



# International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: [www.ijrpr.com](http://www.ijrpr.com) ISSN 2582-7421

---

## Soft Power of Turkey

*Ejaz Karim*

*Division of International Relations, Jilin University, China*

---

### ABSTRACT

Much has been written about Turkey geopolitical, bilateral and regional issues, but literature is scarce on Turkish soft power. Turkey has been exercising soft power for a long time, but since the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey has paid colossal concentration and investment on soft power dimension. This paper unveils the defining features and resources of Turkish soft power. This paper primarily explores various projects that the Turkish governmental and private institutions have been carried out in terms of economic, cultural, educational, humanitarian, and religious spheres. It also discusses the current reform initiatives in Turkish politics and economy and the emergence of independent civil society and media.

---

Keywords: Soft power, Turkey, Government, media, civil society

---

### 1. Introduction

Since the last few decades, the soft power has become one of the most frequently used lexicon in foreign policy discourses of Western, democratic, and developed states and non-democratic, authoritarian and Islamic states as well - such as China and Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are few instances. This paper merely focuses on the exercise of Turkish soft power and its conceptual evaluation. The Turkish discourse on Soft Power has mainly focused on its sources and potential efficacy in its foreign strategy. The assessment of Turkey's Soft Power by Turkish and non-Turkish scholars argues that the soft power of Turkey is too soft to achieve its foreign policy objectives and become a Turkish national power. However, they argue, it is becoming increasingly relevant and discussed in Turkish media, academics and diplomats.

This paper will also figure out the limitations of Turkish Soft Power in the region as a conceptual relevance and contextual efficacy. However, Soft Power of Turkey has multiplied from its successes in social and economic profile. Turkey stands far ahead of all Muslim states – Arab and non-Arab having improved its political and cultural institutions, human resources and cultural landscape. Turkey has over 200 TV channels and nearly 1,000 radio channels in terms of media, making Turkey unique and prominent in the totalitarian nature Muslim world. According to Reporters Without Borders, Turkey rank 154 out of 180 countries in the world rankings in 2020<sup>1</sup>. People of Turkey having mobile phones twice the world average. Presence of foreign media in Turkey has also increased, including CNN Turkish, Al-Jazeera and other Arab TV Channels Bureaus in Turkey. For example, Al Jazeera's bureau is second only to its Washington Bureau in terms of team and stories filed from a non-Arab country.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [k4karimformanite@gmail.com](mailto:k4karimformanite@gmail.com)

## 2. Concept of Soft Power

Before discussing soft power, it is crucial to define what exactly power is. According to most definitions, power is the capacity to influence other actors and shape their preferences. Professor Nye writes, power, like love, is easier to experience than to define or measure. Power is the ability to achieve one's purposes or goals. The dictionary tells us that it is the ability to do things and to control others. Robert Dahl, a leading political scientist, defines power as the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do<sup>2</sup>.

Another scholar Ilgen, Thomas defines power defines "the ability to coerce grows out of a country's military, and economic might' had led the nation-states to accumulate and control maximum ability, military or capital power which later was defined as hard power"<sup>3</sup>. The term soft power has been coined by an American political scientist and Harvard professor Joseph Nye in the late 1980s. He defines the term as "the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion.

The concept of "soft power" is now widely used in many disciplines. The term was first developed in the influential 1990 book by Harvard University Professor Joseph S. Nye, titled *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power, Soft Power*. Nye introduced the soft-power concept to the international relations field's lexicon, which profoundly shifted the nature of academic discourses surrounding power. Though his 1990 book was concerned primarily with the United States and its role in the world, Nye in his later works expanded on the concept further and applied it to other cases. In international relations, the study of soft power is a relatively new topic that is only decades old. Yet, soft power is becoming increasingly relevant because a more globally aware public sees soft power as a legitimate and effective means to pursue national interests than actions that employ hard power. Despite the increased importance of soft power worldwide, the academic analysis of soft power still relies almost completely on a Western view of which countries exercise soft power and who should be exerting such forms of influence. However, non-western, non-democratic, and non-dominant states' exercise of soft power tactics remain largely understudied and overlooked. Largely, scholars of International Relations still rely on Nye US-centric concept of soft power.

For Nye, the new world system was characterized by interdependence, with less concern for hierarchy and a reduced use of military power. This led Nye (1990b) to reevaluate how power was defined in international relations, focusing on how state power sources had changed. Nye stated that political actors and states attempt to leverage their influence through whatever tools are available. He writes, "In an anarchic system of states where there is no higher government to settle conflicts and where the ultimate recourse is self-help, [military force] could never be ruled out". In assessing a state's power, Nye draws attention to central aspects like institutions, education, culture, ideology, and technology.

Joseph Nye elaboration of exercise of power in different ways. There are three ways to get the outcome:

- Coercion which comes through military power
- Inducement which is derived primarily from economic resources or other sources
- Attraction and co-option which comes through the model one state establish as a successful state for its people

**Table 1 Power behaviour and resources**

Spectrum behavior	<u>Hard Power</u> Coercion, Command power Inducement	<u>Soft Power</u> Agenda setting, attraction, co-optive power
Most likely resources	Force, Bribe sanction, payments	Institutions Cultures Values policies

## 3. Conceptualization Soft Power in the Era of Globalization and Modern Nation-State

In the era of the post-Westphalian nation-state system - a state has been considered as the nucleus of power in national and as well as international politics. The post-Westphalian nation-state system is primarily located within competitive power relationship among units of the system and "national interests"

<sup>2</sup> JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., *The Changing Nature of World Power*, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), p.177,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2151022?origin=JSTOR-pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ilgen, Thomas L.(ed.) (2006) *Hard Power, Soft Power and the Future of Transatlantic Relations*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

are the main driver of their external engagement. Hans J. Morgenthau has presented most influential work on power and politics in his book *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* where he defines power from a realist perspective, “the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not. States have been exercising ‘coercion and inducement’ as major sources of their power”.

Since there is a growing understanding among scholars of international relations over the explicit and logically systematic decomposition of the concept of power, national interests are also being redefined in a transnational context where interests of one state are heavily depended on the interests of other states, and thus the national interests become transnational or global and sometimes universal interest such as environmental problem and global terrorism<sup>4</sup>. They are affecting citizens of several nations and continents and require coordinated efforts towards resolving them. This necessitates kind of interdependency in which nation-states are forced to share their sovereignty, if not compromise, with other states. This interdependency, mainly in military, economic, ecological, and social domains, serves as a new source of power for nation-states and helps create transnational governance under the aegis of international, transnational, or global bodies.

Few examples of the failure of hard power are; disclosure of WikiLeaks, the strongest world power since Rome, the United States failed to secure many of its vital international interests, such as; international financial stability, drug trafficking, human rights, climate change, global terrorism and the spread of pandemics are few. These failures underscore the limitation of a single state's power and its ability to protect its ‘national interests’ alone. ‘Ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do’ is now available to states as well as many non-state actors like terrorist groups and transnational corporations and emerging transnational civil society<sup>5</sup>. This led to another ever speeding intensification of worldwide social relations and the creation of transnational communities, media, culture, and corporations.

#### 4. Turkish Soft Power: Emerging Trends

Since its inception in 1923, Turkey's Republic has wielded considerable soft power on the international stage on at least three separate occasions. Namely, Turkey arose as a potential development model for newly-independent states in the Middle East and South Asia in the mid-twentieth century, as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. More recently, Turkey's internal political developments, cultural attractiveness, and economic performance in the 2000s translated into considerable soft power in the Middle East during the initial phases of the Arab Spring<sup>6</sup>.

The Republic of Turkey first emerged as a wielder of soft power and model for emulation following its creation after the Ottoman Empire's collapse. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his political allies conceptualized in the Republic of Turkey a modern, secular, pro-Western state at a time when secularism was an exception in the Islamic world. For many Western countries, and especially France, Kemalist Turkey and its secular institutions represented a potential model for the development and modernization of other Muslim countries<sup>7</sup>. In Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and even some newly-independent former Ottoman provinces in the Middle East after the Second World War, local modernizers were often influenced by the Turkish Kemalist experience<sup>8</sup>. Likewise, Turkey was regarded as a potential country to emulate during the independence movements in former colonies after the Second World War. In Tunisia, for example, the Habib Bourguiba regime's secularisation reforms mirrored those of 1920s Kemalist Turkey, particularly in terms of the secularization of family law and the rationalization of reforms as a part of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning<sup>9</sup>.

Economically, this era coincided with the emergence of a new Turkish middle class and unparalleled economic performance. Turkey became the seventeenth-largest economy in the world and a member of the G20, and its economic growth since 2003 has been among the most robust globally<sup>10</sup>. The third Turkish model was also bolstered by Turkey's increasing attractiveness in the political and cultural spheres. Despite its roots in Islamic political thought, the AKP initially pursued a moderate political discourse and promoted a pragmatic vision for Islam's co-existence and democracy that improved Turkish democracy. Between 2003 and 2011 the AKP adopted numerous political reforms and held regular democratic elections, making Turkey one of the only Muslim countries with legitimate democratic institutions. At the same time, and as an illustration of this soft power, Turkish culture, soap operas, series, and consumer brands became increasingly popular in Turkey's immediate neighborhood and in Africa, India, and even in South America, where

<sup>4</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (1998), “Power and Interdependence in the Information Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, 77, no 5 (September/October) p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, Robert A. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. For more definitional insight of power see also James March (1966), “The Power of Power” in David Easton, (ed.), *Varieties of Political Theory*, New York: Prentice Hall. (pp 39–70); Herbert Simon, (1957) *Models of Man*, New York: John Wiley. Baldwin, David, “Power Analysis and World Politics,” *World Politics* 31 (January 1979): (161–94) a good example of transnational civil society is Freedom Flotilla to end Gaza Siege

<sup>6</sup> <http://turkishpolicy.com/blog/31/what-remains-from-turkish-soft-power-in-the-caucasus>

<sup>7</sup> Jean-François Pérouse, “Édouard Herriot, un pédagogue laïc en Turquie (1934) : la bonne foi et la méprise?” in *De Samarcande à Istanbul: étapes orientales. Hommages à Pierre Chuvin – II* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2015), p. 300.

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Jung, “Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities,” *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10, No.1 (Winter 2005), pp. 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Weideman, “Tahar Haddad after Bourguiba and bin Ali: A Reformist between Secularists and Islamists,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (February 2016), p. 55; Eric Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 40 (Spring 2009), pp. 29-56.

Turkish series are well-regarded. Moreover, according to a survey of Arab public opinion conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), Turkey was perceived among Arabs as the most economically influential country in the region<sup>11</sup>.

Turkish discourse of Soft Power encounters a series of questions about Turkey's changing role in the Arab World and other regions and its effort to balance between conflicting roles. Though Turkish foreign policy regime calls its emerging and increasing role in all major areas as "consistent and systematic", Turkey's Arab vision may face several challenges. Davutoglu maintains that Turkey's new discourse and diplomatic style have resulted in Turkish soft power in the region. Turkey's new initiatives to strengthen its democratic institutions and intensify relation between state and society aim to acceptability for EU membership and be a successful model for the international and regional community.

Transformation within Turkey is derived by a combination of EU membership process, economic and domestic political considerations. In an increasingly interdependent world, Turkey needs secured supply of energy for sustained economic growth and development projects, minimum or zero problems at its immediate borders and long term prosperity for Turkey's 27% younger population and 67% working population.

Moreover, Turkey's performance in the Arab World and in the Organization of Islamic Countries shows that Turkey's progress is worthy of international attention. Turkey is becoming the largest economy of the Muslim world without having enough energy resources. Turkey has become the most popular tourist destination of the entire Arab and OIC group.

"Turkey expects to host as much as 15 million tourists this year, generating some 11 billion U.S. dollars of revenue, Turkish Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy said"<sup>12</sup>.

It is also a most favorable or foreign direct investment in the entire OIC and attracted the largest FDI worldwide. On the cultural front, Turkish soaps, tourists' destinations, music, novel and spiritual inspiration of Rumi and historical magnificence attract millions of people from across the world. Reports suggest that 22 countries are currently importing popular Turkish television soaps and some of them have made record sales in the Arab World and some of them have touched millions of USD annual sale. In the education sector, single factor ranking of the 20 universities of OIC countries indicates that Turkish universities (14 out of 20) are publishing more research papers than any other Arab and Islamic countries like Iran and Egypt.

---

## 5. Conclusion

Like every nation-state, Turkey has its international relations priorities and objectives based on its primary and secondary interests. Turkey has its own challenges and opportunities. It has to uplift its growing population from unemployment, and poverty and better management of development projects within Turkey. In soft power, Turkey has many extra miles to go, particularly in research and development, education and cultural industries. Undoubtedly, Turkey has produced excellent and abundant modern Turkish literature, increasing its culture as a national brand may produce a positive result in the future. Moreover, Turkey's successful remodelling of Islamic politics by AKP has become a major source of inspiration for many Islamic political parties in the Muslim world. In the post Arab Spring scenario, Turkey has played a vital role in facilitating peaceful power transfer and building democratic discourse within Islamic parties. Turkey, with its democracy and secular politics, also the fastest economic growth in the world, it has much to give to the Arab and non-Arab Muslim state.

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://turkishpolicy.com/blog/31/what-remains-from-turkish-soft-power-in-the-caucasus>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/24/c\\_139314270.htm#:~:text=English.news.cn-Turkey%20expects%2015%20mln%20tourists%2C%2011%20bln,tourist%20revenue%20in%202020%3A%20minister&text=ISTANBUL%2C%20Aug.,Nuri%20Ersoy%20said%20on%20Monday](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/24/c_139314270.htm#:~:text=English.news.cn-Turkey%20expects%2015%20mln%20tourists%2C%2011%20bln,tourist%20revenue%20in%202020%3A%20minister&text=ISTANBUL%2C%20Aug.,Nuri%20Ersoy%20said%20on%20Monday)

Turkey%20expects%2015%20mln%20tourists%2C%2011%20bln,tourist%20revenue%20in%202020%3A%20minister&text=ISTANBUL%2C%20Aug.,Nuri%20Ersoy%20said%20on%20Monday.