

VALUES OF TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union has stirred controversy, both within the EU and within Turkey. Part of this controversy stems from concerns about the compatibility of the values of EU members vs. Turks. In the current study, the values of 38 college students in three freshman English classes of a Turkish university are surveyed. The students list, in rank order, and describe, their 10 most important values. Results can provide a basis for comparison with values of members of EU countries, to see the likelihood of Turkey's successful economic, psychological, and social integration into the EU.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey's possible accession to the European Union has generated controversy within both EU countries and Turkey. A report by the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (2005) examined public opinion toward Turkish accession to the EU among six EU countries: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The total in favor ranged from a high of 49% in Spain to a low of 33% in Germany, with an overall value of 40%. The total against ranged from a high of 61% in Germany to a low of 32% in Spain, with an overall value of 46%.

The report also shows that, while there is widespread public support for EU accession within Turkey (64% in favor and 30% opposed) this support has diminished over time, and Turkish public opinion has tended to swing between "Euroscepticism" and "Eurosupportiveness." Support stems from hopes for economic benefits, decreased corruption, and more advanced democracy. Opposition stems from fears of cultural degeneration and sharing of sovereignty, and the view by some that the EU is a "Christian club."

The mixed feelings that both members of EU countries and Turks have toward Turkey's EU membership may be partly attributable to concerns about value incompatibility. The most frequently cited value difference, and cause of concern, is religious: whether a Muslim country can be successfully integrated into a primarily Christian union. This issue stirs emotions on both sides, often based more on longstanding prejudices than on logic.

A more objective approach is to examine the totality of Turkish values, to see what the Turks value in life. Examining these values might shed some

light on the likelihood of a successful Turkish accession to the EU.

Hofstede (1991) has done the most extensive research on national values, covering 116,000 people in 50 countries, including Turkey and most of the EU. His four value dimensions—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity—have become well known. On Hofstede's scales, Turkey ranks relatively high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance and relatively low on individualism and masculinity. This is the opposite pattern to that of the United Kingdom (and the United States), but similar to certain EU countries such as Spain.

However, Hofstede's dimensions actually represent a mix of values, attitudes and behavioral tendencies, and may reveal little about what an individual personally values. For example, power distance tells us a great deal about whether an individual in a country will accept an unequal distribution of power, but little about whether he/she places a high value on his/her personal acquisition of power.

Other researchers, such as Murray (1938) and McClelland (1968), have assessed the needs for such variables as power, but have not determined the relative value that persons place on these variables across cultures. Their findings have thus been criticized as being culture-bound.

Rokeach (1968) differentiates between "instrumental" and "terminal" values. Instrumental values (e.g., cheerfulness, honesty, obedience) are concerned with modes of conduct, while terminal values (e.g., freedom, happiness, inner harmony) are concerned with end states of existence. The Rokeach Values Survey asks the subject to rank 18

instrumental and 18 terminal values in order of importance.

Probably the most thorough investigation of differences in core value orientations across cultures has been done by Schwartz (1992, 1994). He defines values as goal states of being that serve as guiding principles for life. Schwartz and his colleagues have identified 10 value types. Two of these values, power and achievement, are similar to needs first identified by Murray, and later investigated by McClelland. Some of his other values are similar to those identified by Rokeach (1968). For example, Schwartz's "hedonism" and "stimulation" parallel Rokeach's "pleasure" and "an exciting life," respectively. The full list of Schwartz's values are as follows: power (social status and dominance), achievement (personal success), hedonism (pleasure), stimulation (excitement and novelty), self direction (independence in thought and action), universalism (understanding and tolerance of all people), benevolence (concern for human welfare), tradition (commitment to religious and cultural customs), conformity (not violating social expectations), and security (stability of society, relationships, and self).

Cileli (2000) used the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) to study the values of Turks specifically. The RVS was administered to Turkish youth in 1989, 1992, and 1995. He found the most important terminal values in 1989 were self respect, freedom, inner harmony and equality (reflecting a general concern for psychological stability and independence). The most important values in 1992 were wisdom, mature love, inner harmony, happiness, and family security (reflecting a trend toward more relational concerns). Finally, the most important values in 1995 were happiness, inner harmony, an exciting life, and mature love (reflecting a more hedonistic orientation). The shifts in value orientations were attributed to changes in Turkey during this period, including problems in economic transformation, urbanization, population growth, and political unrest. Also, events in nearby regions (e.g., the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War) had a psychological impact on Turkish society.

HYPOTHESIS

The primary purpose of this study is to obtain data on values that will be compared to data to be collected on British students. Hypotheses for this research will be formulated for a later paper, in which the Turkish vs. British comparisons will be made.

For the current paper, the hypothesis is that the value rankings of Turkish university students will

correlate with the Rokeach terminal value rankings in Cileli's 1995 data (Cileli, 2000). Specifically, Cileli found that "happiness" and "inner harmony," each hedonistic values, ranked first and second among the 18 terminal values. "True friendship" and "social recognition," each relationship values, ranked 17th and 18th among terminal values. Thus it is hypothesized that hedonistic values will be ranked higher than relationship values in the current research.

SUBJECTS

Subjects were 38 freshmen (21 males and 17 females) in three English classes at a major university in Istanbul, Turkey.

METHOD

The students were asked to rank and describe their 10 most important values. The question was open-ended, as follows: "Please rank from 1 to 10 your ten most important values. That is, these are the ten things in life that are most important to you. The value ranked "1" is the one that is most important, the one ranked "2" is the second most important, and so forth. For each value, please also write a short description to explain why this value is important in your life."

By keeping the question general and open ended, the researchers hoped to avoid possible limitations and cultural biases of previous (mostly U.S.-designed) value instruments. In addition, by describing each value, the students could use their own words to provide a deeper insight into their value orientation. The researchers were interested in determining not only the relative importance of previously studied values in Turkey, but also whether other values were deemed important, and how all these values were perceived.

The values were content analyzed to see if they fit in one of 10 categories: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, independence, universalism, traditional morality, security, relationships, and wisdom/intelligence. These values were derived from Rokeach and Schwartz models, as indicated in Table 1 on page 97. The resulting list is intended to incorporate values from both of these theories, and thus to include a wider range than either model alone.

Three values that many students expressed were health, sports, and travel. Rather than create new categories for these values, it was assumed that pursuit of health and playing sports were hedonistic,

while traveling and valuing sports as a spectator were stimulating. When students mentioned a hobby as a value, the nature of the hobby, and the student's description of it, determined the value category. For example, "hiking" could be categorized as either achievement, hedonism, or stimulation, depending on the student's goal in taking a hike (getting somewhere, pure enjoyment, or excitement).

RESULTS

The results are shown in Table 2 on page 97 and will first be discussed by value category. Then the hypothesis will be considered.

Power

Power was mentioned only once, by a student who ranked it eighth among his values. This student wrote: "Also one in your life should be clever and useful because you improve yourself with high level people." This recognition of the importance of political maneuvering might be expected in a high "power distance" culture such as Turkey. Its rarity among the students' values shows that one should not assume that persons in a culture with high power distance necessarily place a high value on the personal acquisition of power.

Achievement

Achievement was mentioned 32 times, often in the context of the student's career. When mentioned, however, it was generally not among the student's highest values, with a mean ranking of 7.69.

Hedonism

Hedonistic values were mentioned 97 times, second to only relationships. It was frequently cited in the context of an object, such as a home or car, that was highly valued. When mentioned, it tended to be only moderately important, with a mean ranking of 6.26.

Stimulation

Stimulation, often in the context of spectator sports and travel, was cited 21 times. Its mean ranking was 5.38.

Independence

Though only cited 11 times, independence was deemed relatively important when mentioned, with a mean ranking of 4.73.

Universalism

Concern for universalistic values such as peace and equality, came up 21 times, with a mean ranking of 5.86.

Traditional morality

Turkey is a relatively secular society, especially for a Muslim country. When God (or Allah) was mentioned, however, the ranking was generally high. The Turkish nation, and traditional morals such as loyalty and obedience, were generally rated somewhat lower. Traditional morality was cited 52 times, with a mean ranking of 4.98.

Security

This value came up the second least (5 times) and was tied for lowest ranking at 8.00.

Relationships

Relationships were both cited most often (114 times) and ranked the highest (mean of 3.99). Family, friends, and loving relationships were very highly valued among the students.

Wisdom

Knowledge, education, and wisdom, were valued by many students, and this value was cited 24 times. It did not tend to be highly ranked, though, with an average ranking of only 6.58.

In general, then, relationships and hedonism were the two most frequently cited values in this sample. Relationships were mentioned 114 times, with a mean ranking of 3.99, while hedonistic values were mentioned 97 times, with a mean ranking of 6.26. Since relationship values were mentioned more often, and ranked higher, than hedonistic values, the hypothesis for this study was not supported.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest that Turkish college freshmen, as might be expected of persons of this age group, are highly concerned with relationships. It should be remembered, however, that other values may be more important to Turkish

adults. Previous research (Karakitapoglu and Imamoglu, 2002) suggests, for example, that compared with university students, Turkish adults place more value on tradition-religiosity. This, of course, is of concern to EU countries that may fear that Turks will have religious values that are not compatible with those of Christian nations.

The Turkish students' descriptions of their values, however, might help to mitigate some of these fears. Those giving religion as their highest value tended to express this in much the same way as a devout Christian might, with an emphasis on love, thankfulness, and family. For example, one student wrote: "I think there are two kinds of love one is loving a human and the other loving the Creator." Another student wrote: "Everything I have now including my family is mine for the reason what God wants me to have. I am very thankful that I have everything I need, are mine with me now." Religion for them is a personal and familial thing, not an activist orientation.

Further research is needed to compare these values to those of a comparable sample in an EU country. The authors plan on doing this in Great Britain in the fall of 2007. Specific comparisons of these values, at a deeper level than has been done in the past, can shed light on the likelihood of Turkey's successful economic, social, and psychological integration into the European Union.

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Table 1
Value Categories

<i>Value Categories</i>	<i>Rokeach Instrumental</i>	<i>Rokeach Terminal</i>	<i>Schwartz</i>
POWER			Power
ACHIEVEMENT	Ambitious	Accomplishment	Achievement
HEDONISM		Happiness, inner harmony, pleasure, comfortable life	Hedonism
STIMULATION	Imaginative, courageous	Exciting life	Stimulation
INDEPENDENCE	Independent, self-controlled	Freedom, self respect	Self-direction
UNIVERSALISM		World at peace, world of beauty, equality	Universalism, benevolence
TRADITIONAL MORALITY	Clean, obedient, polite, responsible	Salvation	Tradition, conformity
SECURITY		Family security, national security	Security
RELATIONSHIPS	Cheerful, forgiving, helpful, honest, loving	Mature love, true friendship, social recognition	
WISDOM	Broad-minded, capable, intellectual, logical	Wisdom	

Table 2
Value Rankings

Number of Students Ranking the Value from 1 (Highest) to 10 (Lowest)

<i>Value Categories</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
POWER								1			1	8.00
ACHIEVEMENT			1	1	2	4	6	5	7	6	32	7.69
HEDONISM	11	7	5	6	8	9	9	11	12	19	97	6.26
STIMULATION		2	6	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	21	5.38
INDEPENDENCE		2	2	1	3	1		1	1		11	4.73
UNIVERSALISM	2	1	3	1	1	2	5	2	2	2	21	5.86
TRADITIONAL MORALITY	8	3	4	7	7	9	3	5	5	1	52	4.98
SECURITY					1		1		2	1	5	8.00
RELATIONSHIPS	19	22	15	17	11	6	10	9	4	1	114	3.99
WISDOM			2	4	3	3	3	3	2	4	24	6.58

