. What is certain is that Erdogan and his ruling party, the AKP, after Taksim Square protests will never be the same. A page is being turned in the history of arguably the most successful Islamist party anywhere in the Muslim world. The AKP may have no choice but to ditch Erdogan lest Erdogan condemns his party to the proverbial dustbin of history. Henceforth, for the AKP it is a case of ‘reform or perish’. In any case, the seeds of a Turkish Spring may have been sown in the very grounds of the space, Gezi Park, the AKP planned to bury. Nature has a way of striking back: Gezi Park has come so close to burying Erdogan and his party.”²⁰²

All of Sadiki’s arguments show how intellectuals or academics in Tunisia made sense of the protests in Turkey and how the image of Turkey was damaged in the eyes of Tunisians, in general. In the Al-Arabiya news outlet, the protests in Turkey were also widely covered. Examples of headlines include: “Turkey’s standing man wins German rights award”²⁰³, “Turkey seeks to tighten grip on Twitter after protests”²⁰⁴. These headlines also show how broadly Turkey’s protests attracted attention in the Arab media, which, in turn, likely affected Arab public opinion negatively.

A different title from Al-Arabiya also reflects another bad development for Turkish democracy and public perception: “Advocacy group cites Turkey press freedom crisis”. In the article, the author writes:

“A prominent press freedom advocacy group is asking Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to take steps to end what it calls a crisis for journalists in Turkey. In a letter to Erdogan dated Sept. 16, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists cites particularly the government’s attempts to control the coverage of recent events, including anti-government protests in June. In a report last

year, the group raised concerns about the prosecution and imprisonment of journalists in Turkey. The new letter, signed by CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon, says that since then the Turkish government has engaged in heated anti-press rhetoric. It notes that senior officials, including Erdogan, have accused media organizations of publishing false reports to destabilize the government. CPJ is also alarmed by “reports of numerous firings and forced resignations of critical columnists, editors and reporters, and in apparent retaliation for their coverage” of the protests.”²⁰⁵

As I previously mentioned, since the current Ennahdha government is hugely popular and widely supported by the people, Tunisian politician's views on Turkey can be used as valid evidence of public perceptions of Turkey in Tunisia. As a reflection of the post-revolution expectations of the Tunisian politicians regarding Turkey, Ahmed Najib Chebbi, Democratic Progressive Party leader said that: “The Tunisian population shares close sympathy with Turkey, but to say that Turkey is a model for Tunisia would not be right.”²⁰⁶ He also said that “Tunisia wants to construct a democracy, a democracy of its own.” “We'd also like Turkey to be a stable democracy.”²⁰⁷

It is important to draw attention to the (International Federation for Human Rights) FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen's criticism of human rights violations in Turkey at the FIDH's 38th congress in Istanbul in front of the Turkish Interior Minister, Besir Atalay²⁰⁸: “Souhayr Belhassen, who is also a Tunisian journalist and human rights activist, told the crowd at the congress that FIDH activists had been detained arbitrarily and 16 FIDH members were imprisoned in Bahrain, Belarus, Iran, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Turkey.”²⁰⁹ While “she praised the recent release of 22 trade unionists and eight Human Rights Association (İHD) leaders in Turkey which she said reflects the government's commitment to improve the human rights situation in Turkey, she also added that the wife and children of Muharrem Erbey, general vice chairperson of the Diyarbakır branch of İHD who is still in

prison, were present in the conference hall, and she appealed to the Turkish government for the release of Erbey.”²¹⁰

In addition, Slim Amamou, the previous short term youth minister of Tunisia and famous blogger and activist, shared in his twitter account a picture of Turkish police. He commented on the photo saying, “Turkish Police puts Burn Chemicals in the Water Cannon Tanks”. He also shared the famous hashtag used by Turkish protestors, “[#occupygezi](#),” clearly revealing his support for the protests and condemnation of police violence.²¹¹

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL VIEWS FROM THE REGION

Instead of analyzing another country, let me shed light on the perception of Turkey by giving examples of various other opinions from the region. This general analysis will cover both periods from 2002-2010 and 2010-2013.

As an example of positive perceptions about Turkey, it serves to mention a personal encounter of mine with a random Moroccan man that I came across in the Netherlands in 2008. He asked me where I was from, and when I told him that I was from Turkey, he sincerely hugged me and told me how he loved Turkey and Prime Minister Erdogan. This provides some evidence of the popularity of Turkey in the 2002-2010 period.

Another example, which serves as an indication of how Arab intellectuals followed the positive developments in Turkey and mentioned it in their articles is the 2009 article of Jouejati. In his article, Jouejati first draws attention to “Turkish-mediated indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel in 2008 and argues that Turkey has proven to be an effective mediator between Syria and Israel and that, if the interrupted peace talks are to resume, Turkey must be present.”²¹² He also discusses the reasons behind Erdogan's harsh criticism of Israel and “his public rebuke of Israeli violence toward Palestinians during the January 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos.”²¹³ As a reflection of this disagreement in regards to policy, he mentioned that: “Erdogan's government cancelled Israel's participation during that October's "Anatolian Eagle" exercise--a joint NATO air force war game in Turkish skies.”²¹⁴ He also talks about a shift in the foreign policy of Turkey and points to “the regional stability Turkey seeks to promote through its "zero-problem policy"--a new Turkish regional approach in which regional rivals would now bury the hatchet.”²¹⁵

Azmi Bishara, a very influential Palestinian political commentator, writes that: “There is a need for a country that could be cast as a "Sunni state" which will play an honorable role in matters important to Arabs.”²¹⁶ He argues that “Turkey's actions are built up to signify the emergence of a neo-Ottoman state, or even the resurgence of the Islamic caliphate.”²¹⁷ According to Bishara, “Ankara's tensions with Tel Aviv are exaggerated to the point where some forecast a Turkish invasion of Israel in retaliation for the attack on the Freedom Flotilla, whereas others mold Prime Minister Erdogan into the statue of the valiant hero, loyal to the Arab/Muslim nation.”²¹⁸ He also emphasized the existence of others who are deeply bothered and made uneasy by Turkey's actions in the Middle East. Furthermore, he discusses the various lenses through which Turkey is viewed in the Arab world.²¹⁹ He compares the official and public view of Turkey: “Here there exists the people without a leadership that projects their frustrations and hopes onto Turkey. On the other hand, there is an Arab officialdom that defies the logic of nations and that is suspicious of any nation that behaves as a nation should, because that nation could offer a model for handling tough issues different from the customary approach of Arab ruling families.”²²⁰

Issandr Amrani is a North African and Egyptian analyst who started his own blog “Arabist” which later turned into a think tank writing about the broader issues in the Arab World. Regarding Turkey, he writes:

“Having come to see Turkey as a democracy (despite remaining problems about its treatment of minorities and some laws left over from the military dictatorship era). In fact, the recent constitutional changes were carried out at a time when the EU connection is getting weaker. Yet, the perception among many is that with the changes to the constitution, the Justice and Development Party's government took important steps toward a more open and democratic government that (unlike an array of reforms undertaken in 2003 and 2004) were not specifically in response to Europe's membership criteria.”²²¹

Furthermore, regarding the Mavi Marmara incident Amrani writes: “As the most democratic state in the Middle East, Turkey has reacted in a manner commensurate with its public opinion and its desire for international respect. The same goes for Turkey's policy with Syria: Turkey's policy is driven by its own interests; whereas US policy is driven by a political desire to lend protection to Israel.”²²²

Altunisik argues in her article, in which she analyzes the general Arab perspective on Turkey, that: “There seems to be a clear correlation between the perceived changes in TFP in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the Palestinian issue, and a more positive view about Turkey.”²²³ By citing Rami Khouri, Altunisik also argues that: “Turkey's increasing democratization was tied to its foreign policy: such as the refusal to cooperate with the US in Iraq and Turkey's policies during the Gaza War.”²²⁴ She also underlined the fact that: “Some in the Arab World thought Turkey could behave as it did because it was democratic. Also, these authors did not fail to mention that this puts Turkey in stark contrast with other Arab regimes.”²²⁵

Altunisik also pointed to Khouri's arguments again as she argues that “the overall result of Turkey's third party involvement in regional disputes has been to consolidate Turkey's role in the region as well as benefit its image as a constructive player.”²²⁶ She also emphasized the importance of Turkey's democracy since “liberals, leftists, and Islamists in the Arab World have been emphasizing Turkey's transformation and connecting it to their criticism of the existing regimes in the region.”²²⁷ This suggests a comparison with and interest in Turkey especially on the part of political elites. However, if they realize Turkey is no different than their own regimes, their perception of Turkey will worsen. This is especially important since these elites seriously shape public opinion, as well.

Mustafa Ellabbad, an Egyptian intellectual, also reiterated Altunisik's arguments. He argues (by giving a glimpse about Egyptian opinions of Turkey) that AK Party's rise to power was very critical. He writes: "In my opinion, the successful integration of a diverse range of political groups with an Islamic background through transparent elections has been of great interest in the Arab World. Also, the AK Party's then adherence to the basic secular principles of the Turkish system has influenced Arab opinion of Turkey."²²⁸ These ideas are particularly striking as they were argued in the year 2010; he goes on to argue that: "The Arab world is in need of a role model, and Turkey, has, to an extent, met this need."²²⁹

Media Analysis

I must acknowledge that Turkey wasn't really in the Middle East in terms of attention, before the initiation of the active foreign policy with the zero-problems with neighbors brand. It is hard to come across articles, news covering Turkey in the early 2000's in the mainstream media. However I refer to the news which appear in the recent years but related to the early 2000's as well.

For example, in the Al-Arabiya newspaper, Baroud points to the economic developments in Turkey and how it contributed to the government domestically and also raised positive perceptions of it in the region. Citing Ibrahim Ozturk, he argued: "From 2002 to 2007, Turkey experienced its longest period of uninterrupted economic growth, which averaged 6-7 percent year on year, while annual inflation plummeted. Moreover, the economy proved resilient following the global financial crisis, with growth recovering rapidly."²³⁰ He then continued:

"One could argue that situating Turkey in suitable socioeconomic, cultural and political contexts was one of the greatest challenges facing modern Turkish politicians. Now Turkey seems to be offering more than just stability at home. It is also serving as a regional model to its

neighbors, an important contribution in the age of Arab revolutions and potential political transformations. The success of the Turkish model goes beyond the economic to sensible political governance, democracy, and the revitalization of civil society and its many institutions.”²³¹

So while highlighting economic factors, he also emphasized the importance of other factors which together constitute the “Turkish Model” and argued that it is not without challenges.²³²

Let me also point out how Al-Jazeera portrayed Turkey and the AK Party just before the 2007 parliamentary elections: “The AK Party's record of economic growth of seven per cent a year on average, falling inflation and record foreign investment has won over many Turks fed up with mismanagement, corruption, fractious coalitions and four military coups in five decades. The party also secured coveted EU accession talks in 2005 after 40 years of trying.”²³³ This give us a sense of how Arab people positively perceived Turkey in 2007 with this type information received from the media. The fact that Turkey, after 2005, started accession negotiations with the EU and Arab people's knowledge about Turkey's potential inclusion as a member of the EU greatly helped Turkey's popularity in the Middle East. These facts helped give the impression Turkey as a modern state with an advanced democracy and economy.

Another indication of a combination of democratic/human rights reform and Islamic values in the government is the parliament's lifting of the headscarf ban in universities in 2008. This story appeared in Al-Jazeera as news and was portrayed as a development for Turkey. Al-Jazeera mentioned “new laws allowing female students to wear the Islamic headscarf and how Turkey's higher education watchdog warned university chiefs to allow headscarves.”²³⁴ Newspapers also gave space to how the Higher Education Council reacted to

some university presidents' insistence on still applying the ban by saying: "The tenets of the republic... listed in the constitution guarantee the protection and progress of basic rights and liberties and can never be used as justification for limiting the rights and liberties of individuals."²³⁵ One can say that this story appeared as a human rights issue and as an improvement for Turkey in the Arab media. This arguably improved the perception of Turkey among the Arab public, who might contrast this development in Turkey with their own countries where they are still suffering from a lack of freedoms and similar ban on headscarves.

Foreign Policy Activism

Turkish mediation efforts in 2008 between various actors and states in the region are also an example of the foreign policy activism variable. Al-Arabiya handled this issue with the caption: "Israel, Syria confirm peace talks in Turkey," and it went on: "Israel and Syria said on Wednesday they had launched indirect peace talks mediated by Turkish officials in Istanbul, the first confirmation of negotiations between the long-time enemies in eight years."²³⁶ The news coverage continued by pointing out that this mediation "could possibly initiate direct talks between the two countries regarding the fate of the Golan Heights and the possibility of Syria severing ties with Iran and guerilla movements hostile to Israel, notably Hamas and Hezbollah."²³⁷

This activism was also cited in an article from Aras: "Turkey's rise in the greater middle east: peace building in the periphery." Aras argued:

"Turkey's mediating role was strengthened when Turkey moved ahead to bring Syria and Israel together. The level of engagement, at the outset, was limited to conveying messages from each side and the process was extremely difficult. The Israeli administration wants to contain Syria, end the Syrian– Iranian alliance, and prevent Syrian support for Hezbollah and HAMAS. Syria

wants the Golan Heights back unconditionally and demands Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese lands. Turkish policy-makers are confident that they may play a constructive role in the resolution of the Israeli–Syrian dispute. They are aware of the complicated nature of the problem and the difficulties of bringing the sides together. However, Turkey’s new activism in the Middle East prioritizes regional stability and security, and Turkish policy-makers aim to play a role in initiating Israeli– Syrian negotiations.”²³⁸

He also draws attention to Turkey's effort in the 2006 hostage crisis between Israel and Palestine. According to Aras: “Turkey used its improved relations with Syria to help solve the crisis of kidnapped Israeli soldier, Gilat Shalit, by Palestinian groups.”²³⁹

Al-Jazeera broadcasted an interview with the current Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davudoglu, the academic who is behind the multidimensional and active Turkish foreign policy. The program praised Turkey's diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the region. It argued that: “Turkey is not only the bridge between Europe and Asia, in recent years; it has also become a key diplomatic player on the world stage. Whether it is shuttle diplomacy to resolve the recent crisis in Gaza or offering to mediate between the Americans and Iranians, Turkey has credibility and is trusted in ways that some superpowers are not.”²⁴⁰ As pointed out in the program, Turkey also brokered peace negotiations between Hamas and Fatah in the Palestinian territories. Turkey, along with Brazil, also tried to initiate a nuclear deal between Iran and the West. All of these foreign policy moves were widely broadcasted by the mainstream Arab media like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. This, in turn, shaped public opinion on Turkey in Tunisia, like other Arab countries, in a positive way.

Davos and Mavi Marmara Crisis

The Davos Crisis in 2009 is considered one of the most important factors contributing to the improving regional perception of Turkey. This is an example of the variable, active

foreign policy with Islamic sensitivities and Islamic-oriented government. This event was widely reported on in Al Arabiya. The story is as follows:

“At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Erdogan and Israeli president Shimon Peres had a discussion of the recent Israeli assault on Gaza which left more than 1300 Palestinians dead. The Israeli president emotionally addressed the issue and argued, "Why did they fire rockets? There was no siege against Gaza." "Why did they fight us? What did they want? There was never a day of starvation in Gaza. What would you do if you were to have in Istanbul every night a hundred rockets?" Peres shouted. After that, Peres was applauded by the audience. This annoyed Erdogan as he said, "I find it very sad that people applaud what you have said because many people have been killed." Then he tried to respond to Peres, but the moderator, Ignatius, prevented him, telling him that it was time for a dinner break. "The president [Peres] spoke for 25 minutes. I have only spoken for half of that," Erdogan fumed. "I don't think I will come back to Davos because you don't let me speak," the Turkish prime minister said, as he stood up and walked out of the conference hall in the Swiss ski resort. "President Peres you are older than I am. Maybe you are feeling guilty and that is why you are so strong in your words. You killed people. I remember the children who died on beaches," Erdogan said before storming out.”²⁴¹

Al Arabiya indicated that: “Erdogan received a hero's welcome in Istanbul, Turkey.”²⁴² The newspaper also gave ample space to the reactions to Erdogan's actions: “The Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas, hailed Erdogan's move. Hamas spokesman, Fawzi Barhum, said, "Hamas pays tribute to the courageous stand of Turkey's prime minister ... who in Davos directly defended the victims of the criminal Zionist war against our children and women in Gaza.” “We consider his departure from the room an expression of support for the victims of the Holocaust carried out by the Zionists.”²⁴³ The newspaper also pointed out how the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, thought that Erdogan's action was understandable: "Mr. Erdogan said what he wanted to say and then he left. That's all. He was

right." Of Israel, he said, "They don't listen."²⁴⁴ Positive perceptions of Turkey and Erdogan in the Middle East skyrocketed after this event.

Al-Jazeera also took Davos to their headlines: "Erdogan hailed after Davos walkout". Like Al-Arabiya, Al Jazeera also positively portrayed the crisis which was also dubbed as the "One Minute". The newspaper mostly put forward positive views of Erdogan's rebuke, mentioning the views of Tony Blair and Amr Moussa²⁴⁵. It also cited Gareth Evans'(the president of the International Crisis Group think-tank) views: "In particular, what was depressing was Peres' utter unwillingness to acknowledge the real significance of the Arab peace initiative. Turkey was Israel's best friend in the Muslim world. I think Israel has to come to grips with the fact that it has alienated a very large proportion of the world's population."²⁴⁶ After this important coverage from the mainstream Arab media of Turkey and Erdogan as supporters of Arab and Muslim causes, Turkey's popularity significantly increased on the Arab street.

The final event to discuss is the Mavi Marmara crisis. In 2010, Israel attacked an aid ship called Mavi Marmara on its way to Gaza which was sent by a Turkish NGO. Nine Turkish citizens, and many other international activists, were killed in the assault by Israeli soldiers in international waters. After these tragic events, Turkish-Israeli relations seriously deteriorated. This event, which was widely publicized in the Arab media, also improved perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East and made Turkey seem like a champion of Arab causes which would even give up martyrs when necessary in the eyes of Arabs. With this event, Turkey was perceived by many as doing more than other Arab countries for such causes.²⁴⁷

2010 Constitutional Referendum

The 2010 Constitutional Referendum and its portrayal in Arab media provide more evidence for analysis. First of all, this event is a good example of democratization in the 2002-2010 as identified in the main hypothesis. At the time this was considered by many as an important step for the improvement of Turkish democratic standards. Turkey was still ruled by a constitution written by the generals behind the coup in 1980, and this referendum was merely a matter of approving constitutional changes. However, it was still an important symbolic move by the Turkish government, as it coincided with the anniversary of the military coup in 1980. The 2010 constitutional changes were an indication of improvement in Turkey's democracy as reflected by the referendum's motto: "Yes but not enough."

According to Al Jazeera:

"Turks have voted on constitutional changes that could reshape the judiciary and curb the powers of the military in a referendum seen as a tussle between an Islamist-influenced government and its secular opponents, mainly in the army. Erdogan has said changes are needed to strengthen democracy and bring Turkey closer to European norms, as the country continues its bid to join the European Union (EU)." Turkish democracy is at a turning point today, we are sitting an important test," Erdogan said after voting in Uskudar district of Istanbul."²⁴⁸

Let me point to another news article, also from Al Jazeera:

"On September 12, 2010, exactly thirty years after the 1980 military coup, Turkish voters went to the polls to vote on the largest constitutional amendment since the current constitution was adopted in 1982. The 26-article amendment package, passed in the Turkish Grand Assembly and approved by President Gul, introduces a number of progressive changes into the Turkish political and judicial system. The 58 per cent 'yes vote' is a victory for the process of democratization in Turkey. The amendments seek to cure the many deficits of the current constitution drafted by the army generals who carried out the 1980 military coup. They aim at expanding the sphere of individual rights and civil liberties, bringing the standards of Turkish democracy closer to that of the European Union (EU) in which Turkey is seeking full membership. The new changes

include, among others, the establishment of ombudspersons, ensuring positive discrimination for children, women and the handicapped, and collective bargaining for public workers.”²⁴⁹

I argue that Turkey is still using the same constitution and must have a brand new one (not just changes of some articles) and this is a very important necessity indicated by both the EU and other international agencies. However this news coverage obviously display an image of a democratically advanced Turkey in the eyes of Arab public.

Turkish Television Series

Another factor that positively affected the perception of Turkey in the Middle East is Turkish TV series. The role of Turkish soaps has been also reflected in *Al Arabiya* newspaper in the news from 2008.

“Romantic, entertaining, relatable and inspirational, which is how most of the 85 million people who tuned into the finale of the most popular series ‘Noor’ described it. Noor, originally ‘Gumus’ in Turkish, told the story of a young woman who married a powerful yet romantic and loving man named Muhanad. The way the show portrayed women and men in a Muslim family was unconventional by Arab standards and aroused the curiosity of millions. In 2008, Saudi-owned MBC group dubbed the soap into colloquial Arabic and gave it on its popular channel MBC4 and the show took off, becoming a television phenomenon. Noor took the Arab world by storm, as its popularity inspired countless discussions by media analysts and were audiences immediately hooked. The show became a socio-cultural phenomenon, as three to four million people tuned in to Noor every night, making it the highest rated show ever in recent Arab television history. “I used to schedule my day around Noor and made sure I was home at least half an hour before it started,” Lara, a 25-year-old Lebanese national, told AlArabiya.net, adding that she was obsessed with the show and would sometimes spend hours on the phone discussing the characters and plot lines.”²⁵⁰

According to the newspaper “the main criticism came from highest religious authority of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh, who considered Noor ‘subversive’ and ‘un-Islamic,’ calling on Muslims to be wary of the “evils” in the show.”²⁵¹ Dr. Craig

Hayden, who studied the Arab media, argued that: “The fact that the fatwas were mostly ignored shows religious authorities no longer have the kind of control that they wish they had over media content and there are other organizations that they have to share their authority with. The one thing that stands out (about Noor) is the role of the man as supportive and not necessarily a primary character...the couple is portrayed as equal and not in a hierarchical relationship.”²⁵²

Also related to Turkish soaps; Semih Idiz reasoned why the shows were watched so much in the Arab World and how they raised Turkey's popularity. While trying to explain Turkey's popularity, he argued in *Al-Monitor* that: “Whether Turkey’s secular parliamentary democracy provides a model for Arabs clamoring for a democratic future remains an open question. That Turkey’s cultural influence is spreading across the Middle East, with social implications that anger Islamists, however, is indisputable.”²⁵³ He also draws attention to the various other factors that affected Turkey's perception: “Curiosity towards Turkey gave way to deep admiration when Erdogan blasted Israeli President Shimon Peres in Davos, in January 2009.”²⁵⁴ He further argues:

“The assumption that Turkey’s increasing popularity in the Middle East is driven solely by the rise of the Islamist AK Party, and Erdogan’s stand on Israel, however is proving to be not completely true. The influence of Turkish television soap operas, which are opening Arab minds to alternative lifestyles and modern living, is also being felt across the Arab world today. But it is the depiction of modern living, and the civilized relationships between men and women, that provides the principle attraction. All of this and much more exists in Western soaps, of course. But people in the Middle East appear to be saying, “Why look to the West with its alien and anti-Arab culture, when one can get inspiration from a Turkey, which is modern but whose culture is not alien, given our shared religion and history.” One follower of the TV series said these productions showed that one could be Muslim and modern at the same time.”²⁵⁵

Let me get back to the democratization in Turkey again. Right after the Gezi Park events in Turkey, Rami G. Khouri who is an influential Palestinian academic wrote an article in the *Cairo Review* journal (published in Egypt), which I believe affected public opinion on Turkey. He argued that: “The full impact of the sudden demonstrations across Turkey against the policies and style of the Erdogan government will become clear in the weeks ahead. Social media have given the world a more complete picture of events on the ground, along with high quality analyses by Turkish and foreign analysts that clarify the many reasons for the protests, in contrast with mainstream media in Turkey that have censored themselves shamefully.”²⁵⁶ He also compared Turkey and Jordan and argued that: “The link between citizen and state is still being negotiated in almost every country in the region.”²⁵⁷

Also in another article Khouri compared Turkey, Egypt, and Brazil. He argued that the protests are the outcome of the majoritarian type of democracies where the demands of 49% of citizens might not be satisfied. He also directs attention to the increasing arrogance of the elected politicians and their indifference to the silent majority who did not vote for them and who are increasingly disturbed by the policies of their governments.²⁵⁸

Also a news article published in *Al-Sharq Al Awsat* writes:

“The European Union decided Tuesday to revive long-dormant EU membership talks with Turkey, but not until later this year because of the government’s heavy-handed crackdown on street protests in Istanbul and elsewhere earlier this month. Germany and others blocked them because of concerns that such negotiations could appear to endorse the crackdown on the demonstrations, which rights groups say has left thousands injured. The protests began in Istanbul on May 31 and quickly turned into widespread demonstrations against the heavy-handed crackdown and against Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly authoritarian and meddlesome ways. Erdogan, who took power a decade ago, denies he is authoritarian and, as

evidence of his popularity, points to elections in 2011 that returned his party to power with almost 50 percent of the vote and gave him a third term in office.”²⁵⁹

This news article elaborates the negative image of Turkey which emerged after the Gezi Park incident and points to the discussions related to Turkey’s EU membership and objections to it.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

This study attempted to find answers to the research questions: 1) What factors affect perception of Turkey in the Middle East? 2) Why does the popularity of Turkey in the Middle East increase/decrease?

In the introduction, I highlighted the burden of history in the relations between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's long time isolation and neglect in the Middle East and its long term alliance with Western countries during the Cold War formed historical prejudices from many Arabs. This appeared to be an alternative argument. However, with the development of my research, we see that it had only a minor effect on the regional relations and perception. With the AK Party's rise to power and positive and active engagement with the region, we see that this historical legacy can be easily overcome.

2002-2010

First of all, I argued that the AK Party's rise to power with free and fair parliamentary elections of 2002 was the result of democracy in Turkey. Arabs understood that even Islamists can take power with the help of democracy. The AK Party's insistence on democratization in the 2002-2010 era with reforms curbing the military's influence in politics and many constitutional amendments for the purpose of EU membership were also crucial in this sense. Finally, when these efforts of the AK Party government gave fruit with the opening of EU accession negotiations in 2005, perceptions of Turkey became very positive in the Arab world. Turkey's democratic advancements and EU aspirations showed how modern Turkey is in the eyes of liberal and leftist Arabs. Many considered Turkey as a model as the most advanced Muslim democracy. They have also been aware of the fact that Turkey was

proposed as a model by the US and many European countries with its secular system and democracy.

The prospects of Turkey's EU membership also excited many Islamists in the region as this implied that Turkey could serve as a bridge between the West and Arabs. Some Islamists became suspicious about the secular nature of the “Turkish Model” and did not trust the AK Party, but most of these Islamists became marginalized later. Most of the Islamists admired Turkey's Muslim-sensitive foreign policy moves. Also, as I observed, a democratically advanced Turkey that solves its internal problems with reforms and openings like the Kurdish Initiative drew a picture of a stable and peaceful country in the eyes of many Arabs. Finally, the 2010 Constitutional Referendum and many democratic changes coming with it raised many people's perception of Turkey, since it was reflected in mainstream Arab media and the works of intellectuals. Also, according to TESEV's perception of Turkey poll in 2010, in general favorable opinions of Turkey increased from 75% in 2009 to 85% in 2010 in the Middle East.²⁶⁰

Almost as important as democratization, the foreign policy activism variable turned out to be significant in the 2002-2010 eras as hypothesized. I found during case studies of Egypt and Tunisia that Turkey's rise in the Middle East with a new foreign policy based on zero problems with neighbors increased its popularity on the Arab streets. In fact, it seems that Turkey's activism and rise in the Middle East began in 2003 with its refusal to allow American troops to use its soil for the Iraqi invasion. Arab elites and people saw how people's voices and demands were reflected in the decisions of policy-makers in Turkey. Contrary to the Turkish military's(which has been a key player in the domestic and foreign policy decisions of Turkey for a long period) positive attitude to allow US troops through the

country, the Turkish parliament's decision showed that Turkey is no longer the pawn of Western countries and American interests in the region. This, in turn, positively affected its perception. Turkey's mediation and peace building efforts in this period were also critical. Brokering negotiations between Syria and Israel and Fatah and Hamas as well as initiating nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West were among Turkey's activism. As a result of this foreign policy activism, Turkey became a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This was also very important in the eyes of both the Arab political elite and public.

An Islamic-oriented government and Erdogan's charisma are also very significant factors leading to the popularity of Turkey in the Middle East during this period. An Islamist party's(although the party does not define itself so) rise into power in the 2002 elections in Turkey and its huge success, both politically and economically, inspired a lot of Islamists in the region who had been desperately struggling with authoritarian regimes. Many Islamists, including Ennahdha in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, considered Turkey as a model. Although the AK Party did not prioritize Islam in its party propaganda and called itself a Conservative-Democrat party, it is well known both in Turkey and Arab world that the founders of AK Party originated in an Islamist Welfare Party and actively participated in politics in the 1990's. The apparent success of an Islamist party in a strictly secular system without making any references to sharia law and trying to be a member of the European Union created a modern and positive image of Turkey in the eyes both Arab liberals and Islamists. Also another factor which is seemingly important is foreign policy with an Islamic brand or with Islamic sensitivities. Here we also see the factor which some scholars call the “Erdogan Effect”.

The newspapers and opinions of political elites in the Arab world indicate that, starting from the 2008 Gaza attack, Erdogan's criticisms of Israel were a critical factor which raised perceptions of Turkey and put it into a position as the defender of Arab and Muslim causes. These rebukes or so called foreign policy booms were critical in this sense. For example, it can be argued that the 2009 Davos or "One Minute" Crisis with Israel made Erdogan the figurative king of the Arab streets. In World Public Opinion's 2009 poll, Erdogan's popularity is 63% in both Egypt and the Palestinian territories which indicates positive perceptions of Turkey in the Middle East at that time. It is also higher than the perception of global leaders such as Putin and Obama.²⁶¹ More popular than many Arab leaders, Erdogan's pictures were held aloft and Turkish flags were waved after this event.

The Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, in which some Turkish citizens were even killed, further boosted Arab perceptions of Turkey. With this event, Turkey, in the eyes of Arabs, became the fiercest defender of Palestinian cause. Also, after this crisis, Turkey's relations with Israel were the worst since the foundation of Israel in 1948. This suggests that there might be an understanding among Arabs that Turkey would even sacrifice its relations with Israel and its economic interests for Arab causes.

The economic development of Turkey in the 2002-2010 time period is also an important reason for Turkey's popularity in the Middle East. After reviewing the literature of both Turkish and Arab scholar's opinions about this issue, as well as examining Arab media and the opinions of political elites, one can safely argue that economic development raised perceptions of Turkey in the region. Arab people, especially when they come to Turkey as tourists, are surprised with the level of development and standards of living which contrast to situations in their countries. Turkey emerged as an important exporter in the 21st century and

became the 17th largest economy in the world. This was perceived favorably in the region. Furthermore, increased trade and economic deals with all of the countries in the Middle East extended Turkey's presence and profile in the region.

Finally Turkish TV series were very effective in shaping Arab public opinion on Turkey. When I analyzed the mainstream media like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, I found out that Turkish soap operas had an enormous positive effect on Turkey's perception in the region. The image of modern Turkey given in these shows with equal relations between men and women and the image of romantic and caring Turkish men greatly increased Turkey's popularity. Millions of Arab people watched these Turkish soaps every day and admired and envied the Turkish way of life.

Table 3 Key Incidents that Positively Affected Perception of Turkey in the time period 2002-2010

2002	Election of the AK Party
2003	Refusal to allow American troops use Turkish territory for the Iraqi invasion
2005	Start of EU accession negotiations for full membership
2007-2009	Turkey's mediation efforts between various countries and actors
2009	Davos Crisis and Erdogan's criticism of Israel
2010	Mavi Marmara Crisis and deterioration of relations with Israel
2010	Constitutional amendments
2002-2010	Democratic improvements and general reforms
2002-2010	Economic development
2005-2010	Fame and spread of Turkish TV series

2010-2013

After 2010, the Turkish government generally lost its reformist spirit. This happened after the AK Party was elected with almost 50% majorities in the 2011 elections. This seemed to cause overconfidence and even arrogance for some since Erdogan called the new period starting with the 2011 election victory as the “mastery term”. The democratic reforms and EU membership process slowed down and almost vanished. As a result of this, the perception of Turkey in the Middle East was negatively affected, too. Many incidents indicating creeping authoritarianism occurred in Turkey. Turkey began to lose its most valuable democratic achievements which had made it very popular in the eyes of the Arab public. Erdogan disliked and could not bear any criticisms that appeared in the Turkish media. Many journalists and columnists were fired for being too critical of the government. Many EU and foreign reports emerged which criticized the government and showed the lack of press and internet freedom in Turkey. Reports mentioned many jailed journalists and thinkers and referenced the Ergenekon case.²⁶² According to the current Freedom House data Turkey, is still considered only partly free including press and internet freedom.²⁶³

Some articles²⁶⁴ appeared in the mainstream Turkish media, especially in newspapers known to support the government since it rose to power, which discussed the idea that there is a majoritarian understanding of democracy in Turkey which leads incumbent governments to believe that they can do whatever they want since they were elected by the majority. According to this understanding, incumbents do not have to care about the demands and concerns of the other 50% who did not vote for them. It was argued that Islamists in Turkey and the Arab World might not be able to solve their problems with democracy.

While the other variables, such as economic development, Islamic oriented government and Turkish TV series were very effective during the 2010-2013 periods, one can argue that the foreign policy activism variable did not have much of an impact.

Based on analysis of many opinions from Arab political elites and news sources, it seems that some foreign policy failures during this period, especially right after the “Arab Spring,” negatively affected the perception of Turkey in the Middle East. Equivocal Turkish reactions to the “Arab Spring” and the failure to transform and update its policy of “zero problems with neighbors”, according to the new conditions emerging with the “Arab Spring,” made Turkey open to criticisms and, in turn, negative perceptions. Turkey was also quite isolated from the region and could not maintain its activism, such as mediation efforts and good relations with countries after the “Arab Spring”. Moreover Turkey's recent Egypt policy seriously reduced its popularity in that country. According to news reports, many Egyptians disliked Erdogan's clear support of the Muslim Brotherhood after the coup. Also, in TESEV's 2012 survey, only 42 percent of the respondents thought that Turkey had a positive effect on the Arab Spring, compared to 56 percent back in 2011.²⁶⁵ It clearly shows a negative perception of Turkey recently which can be explained as a result of Turkey's relatively unsuccessful foreign policy after the Arab Spring and a trend towards authoritarianism after 2010.

Findings

The initial hypothesis was that the democratization of Turkey is the most effective variable explaining Turkey's popularity. In particular I argued that: H1: As the level of internal democratization increases in Turkey the regional perception of Turkey will increase as well. Consistent with that, the case studies showed that the democratic reforms which were implemented in Turkey in the 2002-2010 time period and also Turkey's coherent blending of

Islam and democracy was the most important factor creating a positive perception of Turkey in the Middle East. Likewise the worsening of democratization in Turkey with the lack of necessary reforms and spirit on the part of the government, as well as a trend towards authoritarianism, negatively affected the regional perception of Turkey in the 2010-2013 time period.

I also tested Hypothesis 1 using the cases of Tunisia and Egypt. Especially during the Gezi Park events in 2013, it seems that the perception and image of Turkey greatly correlates with the status of democracy in Turkey. When negative articles and information about Turkey's democratic standards appear in the Arab media and are included in the speeches of politicians, the perception of Turkey will become more negative. The case of Gezi Park once again made it clear how greatly Turkey's popularity depends on its internal democratic standards. I observed this in the vast amount of news and information provided to the Arab public in both case studies. Also, the 2012 Perception of Turkey report published by TESEV included a question on Turkey's role in the Middle East. It shows that the number of people saying "Turkey is a successful example of the coherence of Islam and democracy" declined from 67% in 2011 to 58% in 2012.²⁶⁶ I argue that this change is because Turkey did not maintain its image of being an advanced democracy after 2010. It is likely that TESEV's 2013 report will find even more negative results.

This study's research suggests that, from more democratically experienced countries to less democratically experienced ones, interest in democratization inside and out of those countries will decline in the Middle East. In other words, the Arab public in those countries which have experienced the "Arab Spring" will have more interest and demands for democratization while countries which have not experienced the "Arab Spring" or any other

rights movements will have less or no interest. This is related to Turkey in the sense that interest in Turkey's own democratization process and achievements will be minor or nonexistent in those countries which have no democratic political culture or civil society. A more positive perception due to democratic advances in Turkey will not be the case in these kinds of countries, nor will these countries have a worsening perception due to a more "authoritarian Turkey". Foreign policy actions such as being critical of Israel and political personalities such as Turkey's prime minister, Erdogan, and his well-known Davos "one minute" fury will be more effective. Turkish TV series and bilateral trade with those countries will also positively change their perceptions of Turkey. This research examined, not just democracy, but the effects of other variables as well, such as foreign policy activism. Although the importance and vitality of democratization inside Turkey was obvious, the necessity of other factors such as the economy and foreign policy were found to be critical in explaining changes in Arab perceptions of Turkey.

It is a humble prediction of this paper that, as long as the Turkish government continues reforms and progress towards democratization, the popularity of Turkey in the Middle East will increase. This would be in line both with the government's goal of European Union membership and also the vital need for an advanced democracy to enable the existence of a stable, prosperous, and peaceful Turkey. However, if Turkey draws the perception of being a less democratic or even authoritarian country, as observed in the Gezi Park protests (which became widespread with the international media), then Turkey's image as a democratic and secular country would be seriously damaged and perceptions of Turkey will become more negative as they did in 2012. Positive perceptions will continue to decline in the next few years and will be proportional to the demands for freedom and human rights in the Arab world. It will also no longer be possible to even talk about the "Turkish Model"

which was offered as a harmonious example of Islam and democracy or as inspiration for the countries in the Middle East. The Turkish government must be careful about its democratic image if the officials are concerned about Turkey's soft power in the region. Such care is also very critical in maintaining good relations with the Arab public and for the public diplomacy of Turkey. In terms of foreign policy, Ankara must be careful, too. Turkey can no longer be isolated and indifferent to the problems or crises in the region. Therefore, Turkey must carefully determine and adjust its policies toward the region to gain better perceptions and maintain its soft power.

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