

# Love, Money or Fame? Determinants of Turkey's Leader Visits

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**Abstract:** High-level leader visits serve as credible signals in international relations, as they not only reveal the priorities of states in foreign relations but also convey messages to third parties. Observations of Turkey's elevated diplomatic encounters with Iran, China, and Russia suggest a potential deviation from the West, while visits to Middle Eastern capitals are interpreted as evidence of Turkey's Islamization. Beyond these individual cases, is it possible to identify a pattern of motivations that determine Turkey's visit dynamics? By constructing a novel dataset from primary sources like official state documents, "*Turkey Visits*," which spans the period from 1989 to 2022, this study aims to both characterize the distribution patterns of high-level leader visits and investigate the underlying factors that influence these patterns.

Two reporters from *The Washington Post* portrayed the then-Turkish president's first trip abroad to Russia after the attempted military takeover in 2016 as "Turkey's Erdoğan pivots to Putin" (Roth and Cunningham 2016; İçener 2016: 74-76). In response to severe economic crises, Turkish leaders engage in diplomatic visits to either Western lenders or resource-rich Middle Eastern nations in pursuit of economic support. Are these examples just stand-alone cases, or is there a motivational pattern that determines the preferences of Turkish leaders for countries to visit? The emerging literature on high-level leader visits identifies three main determinants: the pursuit of economic and military interests (Lebovic and Saunders 2016; Lebovic 2018; McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017), the manifestation of ideational/political motivations (Ostrander and Rider 2019; Wang and Stone 2022), and the quest for or consolidation of status within the international community (Kastner and Saunders 2012, Goldstein 2008: 170-176). In addition to these factors, scholars examine electoral concerns (Ostrander and Rider 2019), membership in international organizations (Wang and Stone 2022), and international habits (Lebovic and Saunders 2016) as potential determinants of high-level visits. Despite the recent surge in scholarly interest on high-level leader visits, the investigation of these determinants has been predominantly conducted

using data from the US (Lebovic and Saunders 2016), China (Wang and Stone 2022), and France (Lavallée and Lochard 2022). By studying the Turkish case, we emphasize the importance of expanding the scope of leader visit studies. The limited focus on leader visits of great powers prevents us from answering even basic theoretical questions about leader visits. For instance, motivations related to recognition concerns and foreign aid requirements cannot be sufficiently explored without investigating smaller states. Expanding leader visit studies to include smaller and non-Western states may be challenging due to lack of ready data, but it is promising, as it not only enriches our theoretical arguments but also leads to the emergence of a dedicated research field: leader visit studies.

Foreign visits by Turkish leaders, while often utilized as compelling examples to substantiate arguments in qualitative foreign policy analyses, have seldom been the focus of quantitative studies in the field. Available data-based studies are primarily concerned with examining shifts in Turkish foreign policy (Ekmekci and Yıldırım 2013; Kuşku-Sönmez 2019) and assessing Turkey's regional actorness (Mesquita and Chien 2021). Among these, only Mesquita and Chien's dataset, despite its limitations and shortcomings (see Appendix), is publicly accessible and suitable for use in different academic investigations. All three studies employ foreign visits as an independent variable to either elucidate Turkey's potential distancing from the West or ascertain Turkey's status as a regional power. Although Mesquita and Chien's dataset proves valuable for characterizing the geographic distribution of Turkey's high-level visits, a systematic study investigating the motivations behind Turkish foreign visits remains absent. With a fine-grained dataset covering a wider period, this study investigates the dynamics influencing the visiting preferences of Turkish leaders. What drives Turkish leaders to allocate their limited time and resources to certain countries over others? While explanations that prioritize domestic political dynamics prevail in theory-driven literature (Smith 1996; Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo 2020), the current study seeks to explore the broader dynamics underpinning Turkey's high-level leader visits. Undoubtedly, some Turkish leaders have designed their travel plans to evade domestic crises (Kara 2022), enhance their prospects in forthcoming elections through notable achievements (Balta 2015), or legitimize their ideological positions within the domestic context (Aras 2001; Küçükboz 2016; Can 2020). However, while such studies yield leader-specific conclusions, this paper aims to investigate the more comprehensive dynamics that govern the visit preferences of Turkish leaders.

The present study constructs a novel dataset, Turkey Visits, encompassing the period from 1989 to 2022, to delineate the distribution patterns of leader visits and investigate the underlying factors shaping these patterns. Our theoretical arguments regarding the determinants of high-level foreign visits are tested using logistic regression models of those visits spanning twenty-seven years after the Cold War (1991-2018). The theoretical literature on bilateral visits proposes a variety of reasons why state leaders visit foreign countries. These explanations can be grouped under three main categories: love, money and fame. Love refers to the ideational dynamics that influence the perception of the external world, money represents material interests that drive leaders' decisions, and fame pertains to status concerns within the international community. The first part of the study engages with existing theoretical and empirical literature to provide a broader debate on potential determinants of leader visits. The second part introduces the Turkey

Visits dataset and compares it with available studies. The third part comprises a descriptive analysis of the geographical, temporal, and leader-specific distributions of post-Cold War visits by Turkish prime ministers and presidents. The subsequent two parts introduce the econometric model and present its results.

### Why (Turkish) Leaders Visit

Since foreign visits are rare, costly, and time-consuming, political leaders need to prioritize some countries over others for visits. Visit preferences also pose risks in domestic settings, as their necessity or lack thereof can prompt criticism from the opposition in democratic countries. A similar risk exists in foreign relations, given that visit preferences can negatively affect relations with third countries (Goldstein 2008, 164-167). For example, a member of the opposition party posed a written official question to the then-finance minister of Turkey regarding President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Chile (TBMM 2016). This question underscored the high cost of Erdoğan's visit and criticized such expensive visits during a time when unemployment was rising, and economic conditions were deteriorating. When then-Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan visited Libya and other Muslim countries in 1996, opposition parties and the media shone a spotlight on those visits to delegitimize his rule, leading to the February 28 coup in 1997. Symbolic travels, such as Prime Minister Tansu Çiller's visit to Israel in 1995 and President Abdullah Gül's visit to Armenia in 2008, as well as high-level visits to disputed regions, caused resentment among neighboring countries against Turkey. Therefore, we assume that political leaders invest their scarce time, limited resources, and domestic and international risks only into destinations important for their country's material needs (money), identity (love), and status (fame).

What factors influence the selection of countries for diplomatic visits? In the scholarly literature, two separate areas of research offer insights into the potential factors affecting the choice of countries for diplomatic visits. The first group of scholars seeks to comprehend the consequences of leader visits, while the second group primarily investigates the underlying motivations for such visits. In the context of the first research area, several studies have used leader visits as an independent variable to understand some international outcomes including change in trade flows between two nations (Nitsch 2007; Beaulieu et al. 2020; Lavallée and Lochard 2022), the perception of the visiting country by the populace in the visited country (Goldsmith et al. 2021), and the probability of leader survival in the visited nation (Bader 2015; McManus 2018; Malis, and Smith 2020; Wang et al. 2023). Albeit indirectly, this body of literature implies that political leaders strategically organize their diplomatic visits with intentions to boost their nations' exports and reputation, as well as to support their allies within the destination countries. The second group of studies explicitly aims to quantify motivations behind diplomatic visits. For example, Lebovic and Saunders (2016), McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017), and Lebovic (2018) find that US leaders exhibit a higher inclination to visit great powers, countries with considerable military expenditure, nations engaging in substantial bilateral trade with the US, and nations displaying political alignment with the US. Wang and Stone (2022) identify that Chinese diplomatic visits are positively correlated with larger populations, higher GDP per capita, and great power status of the target country. Several scholars have also demonstrated a correlation between a country's status and high-level diplomatic visits. Kastner and Saunders (2012) and Mesquita and Chien

(2021) used leader visits to determine a nation's position in the international arena, designating it as status quo, revisionist, or an emerging power.

Given that the primary arguments are derived from the analysis of great power practices, it may be unsuitable to directly apply these arguments to comparatively weaker nations such as Turkey. For instance, it would not be a logically sound decision to investigate leader survival in the target country as a motivating factor for visits by Turkish leaders. Reviewing the Turkish foreign policy literature is helpful in identifying more suitable hypotheses from these arguments, which are based on U.S. and Chinese records. Although a significant portion of this literature comprises interpretive inferences drawn from single cases, three prominent categories of motivations stand out: economic and security priorities, ideational/political dynamics driving perceptions of the external world, and Turkey's international status as a rising, revisionist, or regional power. To start with material interests, some scholars have characterized Turkey as a trading state that prioritizes its export capacity in its dealings with other countries. Kirişçi and Kaptanoğlu (2011, 712; Kelkitli 2017, 5-6; Sariaslan 2019), for instance, argues that the primary motivation for foreign visits by Turgut Özal and high-level leaders of the AKP governments was "in search of markets" for Turkish products. Similarly, Habibi and Walker (2011, 4) contend that Turkish leaders' official visits have played a crucial role in fostering economic cooperation agreements and facilitating trade relations between Turkey and Middle Eastern nations. As a result, our first expectation is that Turkish leaders are more likely to visit large and affluent countries. Additionally, given that Turkey is an energy-dependent and developing state, we anticipate that Turkish leaders will also prioritize resource-rich countries (Harunoğlu, Sever and Erşen 2021, 115). Nevertheless, economic interests are not the only material consideration. Since Turkey is a middle-power country that contends with separatist PKK terrorism and regional instability, it urgently needed suppliers for sophisticated arms systems throughout the period under investigation (Bağcı and Kurç 2017, 48; Bilgel and Karahasan 2021; Erdağ 2021, 121; Yetim and Hazar 2023). SIPRI (2022) data shows that Turkey ranks among the top five countries with the highest defense exports for the 1991-2018 period. Consequently, access to sophisticated arms systems was essential for Turkey's security interests, and we expect that Turkish leaders' visits are motivated by security concerns (Lebovic 2018), particularly securing arms transfers to Turkey.

A substantial body of literature by Turkish scholars focuses on the identities and ideologies of ruling leaders to elucidate the foreign policy orientations of Turkey in different periods. For example, William Hale (2013, 228) explains Necmettin Erbakan's foreign visits during his short-term rule in the mid-1990s through "his programme to develop an Islamic foreign policy". Rather than attaching particular identities to single political actors, some scholars suggest that three historical identities (Turkism, Islamism, and Westernism) influenced all political actors, but with varying degrees (Yanık 2011; Yesiltas 2013). While Turkism looks for a greater role in the Turkic world, Islamism goes in the direction of Arab-Islamic countries, and the Westernism calls for further integration in European institutions (Aktürk 2015: 54). For example, Bozdağlıoğlu (2004, 98) writes that intensive diplomatic visits of Turkish leaders to Central Asia in the early 1990s, regardless of their individual ideologies, were "made in large part according to 'fanciful notions of ethnic solidarity' rather than mutual interests." Drawing on this perspective, we assume that three different identity dynamics (Turkism, Islamism, and Westernism) primarily influence visit

preferences of Turkish leaders. To determine the identity of targeted countries, we use their membership in one of the following international organizations, European Union, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Organization of Turkic States (OTC). Since OTC-member countries are also members of the OIC, we exclude them from the list of OIC members to differentiate Islamic motivation from Turkic one. Considering that the term “Westernism” has historically referred to Europe within the Turkish context, and that integration with Atlantic institutions is predominantly driven by security concerns, we exclude the US, Canada, Australia, and other non-European “Western” countries from our analysis. Like identity-related dynamics, political dynamics like regime type and alliance relations may influence the visit preferences of high-level leaders (Bader 2015). If a country has a democratic regime, it is expected that its high-level leaders prefer their democratic pairs to visit more.

Finally, a significant body of research on Turkish foreign policy posits that Turkey is a regional power (Sever and Oguz Gok 2016; Celikpala 2007; Koçak, and Akgül 2022). Existing literature suggests that a country’s standing in international politics influences its foreign policy practices. While global powers engage in affairs of distant geographies, revisionist powers form alliances with those who challenge the existing international order. Some state leaders plan their visits to signal their countries’ positioning as either revisionist or status quo states (Kastner and Saunders 2012), while others use their visits to present themselves as “acceptable members of the international community” (Goldstein 2008, 170). Consequently, it is expected that countries with regional ambitions have travel schedules favoring countries located in their neighboring regions (Mesquita and Chien 2021, 1546; Nolte 2010). Although Mesquita and Chien focus solely on Turkish leaders’ visits to countries in the Middle East/North Africa region to determine if Turkey is a regional power, Kardaş (2013, 647) critiques this classical categorization for not accurately capturing Turkey’s regional-level interactions. Acknowledging the possibility of an actor’s membership in multiple regions, Kardaş (2013, 654) posits that “Turkey is a part of ... the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus, and Black Sea.” Numerous scholars adopt this multi-region approach to examine Turkey’s increasing activism in its surrounding areas. For instance, Parlar Dal (2016, 1426) investigates “neighboring regions of the Middle East, the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus” to assess “the performance of Turkey in creating a regional impact.”

#### *Turkey Visits Dataset*

The dataset of Turkish leader visits, *Turkey Visits*, encompasses official state visits, goodwill visits, multilateral visits, and public visits undertaken by Turkish presidents and prime ministers. Official state visits consist of all instances where the Turkish president or prime minister engages with high-level governmental representatives of the host countries. Public visits pertain to the journeys of Turkish leaders to foreign nations to interact with the Turkish community or civil society organizations affiliated with Turkey. Goodwill visits denote leadership travels abroad for the purpose of participating in events such as funerals, national independence days, and coronations. Multilateral visits involve trips aimed at attending multilateral meetings, including NATO, the Turkish Africa Summit, the World Economic Forum, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. If Turkish leaders convened with their counterparts from the host country before or after their public, multilateral, and goodwill visits, we also classify them as official state visits. This four-level categorization is useful in isolating visits targeting specific countries. Given our

main research hypothesis, official visits reveal motivations and determinants more clearly than multilateral visits (Lebovic 2018, 293). Furthermore, multilateral visits often arise as a routine of membership in the relevant international organization. Alongside the classification of visits, our dataset comprises the name of the visited country, the name of the visiting leader, the leader's rank, and the start and end dates of the visit.

In compiling the dataset, we utilized a diverse range of sources, including the websites of the Turkish presidency and foreign ministry, annual and monthly periodicals from the Turkish foreign ministry, the Directorate General of Press and Information, the official gazette of the Republic of Turkey, newspaper archives, relevant academic studies, and keyword-based Google searches. The 2018 transition from parliamentary rule to a presidential system resulted in some data loss due to the termination of certain state web pages. The web pages of the Prime Ministry and the Directorate General of Press and Information were useful in collecting data about the presidential and prime ministerial visits of Turkey. Since we were unable to create a high-level visit list based solely on official data, we also cross-referenced a significant portion of the data we recorded from alternative sources. For example, if the data were from secondary sources such as Wikipedia and unreliable internet sources, these were checked through newspaper archives and relevant official documents, such as parliamentary papers and official reports. To increase the reliability of the data, we also share our supporting documents alongside the Turkey Visits dataset. The dataset treats all UN member countries as potential hosts for Turkish leaders, and therefore it covers those that Turkish leaders have never visited. The dataset also spans the years between 1989 and 2022 because the year 1989 coincides with two important developments: the end of the Cold War and the ascendancy of the first civilian president after a cycle of military coups. Coincidentally, 9 November 1989 is the date when the Berlin Wall fell, and Turgut Özal became the Turkish president.

Two existing studies on Turkish leader visits do not have publicly available datasets. Ekmekci and Yıldırım (2013) utilize a dataset covering only Erdoğan's visits abroad between 2003 and 2010. At the time, Erdoğan served as prime minister and made "226 foreign visits to a total of 80 countries." The authors code Erdoğan's visits as either multilateral or bilateral and exclude multilateral visits from their empirical analysis. However, it is unclear how they count Erdoğan's separate talks with the host country's leader during the multilateral visits. Kuşku-Sönmez (2019) employs a much more comprehensive dataset. Kuşku-Sönmez's dataset covers more than seven years (from January 2009 to October 2016) and includes auxiliary information such as the names of contacted countries, their respective regions, and the year of the visit. It also has broader coverage in terms of high-level ranks and includes the visits of key ministers and heads of parliament to foreign countries. The only publicly available dataset on high-level Turkish visits is that of Mesquita and Chien (2021). It covers presidential and prime ministerial visits from February 1995 to December 2019. Mesquita's dataset includes 1,074 visits of Turkish presidents and prime ministers, 679 of which are state visits. However, it has some missing data and coding problems in certain categories (see Appendix). While 463 visits lack information about duration, destination type does not differentiate official visits from visits for public reasons, such as attending a funeral. For example, both the Turkish president and prime minister at the time visited Azerbaijan to participate in the funeral of Heydar Aliyev in December 2003. Mesquita's

dataset codes them as state visits. More importantly, Mesquita’s dataset is not clear whether visits with a multilateral component are also considered state visits. For example, President Suleyman Demirel visited Romania on 30 June 1995 to participate in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Summit. While Mesquita recorded this visit as both multilateral and state, we code it only as a multilateral visit.

### The Distribution of Turkey’s High-level Visits

Figure 1: All High-level Leader Visits between 1989 and 2022

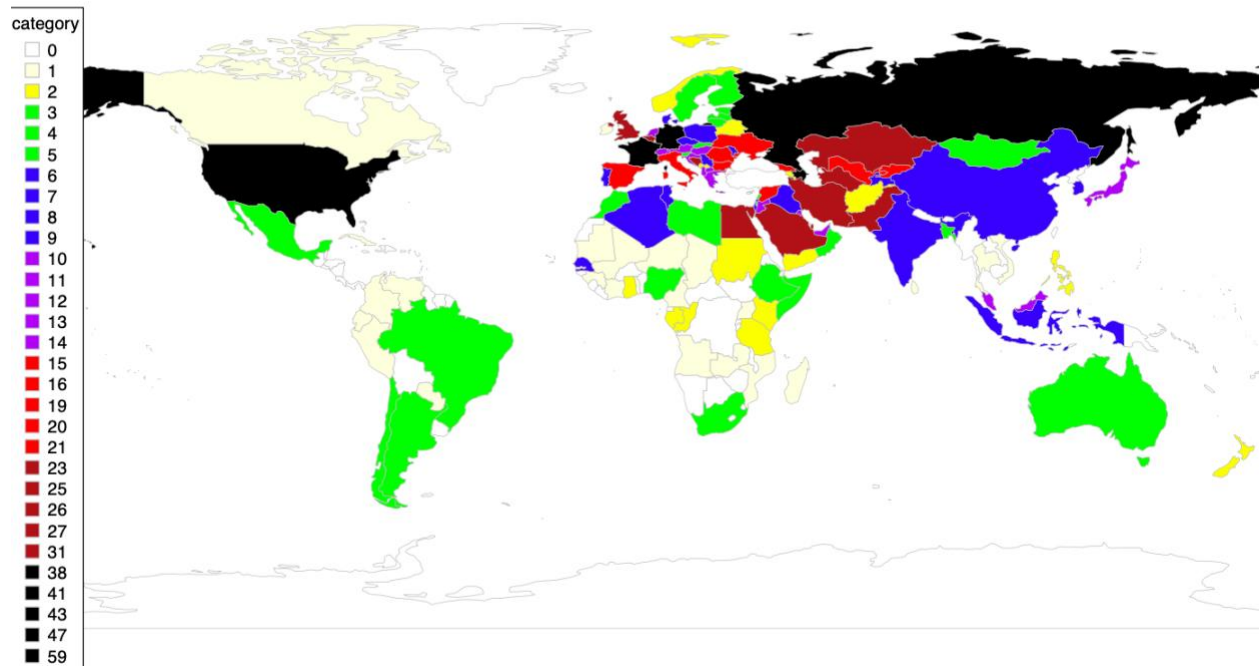
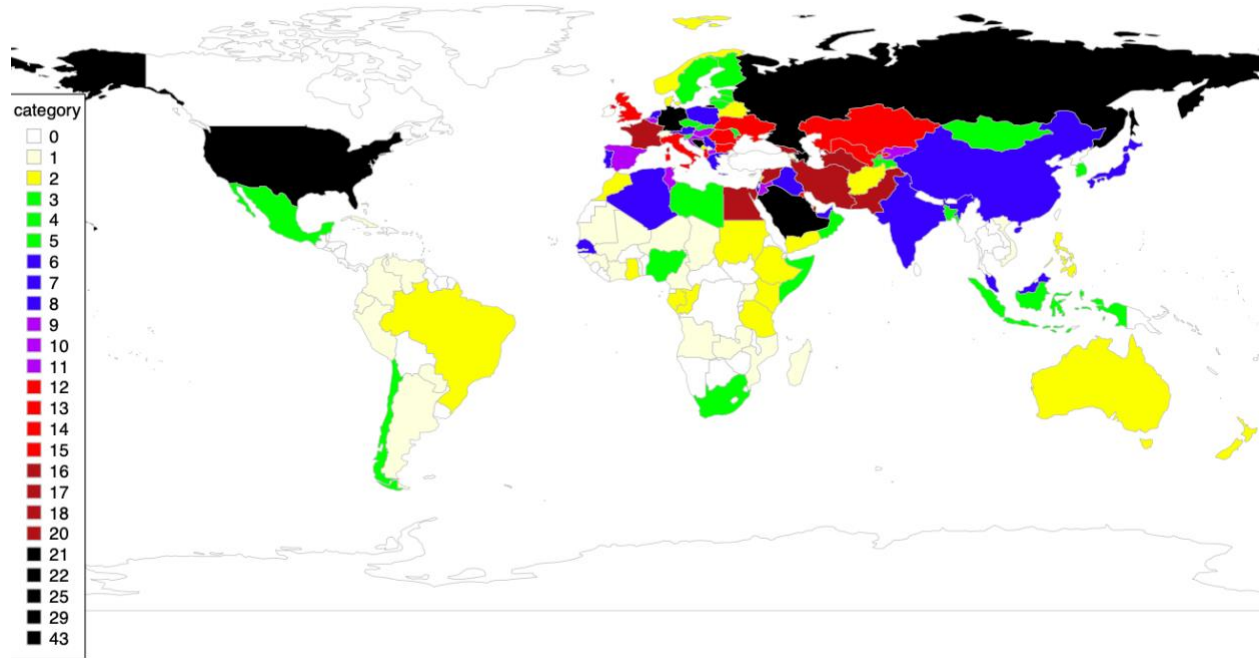


Figure 1 displays the country-based distribution of all visits made by Turkish leaders between 1989 and 2022. It clearly demonstrates that Azerbaijan, the US, France, Germany, and Russia, with 59, 47, 43, and 41 visits respectively, are by far the most frequently visited countries. When we confine our data to official visits only (Figure 2), Azerbaijan retains its top position with 43 visits, while Russia ascends to second place with 29 visits, and Germany rises to third with 25 visits. The US preserves its standing among the top five destinations, with Turkish leaders making 22 visits, excluding engagements in multilateral meetings such as the UN General Assembly. Considering solely official visits, Saudi Arabia emerges as one of the top five destinations. Figure 2 further reveals that Turkish leaders predominantly visit countries within their immediate geographical vicinity, apart from the US. The most visited regions encompass Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Several crucial inferences can be drawn from these two maps. First, major powers like the US, Russia, Germany, France, and the UK rank among the most visited countries. Second, it is evident that Turkish presidents and prime ministers prioritize regional countries in their travel itineraries. Third, Oceania, Central America, and Southern Africa are the least favored destinations for Turkey’s high-level leaders (also see Table 7 in the Appendix). Over

20 countries spanning the African and American continents have yet to receive high-level leader visits from Turkey. Fourth, although African and Latin American openings have been popular research subjects among Turkish scholars in the 2000s, high-level visits to these continents appear to be isolated attempts without having established a diplomatic routine.

Figure 2: All High-level Official Leader Visits between 1989 and 2022



When examining official high-level visits between 1989 and 2022 by individual leaders, as shown in Table 1, it is evident that EU member states were visited most frequently by Ahmet Davutoğlu, OIC-member states by Necmettin Erbakan, and OTS-member states by Tansu Çiller. Table 1 also suggests that pro-Islamic and pro-Western categories may not be particularly useful in understanding the motivations behind leader visits. For instance, Ahmet Necdet Sezer visited OIC-member countries more than EU and Turkic countries, which calls into question the validity of arguments based on “the traditional hostility of Turkey’s secular Kemalist elites toward the Arab world” (Habibi and Walker 2011, 6). Conversely, leaders with an Islam-sympathetic stance, such as Ahmet Davutoğlu, Abdullah Gül, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, are among those who visited EU member states most frequently. Identity-oriented analyses seem to be applicable only in the case of Necmettin Erbakan. Nevertheless, drawing straightforward conclusions may not be accurate for two reasons. First, Erbakan’s initial foreign visit initiatives were abruptly halted by the February 28 military coup. Second, Erbakan declared a division of labor within the coalition government, assigning Deputy Prime Minister Tansu Çiller the responsibility of visiting Western and pro-Western countries (Erbakan visited 8 OIC-member countries, while Çiller visited 7 EU countries and the US). The leaders with the highest proportion of official visits to the US include Bülent Ecevit (20%), Tansu Çiller (13%), and Turgut Özal (6%), respectively. When examining the total number of visits to the US, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan leads with 9 official visits. Considering



Ecevit's anti-imperialist and Third-Worldist perspectives, it is reasonable to argue that his visits to the US were primarily influenced by Turkey's requirements.

*Table 1: Official Visits of Turkish leaders in OIC, EU and OTS countries between 1989 and 2022*

	Total	OIC	%	EU	% ↓	OTS	%
Ahmet Davutoğlu	31	5	16,13	15	48,39	3	9,68
Mesut Yılmaz	35	3	8,57	13	37,14	8	22,86
Tansu Çiller	24	1	4,17	8	33,33	6	25,00
Abdullah Gül	95	35	36,84	27	28,42	12	12,63
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	366	131	35,79	78	21,31	39	10,66
Ahmet Necdet Sezer	40	9	22,50	7	17,50	6	15,00
Binali Yıldırım	24	4	16,67	4	16,67	3	12,50
Turgut Özal	35	11	31,43	5	14,29	5	14,29
Bülent Ecevit	10	1	10,00	1	10,00	0	0,00
Süleyman Demirel	109	32	29,36	8	7,34	17	15,60
Yıldırım Akbulut	5	3	60,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Necmettin Erbakan	8	7	87,50	0	0,00	0	0,00
Total Visits	782	242	30,95	166	21,23	99	12,66

Many scholars of Turkish foreign policy have regarded the office of the president as a symbolic post until 2018 (Ülgül 2018). Table 2 compares presidential visits with prime ministerial visits prior to Turkey's transition to the presidential system. While prime ministers visit EU member states more frequently than presidents, Turkic countries are popular destinations for presidents. Although not readily apparent, the data in Table 2 suggests that prime ministers tend to align with material priorities, whereas presidents prioritize emotional connections. Prime ministers paid official visits to two great powers, the US and Russia, more often than presidents. While prime ministers made 2.1% of their total official visits to the US, this rate drops to 0.9% for presidents. Another notable difference between prime ministerial and presidential visits lies in their travel patterns to EU member states. Examining all visits, presidents favored Turkic and Muslim countries more than prime ministers, while prime ministers exhibited a stronger preference for visiting EU member states.

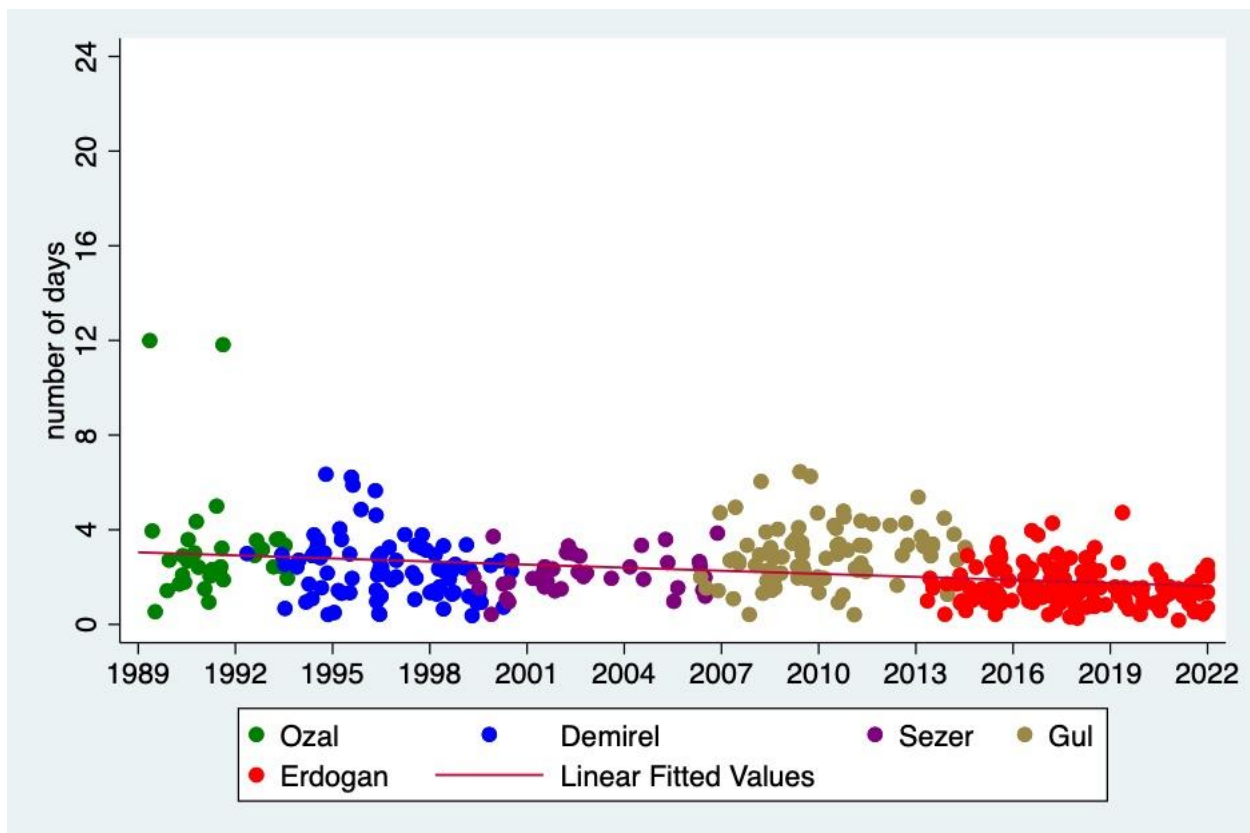
*Table 2: Official Visits of Turkish Presidents and Prime Ministers in OIC, EU and OTS countries between 1989 and 2018*

	All Visits					Official Visits				
	Total	Prime Minister		President		Total	Prime Minister		President	
OIC	1090	189	17,3%	207	19,0%	767	153	19,9%	150	19,6%
EU	1090	178	16,3%	91	8,3%	767	101	13,2%	58	7,6%
OTS	1090	51	4,7%	68	6,2%	767	45	5,9%	40	5,2%
US	1090	26	2,4%	21	1,9%	767	16	2,1%	5	0,7%

Russia	1090	17	1,6%	12	1,1%	767	13	1,7%	8	1,0%
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Figure 3 presents the duration of official visits by Turkish presidents, clearly illustrating a steady decrease in the average number of days spent on their travels over time. President Turgut Özal holds the record for the longest official visit, having spent 12 days in the United States during each of his visits in January 1990 and March 1991. Excluding the United States, the longest official visit was conducted by President Abdullah Gül to China in June 2009. While a significant majority of official visits lasting more than five days were made to the United States, the remaining visits were conducted in geographically distant countries such as South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, and India. The longest visits in nearby regions were made to Egypt (President Turgut Özal in November 1992) and Saudi Arabia (President Abdullah Gül in October 2013), each lasting five days. Comparing presidential visits to those made by prime ministers, Turgut Özal’s record is followed by Prime Minister Tansu Çiller’s visits to the United States in October 1993 and April 1995, as well as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s visit to the United States in January 2004, each lasting eight days.

Figure 3: Duration Distribution of Official Turkish Presidential Visits between 1989 and 2022



#### Econometric Model: Determinants of Visits

Contrary to the distribution patterns of Turkish leader visits, we confine our analysis of the dynamics influencing the selection of these visits to the period between 1991 and 2018. This is due to the unavailability of data for certain independent variables after 2018 and the fact that

states in Central Asia and Eastern Europe were not independent prior to 1991. Additionally, we exclude visits to non-UN member states (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the Holy See, and the State of Palestine) from our regression model, as they do not align with the available data for our independent variables. Drawing from theoretical literature and policy analyses pertinent to Turkey, we aim to test three primary hypotheses: a) Turkey's material needs influenced the choices of high-level state leaders regarding which countries to visit, b) ideational dynamics, such as national identity and regime type, affected the preferences of Turkish leaders in scheduling their visits, and c) Turkey's status as a regional actor influenced the visit preferences of its high-level leaders. To conduct these tests, we formulate our main regression equation as follows;

$$Visit_{i,t} = f(\beta_0 + \beta_1 Material\ Vars_{i,t} + \beta_2 Ideational\ Vars_{i,t(t-1)} + \beta_3 Status_{i,t} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t})$$

where  $f$  is the logistic link function and  $Visit_{i,t}$  represents a dummy variable indicating whether a Turkish leader visits country  $i$  in year  $t$ . *Material Vars* comprises a set of economic and security-related variables, as we hypothesize that, from a material-interest perspective, Turkish leaders are more inclined to visit large, wealthy, resource-rich, and arms-exporting countries. Consequently, economic variables encompass population (World Bank 2022a), GDP per capita (World Bank 2022b), and natural resources (World Bank 2022c) of potential host countries. To address possible issues of reverse causation, GDP per capita and resource variables are lagged by one year. To assess security-related motivations, we include potential arms exporters to Turkey (SIPRI 2022). The potentiality of being an arms exporter is determined by examining historical records of Turkey's arms exports. If a country has ever exported arms to Turkey, we assign a code of 1, and 0 otherwise (based on the assumption that Turkish leaders visit such countries to eliminate obstacles before arms trade or to make subsequent purchases).

Historically, the state identity of Turkey has been shaped by three significant dynamics: Turkism, Islamism, and Westernism (Kösebalaban 2011). Instead of categorizing Turkish leaders strictly as Islamist or nationalist, this study examines the identities of target countries to discern overarching patterns underpinning ideational motivation. For this purpose, we introduce dummy variables for each EU member state (the dummy variable is assigned 1 when the country is an EU member, and 0 otherwise), OIC-member countries, and Turkic countries. To assess the influence of regime types, we examine the regime types of target countries, which span from fully-established democracies to authoritarian regimes (Marshall and Gurr 2020). In light of the agreement among numerous Turkish scholars that Turkey's international status constitutes a regional actor, and considering that key political figures such as Turgut Özal, İsmail Cem and Ahmet Davutoğlu advanced Turkey's image as a regional power during the period under investigation, we regard regional power as Turkey's primary status concern.<sup>1</sup> To ascertain

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<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, a country may possess multiple status concerns under varying conditions across distinct periods. For instance, being acknowledged as a European nation is another status concern for Turkey. While this concern was of utmost importance during the initial years of the AKP governments in power, it subsequently diminished (Koçak, and Akgül, 2022). However, after the Cold War, the aspiration to be a regional actor has persisted as a dominant and unchanging status concern for Turkey. We express our gratitude to the reviewers for bringing this crucial point to our attention.

whether a country is situated within the region encompassing Turkey, various variables are available, including the World Bank's regional classification, shared borders, and CIA World Factbook regions. We opt for United Nations regions, as this indicator most accurately identifies the countries surrounding Turkey. If a country is located within the regions of Eastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa, we assign a code of 1 and 0 otherwise. Given that other alternative indicators tend to exhibit a high correlation with one another, we solely include the UN indicator in our regression model.

Although the qualitative literature on Turkish foreign policy largely focuses on ideational, material, and status motivations to explain high-level leader visits, disentangling the effects of these underlying motivations on visit preferences remains a challenging task.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the visits of Turkish leaders to EU member states may be influenced by factors such as Westernism, economic necessities, or defense imperatives. Similarly, the determinants of visiting neighboring countries may encompass Turkey's regional power status or its commercial relationships. To minimize such isolation problems, we include two additional independent variables in our regression equation: Turkey's trade percentage with countries (Turkish Statistical Institute 2023) and UN General Assembly voting similarity (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017). The integration of these variables does not substantially alter our findings (See Table 8 in the Appendix). However, controlling for Turkey's trade relations bolsters the results concerning regional power status, indicating that high-level visits to regional countries are not primarily driven by economic considerations. Accounting for similarities in UN voting patterns further strengthens the evidence on identity-based factors, as visits to EU, OIC, and Turkic countries cannot be attributed to policy convergence with these states. Nonetheless, it is crucial to explore other potential motivations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of high-level diplomatic visits, which necessitates further research. For instance, the pursuit of conflict resolution objectives may serve as a motivation for visiting regional countries (Köse, 2014).

## Results

Table 3 reports the main results of our econometric model. Largely consistent with our expectations, all variables have a positive effect on the visit preferences of Turkey's prime ministers and presidents. However, the coefficients of resource and regime type are not statistically significant in most of the models. Focusing on identity-related variables, we find that if a country is a member of one of the identity categories, its likelihood of receiving high-level visits from Turkey increases, but to varying degrees. To assess the relative impact of target countries' identity on Turkish leaders' official visits, we set the independent variables not only at their means but also at one standard deviation from their means, which is often used as a standard change in the relevant literature (Wang and Stone 2022; Wang 2022). For this, we use the estimates for Model 1 in Table 3, measuring the impact of independent variables on all official visits of Turkish political leaders. Figure 4 depicts that, holding all other variables at their mean values, the probability of a Turkish leader visiting an OTS-member country is 58.2%, compared with 8.2% for other countries. Examining the probability of visits to EU-member states, the probability of a Turkish leader visiting an EU member, when all other variables are at their means,

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<sup>2</sup> We express our gratitude to the reviewers for bringing these isolation problems to our attention.

is 21.4%, compared with 7.8% for other countries. When we exclude Turkic countries from the list of OIC members, the probability of a Turkish leader visiting a Muslim country is 14%, compared with 7.3% for other countries. This demonstrates that, everything else being equal, OTS-member (Turkic) countries are 609.8% more likely to receive a Turkish leader than other countries, while EU-members (Western) 174.4%, and OIC-members (Islamic) 91.8% respectively. In terms of the identities of targeted countries, it is clear that the least inclination of Turkish leaders is towards non-Turkic OIC-member states.

*Table 3: Determinants of Turkish leader visits, 1991-2018*

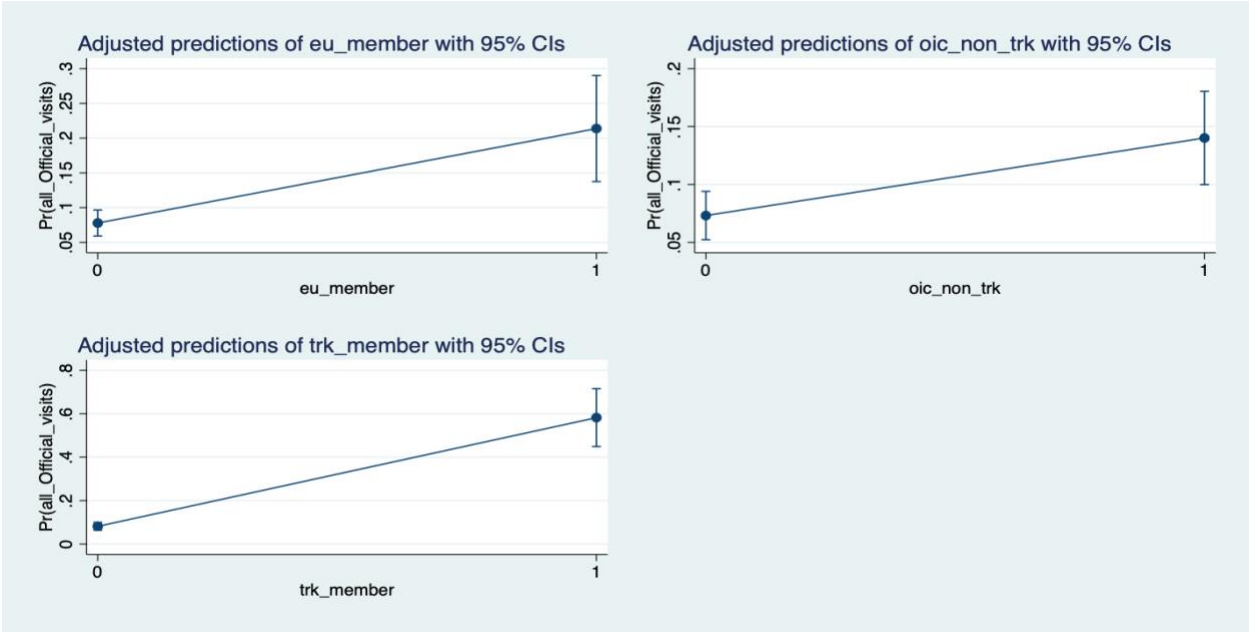
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Official All	Official PM	Official Pres.	All Visits	All PM	All Pres.	Multi
EU-member	1.170*** (0.284)	1.376*** (0.385)	0.833*** (0.218)	1.268*** (0.290)	1.453*** (0.361)	0.781*** (0.272)	0.955** (0.441)
OIC-member	0.725*** (0.246)	0.949*** (0.303)	0.451** (0.219)	0.763*** (0.244)	0.886*** (0.275)	0.568** (0.237)	0.539* (0.288)
OTS-member	2.752*** (0.314)	2.833*** (0.360)	2.309*** (0.316)	3.029*** (0.402)	2.638*** (0.388)	2.850*** (0.344)	2.828*** (0.419)
polity5	0.0273 (0.0180)	0.0328 (0.0247)	0.0144 (0.0159)	0.0327* (0.0190)	0.0365 (0.0239)	0.0214 (0.0177)	0.0532* (0.0286)
population_log	0.723*** (0.142)	0.760*** (0.177)	0.631*** (0.133)	0.730*** (0.150)	0.732*** (0.174)	0.668*** (0.140)	0.803*** (0.233)
lag1_resource	0.00413 (0.00789)	0.00942 (0.00725)	-0.000905 (0.00790)	0.00681 (0.00860)	0.00797 (0.00748)	0.00188 (0.00770)	0.0112 (0.00885)
lag1_gdp_per	0.299** (0.142)	0.293* (0.178)	0.252** (0.125)	0.331** (0.141)	0.295* (0.168)	0.319** (0.127)	0.314* (0.180)
arms_exp_tur	0.588* (0.318)	0.891** (0.364)	0.198 (0.246)	0.824** (0.334)	1.041*** (0.363)	0.567* (0.291)	1.389*** (0.394)
region_un	1.347*** (0.260)	1.425*** (0.289)	1.097*** (0.219)	1.283*** (0.283)	1.282*** (0.289)	1.062*** (0.256)	0.895*** (0.301)
Constant	-9.308*** (1.229)	-10.59*** (1.571)	-8.802*** (1.148)	-9.281*** (1.256)	-10.01*** (1.449)	-9.215*** (1.194)	-11.37*** (1.735)
Observations	4261	4261	4261	4261	4261	4261	4261
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.157	0.172	0.100	0.178	0.177	0.132	0.176

Standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10 \*\* p<0.05 \*\*\* p<0.01

When examining material variables in Table 3, resource coefficients are not statistically significant. This is surprising given that Turkey has long been a rising country and has required cheap energy sources for its aspiring industry. Consistent with our hypothetical expectations, Figure 5 illustrates the marginal effects associated with a one standard deviation increase in each of the economy-related measures, holding other variables at their means. The probability of high-

level Turkish leaders visiting a country with a Log(Population) that is one standard deviation above the mean stands at 7.3%, compared with 0.1% for a country with a Log(Population) at the mean. Similar to larger populations, countries with a higher GDP per capita are more likely to receive Turkish leader visits. When we hold all other variables at their means, the probability of Turkish leaders officially visiting a country with a Log(GDP per capita) that is one standard deviation above its mean is 8.8%, compared with 4% for a country with a Log(GDP per capita) at the mean. Considering the probability of visits to potential arms-exporting countries, the probability of a Turkish leader visiting an arms-exporting country, when all other variables are at their means, is 14.1%, compared with 8.4% for other countries (Figure 3 in the Appendix). This demonstrates that, everything else being equal, arms-exporting countries are 67% more likely to receive a Turkish leader than other countries.

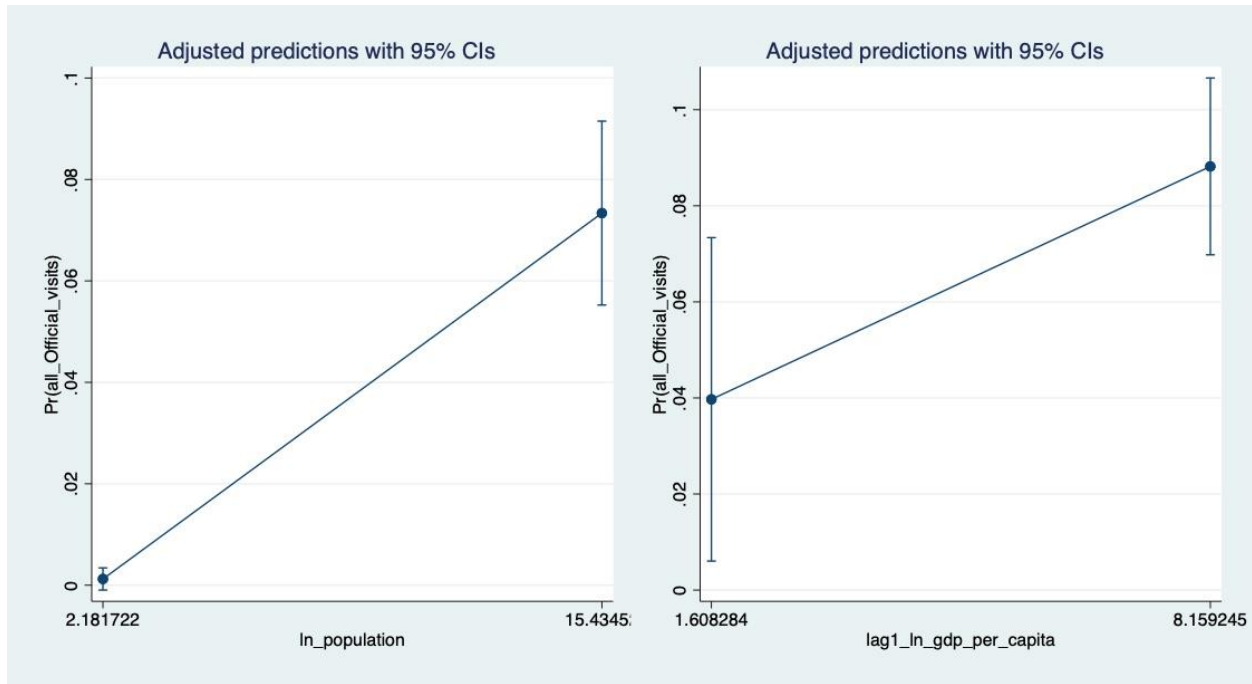
Figure 4: Change in probability of Turkish leader official visits given change in identity-related variables. Estimates correspond to Model 1 in Table 3.



When we look at the impact of regional actor status on the visit preferences of Turkish leaders, Table 3 clearly demonstrates that coefficients on the regional variable are positive and significant in all models. Holding all variables at their mean values, the probability of a Turkish leader visiting a country in the regions of the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus, and Black Sea is 22.2%, compared with 6.9% for countries outside of those regions. Everything else being equal, this outcome indicates that regional countries are 221% more likely to receive a Turkish leader than non-regional countries (Figure 2 in the Appendix). Upon analyzing Models 2 and 3, we find variations in foreign visits by Turkish presidents and prime ministers. Being in the regions around Turkey increases the likelihood of countries being visited by Turkish prime ministers more than presidents. Such variation between presidential and prime ministerial visits is also applicable to other dynamics. Models 5 and 6 reveal that being a potential arms exporter to Turkey increases the likelihood of countries being visited by a Turkish prime minister more, compared with

presidents. This variation suggests that Turkish prime ministers were primarily tasked with addressing Turkey’s material needs.

Figure 5: Change in probability of Turkish leader official visits given one standard deviation increase from the means of economic variables. Estimates correspond to Model 1 in Table 3.



As a robustness check, we exclude leader visits before the AKP came to power from our regressions. We do this to eliminate the influence of leaders from different political parties. Unlike the 1990s, Turkey has been governed by a single party after 2003. Table 4 demonstrates that regression results remain mostly consistent, with some minor changes. While regime type and resource variables are not significant, the GDP per capita variable is only significant for models measuring presidential visits. All other variables, such as identity, economic, security, and region, are significant and remain positive. Some scholars have posited that the AKP adopted a more autonomous approach in foreign relations after 2011 (Kutlay and Öniş 2021). Upon restricting our analysis to the post-2011 period (Table 9 in the Appendix), we find that the results remain consistent with this assertion.

Table 4: Determinants of Turkish leader visits, 2003-2018

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Official All	Official PM	Official Pres.	All Visits	All PM	All Pres.	Multi
EU-member	1.358*** (0.324)	1.363*** (0.424)	1.208*** (0.271)	1.477*** (0.330)	1.516*** (0.405)	1.125*** (0.295)	0.932* (0.483)
OIC-member	0.883*** (0.260)	0.977*** (0.323)	0.768*** (0.242)	0.925*** (0.246)	0.997*** (0.291)	0.829*** (0.245)	0.615** (0.310)

OTS-member	2.387*** (0.338)	2.577*** (0.509)	2.261*** (0.337)	2.593*** (0.425)	2.491*** (0.535)	2.774*** (0.412)	2.661*** (0.505)
polity5	0.0135 (0.0197)	0.0227 (0.0247)	-0.00213 (0.0190)	0.0162 (0.0210)	0.0190 (0.0253)	0.00827 (0.0198)	0.0351 (0.0323)
population_log	0.776*** (0.145)	0.700*** (0.186)	0.784*** (0.124)	0.806*** (0.154)	0.710*** (0.186)	0.814*** (0.133)	0.824*** (0.248)
lag1_resource	0.00373 (0.00681)	0.00815 (0.00762)	-0.00394 (0.00657)	0.00549 (0.00684)	0.00583 (0.00708)	-0.000878 (0.00675)	0.00848 (0.00874)
lag1_gdp_per	0.235 (0.157)	0.165 (0.205)	0.310** (0.125)	0.210 (0.159)	0.108 (0.195)	0.352*** (0.133)	0.209 (0.220)
arms_exp_tur	0.646** (0.315)	0.966*** (0.360)	0.211 (0.234)	0.924*** (0.346)	1.189*** (0.362)	0.533** (0.266)	1.639*** (0.380)
region_un	1.302*** (0.279)	1.429*** (0.310)	0.898*** (0.239)	1.244*** (0.301)	1.290*** (0.314)	0.930*** (0.263)	0.832** (0.325)
Constant	-9.390*** (1.252)	-9.458*** (1.648)	-10.20*** (1.087)	-9.322*** (1.326)	-8.967*** (1.556)	-10.53*** (1.195)	-11.08*** (2.027)
Observations	2515	2515	2515	2515	2515	2515	2515
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.159	0.162	0.112	0.180	0.176	0.139	0.174

Standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.10 \*\* p<0.05 \*\*\* p<0.01

## Conclusion

Existing datasets on leader visits predominantly focus on Western (e.g., the US, France) and great powers (e.g., China). Therefore, this study contributes to the emerging interest in developing datasets that encompass non-Western and smaller countries. Given that leader visits serve as crucial signals in international politics, the creation of datasets for as many countries as possible could facilitate comparative studies, yielding analytically and theoretically rich insights into international politics. For instance, comparing the motivations behind foreign visits of great and small powers is feasible only when sufficient data on foreign visits of smaller countries is available. Our dataset represents a modest contribution to such an ambitious endeavor for future researchers concentrating on leader visits. Although we treat leader visits as the dependent variable in this study, our dataset is also suitable for investigations exploring the benefits of foreign visits. For example, are Turkey's high-level visits advantageous for its aspirations to enhance its export capacity? In line with this question, our Turkish visit variable can be integrated into various research inquiries as an independent or control variable.

Numerous qualitative studies have explored Turkey's motivations in foreign relations. Rather than dismissing the primary arguments of these works, our present study quantitatively substantiates the majority of them while disputing some. For instance, although numerous studies have emphasized Turkey's need for cheap energy resources following the Cold War, we are unable to quantitatively demonstrate Turkish leaders' preference for visiting countries with energy resources. Even when narrowing the scope to natural gas alone, our results are not statistically significant. Consistent with the findings of other quantitative research (Tezcür and



Grigorescu 2014), we do not observe a trend of visits to Muslim countries surpassing those to European counterparts, either in the post-Cold War period or exclusively during the AKP rule. Given the prominence of this notion in many interpretative-based studies, scholars of Turkish foreign policy may need to reevaluate this prevalent understanding. Quantitative research on this subject remains relatively limited compared to qualitative studies. By employing alternative research designs, the influence of identity on Turkey's foreign policy preferences can be further scrutinized, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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