

An Analysis on the Image of NATO in Türkiye

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Abstract

Considering its geographical location, strategic importance, and geopolitical depth, Türkiye's NATO membership plays a significant role in current regional and international developments. Besides, Türkiye's military and economic strength, trained human resources, geographical location, and extensive maritime and land borders represent a strategic potential to contribute to NATO's efforts in maintaining regional security and stability. Nevertheless, Türkiye's membership in NATO is discussed by some allied countries. Türkiye's national security policies are also not always in line with other NATO member countries. This causes relations to fluctuate. The course of relations also influences Turkish public perceptions of NATO's organizational image. The primary purpose of this research is to disclose how NATO has an image in Turkish society as an intergovernmental military alliance. Since quantitative data are taken as the basis of the research, a questionnaire was employed as a data collection method. For the research, 1436 participants from different regions of Türkiye were accessed via a simple random sampling method. Based on the findings obtained as a result of the research, it is apparent that a large part of the participants does not have a clear view regarding NATO. In terms of demographic data, it was understood that female, single, 18-25 years of age and student-weighted participants had higher positive, negative, and general NATO perceptions than the others. Besides, it was observed that the group that perceived NATO as the most negative educational situation was those who had graduated from elementary school. As a result, about half of the participants believe that Türkiye should remain in the NATO, but in the event of any war, NATO will leave Türkiye alone. This situation indicates that NATO membership is strategically crucial, but it also gives the impression that the Turkish people are worried about trust. According to the findings of the study, the majority of the participants consider the USA as the main threat against Türkiye, on the other hand Azerbaijan is regarded as Türkiye's most important partner and friend in the international arena.

Keywords: Image, Organizational Image, Perception, NATO, Türkiye.

Introduction

Since its establishment, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a transatlantic security alliance that aims to ensure military cooperation and collective defence among member states. Nevertheless, the perspectives of this alliance among the member states differ significantly based on factors such as national security priorities, geostrategic positions, and internal policy dynamics. This has become even more evident with the changes in global security dynamics and the increase in regional security threats, especially in the post-Cold War period. The perception in Europe and North America that NATO has provided an effective security mechanism against the threats emerging during the Cold War has gained strong support for the alliance. Nonetheless, the perception of NATO has become more complex in countries like Türkiye. Türkiye experiences unique security challenges because of its geographical location, especially in sensitive regions such as the Middle East. In this context, though NATO is strategically significant to Türkiye, conflicts might occasionally occur between Türkiye's regional security priorities and the alliance's overall goals.

Recently, the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's increased regional expansion efforts have led to an overall increase in confidence and support for NATO in some western countries. Nonetheless, those criticizing NATO express concerns regarding the alliance's militaristic policies contrary to international law and operations leading to civilian casualties. These criticisms emphasize the lack of democratic accountability and transparency in the alliance's policy-making processes, thus preparing the ground for discussions on the effectiveness and legitimacy of NATO. In this framework, the complexity of perceptions towards NATO is closely related to countries' security interests, geopolitical positions, and internal policy dynamics. Accordingly, even though NATO has emerged as an alliance that guarantees collective defence and international peace, there are different perceptions regarding its organizational image. Within the scope of the study, after the image and the image

of the organization are explained, NATO and Türkiye relations will be discussed. The main question of the study is: “What kind of image do the Turkish people have in the context of NATO's role, effectiveness, and legitimacy?”

Conceptual Framework

Image and Organizational Image

The concept of image is defined as the ideas and opinions about events, objects, situations, organizations, places, or states. Images generally begin to be formed with first impressions and are shaped by experiences. Dichter (1985, pp. 75) defined image as the total impressions left by a person or entity on the minds of others. Oktay (2002, pp. 24) also defines image as the ideas and value judgments of the people making up the target audience regarding an organization, individual, subject or product. As Kotler and Getner (2002, pp. 252) put it, image is a judgment arising from the individual perceptions of a segment or members of society.

The organizational image expresses people's personal impressions regarding an organization (Lievens, 2017, pp. 1116). Organizational image is the total impressions, feelings, information and ideas people have about an organization (Worcester, 2009, pp. 578). Organizational image is impacted by many factors and is shaped in accordance with the impressions of the groups with/through which organizations interact (Carroll, 2008, pp. 1). Organizational image is the set of impressions and perceptions formed based on experiences about the organization's features, capabilities, products and services (Geçikli, 2012, pp. 4). Organizational image might differ among the members of society. Organizations may have a negative image in some parts of the world, whereas they might have a positive image in others. This situation discloses that organizations can have more than a single image. Furthermore, the public perception and image of an organization can directly influence a country's policy decisions regarding the organization.

Organizational image is in a dynamic structure and has been constantly changing. Organizations need to constantly manage their image (Lievens, 2017). One of the fundamental goals of organizations is to reflect an accurate and positive image to their stakeholders. Organizational images should be managed with well-designed communication studies (Gray and Smeltzer, 1985, pp. 74). In this direction, NATO, NATO's organizational image, and Turkish relations will be discussed in the study.

NATO and Türkiye

NATO is a political-military alliance established on April 4, 1949. Since its establishment, NATO has become one of the essential elements of countries' security and defense policies. NATO is also one of the most prominent international organizations that not only focuses on military issues, but also stands out with its perspective on universal values including democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The organization intended to enhance its members' national security and maintain global peace by providing a solid platform of solidarity and cooperation among member states. NATO's commitment to universal values creates the expectation of a perceived image of an organization that is effective in defending democracy, human rights, and the rule of law worldwide.

As an alliance emerging with the influence of the Cold War, NATO supports the consolidation of a peaceful order in Europe (Forster and Wallace, 2001, pp. 107). Now, NATO represents a strategic security and defense center that might project worldwide military and partnership power. The mission of the alliance is to protect the freedom and security of its member states via political and security tools based on the values of democracy, freedom, rule of law and peaceful settlement of disputes (Lindley-French, 2006). In this regard, the two main pillars of NATO are the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (Brown, 2012, pp. 80).

International military organizations affiliated with NATO have been accredited based on certain criteria, and centers of excellence have been created to reflect a positive organizational image (Stepánek, 2011, pp. 252). The main purpose of the

quality management systems created by NATO is to provide a positive image, quality, and standardization of its military units (Ayhan, 2014, pp. 263).

In the external reflection of the organizational image, NATO's strategic concept is a crucial document of the alliance. In 1999, the content of the concept in which the elements of a broad approach to security were determined were changed because of changes in the world (Pimenta, 2010, pp. 234). In this direction, NATO took robust steps to become a modern alliance at the Lisbon Summit in 2010. In the face of a changing security environment and diverging strategic interests among its members, NATO adapted its strategic concept and reformed its method of strategy formulation. With greater emphasis on the development of partnerships, NATO conceptually strengthened its organizational image profile as a global security actor by highlighting conflict management as a core task for the alliance (Noetzel and Schreer, 2012, pp. 20). By 2022, NATO updated its strategic concept again and underlined that as a defense alliance based on protecting the freedom and security of its allies, it is essential for them to strive to increase their technological superiority. NATO claims that the three core missions of "deterrence and defense", "crisis prevention and management," and "cooperative security" will be complementary (NATO, 2022).

Originally conceived as a purely defensive military alliance, NATO's organizational role has deepened and expanded as of the Cold War. For instance, NATO contributes to Ukraine's security sector reform and plays a fundamental role in the efforts of political will to succeed (Tuohy, 2016, pp. 54). Under the current circumstances, NATO-Ukraine relations play an essential role in enhancing Ukraine's defense capacity against Russia (Alexiyevets and Alexiyevets, 2020, pp. 175). It is apparent that Russia has negative relations with Ukraine because of its perception of NATO as a threat from the West, particularly with the expansion of NATO, its struggle with the United States, and its efforts to maintain its influence in the former Soviet region (Uyar and Yiğit Uyar, 2024, pp. 31). In Russia-Ukraine relations, it is clear that Ukraine could not join NATO despite the territorial and heavy casualties, whereas

Finland, which was not a NATO member during the Cold War, abandoned its neutrality policy after the Russian-Ukrainian War and became a NATO member (Alkanalka and Babahanoğlu, 2024, pp. 137). A similar situation has been experienced from Sweden's point of view, and after Finland's application process to become a NATO member in 2022, Finland joined the 31st NATO Alliance on April 3, 2023. Sweden, of which it is now a member also joined the 32nd NATO Alliance on March 7, 2024. During the NATO process of Finland and Sweden, Türkiye did not approve the entry of these two countries into NATO at first, primarily because of its security concerns about combating terrorism. However, the entry process into NATO was completed positively, with these two countries committing to further cooperation in the fight against terrorism with Türkiye.

Upon analyzing Türkiye's NATO process, it is evident that Türkiye sought to legitimize its Western/European identity via NATO after joining the alliance in 1952 and that the alliance has contributed to Türkiye in increasing its regional power status in dealing with the security threats and challenges emerging in the Middle East. Besides, when European allies questioned Türkiye's European identity and adopted negative attitudes towards Türkiye's EU membership, NATO emerged with an identity-oriented perspective on Türkiye's relations with the West. Nonetheless, from another point of view, there have been claims that membership in a tight alliance is no longer necessary, especially with the removal of the Soviet threat, and if Türkiye leaves the Alliance, its maneuverability in neighboring regions will increase even more (Oğuzlu, 2013, pp. 208-220). The debate on Türkiye's NATO membership began during World War II and then in the early years of the Cold War. For those in favor of Türkiye's membership, membership is seen as an obligation, not a choice, while for those against it, it is a choice closely linked to politics (Doster, 2012, pp. 32). Upon evaluating Türkiye's relations with NATO in general, it is apparent that a more critical and questioning attitude is taken (Oğuzlu, 2012, pp. 99).

Türkiye's membership in the NATO has realized three important transformations. The first of these is that it is the culmination of Türkiye's long-standing search for

security. The second is Türkiye's quest for Westernization and its recognition of its identity and role as an integral part of the West and its institutions. Lastly, more specific one is the institutionalization of the Turkish-American alliance via NATO membership, becoming one of the main pillars of Turkish foreign policy to date (Yılmaz, 2012, pp. 481). Within the alliance and in its general relations with the West, Türkiye is considered to be in a line of balance between the US and European elements (Egeli, 2014, pp. 39). Türkiye's NATO membership, in the context of its geographical location, strategic importance and geopolitical depth, plays a critical role in current regional and international developments. First, Türkiye is located at a strategic junction point between the Asian, African, and European continents (Aydın et al., 2020). This geographical advantage makes Türkiye a critical actor in ensuring regional stability, directing energy transport routes, and achieving NATO's overall strategic goals. Furthermore, Türkiye's extensive maritime and land borders represent a strategic potential to contribute to NATO's efforts in maintaining regional security and stability.

Türkiye's relationship with NATO is strategically crucial for Türkiye and the alliance. Though Türkiye's geographical position and military capacity and its position within NATO are strong, it is asserted that NATO ignores Türkiye's security concerns in the relations between Türkiye and NATO (Armutlu, 2023, pp. 41). Furthermore, Türkiye's Cyprus policy, its decision to purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia, and Sweden and Finland's initial opposition to NATO membership have recently increased tensions between Türkiye and NATO. This situation points out that Türkiye-NATO relations have occasionally been problematic.

There are studies performed on NATO in the literature: Aziz (1979) investigated NATO Image and American Public Opinion, while Tatalović (2008) investigated Public Perception of Croatia's NATO Membership. Naumann (2009) researched Europe's Perception of NATO, whereas Priest (2011) studied Johnson Administration and NATO Nuclear Sharing. Kaya (2017), dealt with EU-NATO

Relations in the Post-Cold War Security Environment. Barcik and Czech (2018) focused on NATO Transportation Through the Schengen Military Zone in the Perspective of International Law, while Tsygankov (2018) focused on Russia's Perception of NATO. Aydemir (2018) scrutinized NATO Operations and Public Diplomacy, whereas Michalski and Danielson (2020) made a comparison of Committees of Permanent Representatives in the EU and NATO and Aleksieievets et al. (2022) examined Ukraine - NATO Relations Between 1991 and 2020.

When the studies on Türkiye and NATO are also examined, it can be claimed that Ülman (1967) dealt with NATO and Türkiye Relations, whereas Bilge-Criss (2012) focused on the Historical Dimension of the Türkiye-NATO Alliance. Ekici and Baharçipek (2016) studied Türkiye-US Relations During the NATO Membership Process, whereas Balcı (2018) dealt with the Depth of Turkish-NATO Defense Cooperation. Likewise, Erkmen (2020) researched Türkiye's NATO Membership and its acceptance by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, while Erol and Oğuz (2021) concentrated on Bilateral Relations in the Light of Crises Between Türkiye and NATO. Duman (2023) dealt with the Historical Dimension of Türkiye-NATO Relations in its 70th year, whereas Turgut and Çakır (2023) studied the Construction of Anti-Türkiye Discourse in US Public Opinion. Ataturun (2023) also examined the Moral Dimension of Türkiye-NATO Relations, and Çelik (2023) dealt with NATO Skepticism in Türkiye in the historical process.

Courbis Poncet (2024, pp. 96) stated in a study carried out with the Eurobarometer data set that the trend of trust in NATO is 56.2% positive and 43.8% negative. This situation indicates that the perceptions of the EU member states towards NATO are positively above the medium level. According to the Transatlantic Trends Survey (2004-2010) data by Canan-Sokullu (2012, pp. 170), it was found out that the Turkish public perception of NATO weakened slightly every year, the idea that NATO was necessary for the country's security. Türkiye's problems in relations with the NATO alliance itself and other NATO partners have led to a remarkable increase in NATO skepticism throughout the country (Çelik, 2023, pp. 112). In the study

conducted in this direction, it was analyzed how the people living in Türkiye perceived NATO and how their organizational image trends were in line with today's strategic factors. Furthermore, in the problems seen from time to time in terms of security and stability in relations between NATO and Türkiye, how this situation impacted the public image became the basis of the research.

Methodology

The Purpose of the Research

Whereas global actors continue their efforts to establish a new world order, power centers have shifted today. The global competition between global and regional powers for a greater say in global politics has escalated again. While this situation increases global uncertainty, it also forces countries to reconsider their foreign policies. In an environment where the global balance of power has been changing, NATO's relations with Türkiye, its only partner on the Asian continent, are becoming even more critical for the organization. Nonetheless, what kind of image the NATO has and how it is perceived in Türkiye, one of the most critical alliance partners, has not been adequately covered in the literature. The basic purpose of this research is to disclose how NATO is perceived in Turkish society as a military alliance and ally.

In the survey conducted for this purpose, some questions were first asked from the participants as to the problems in their countries and regions. In this section, participants were asked about their perceptions of the main threats against Türkiye, which countries they consider friends of Türkiye, and which countries they want Türkiye to cooperate. In the second part of the research, multiple choice and graded questions were posed to measure the current perceptions of the participants regarding NATO. In this section, in the eyes of the participants, the kind of policies NATO has towards Türkiye and how important they are for Türkiye's security were also questioned. Furthermore, the participants' perspectives on Sweden's NATO membership and the degree to which they approve NATO's support for Ukraine against Russia were questioned. Finally, the participants made some positive and

negative judgments regarding NATO, and the level of participation in these propositions was measured.

The Method of Research

The research data were collected through both face-to-face and online survey methods. Multiple choice and Likert scale questions were used. Primarily through online tools, the survey questions were delivered to participants over the age of 18 who had Turkish citizenship and lived in different regions and cities of Türkiye. Nevertheless, face-to-face surveys were also conducted, considering the fact that participants in the upper age group and with lower levels of education use online tools less than participants in the lower age group and with higher levels of education. In this way, it was tried to ensure balance in the representation of the sample of the research population. Research data were collected between 01.05.2023-28.06.2023 and received from a total of 1436 participants.

Simple random sampling method was employed to determine the participants in the study. In this method, each person participating in the research is selected through random methods. Hence, the probability of sampling selection of each participant in the research universe is performed equally to each other. Besides, in this method, the researcher is less likely to make a systematic error when choosing a sample (Neuman, 2014). In the study, Sekaran's (2000) method of determining the sample size in the research population in social sciences was preferred. In this method, a minimum of 384 participants representing the demographic characteristics of the population was determined as a sufficient number to represent the research population (Sekaran, 2000, pp. 295). The survey data obtained from the participants were analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) statistical analysis program. The data were analyzed via frequency analyses, weighted scores and parametric tests, and the results obtained were shared in forms of tables and graphs. The survey questions were prepared by using the researches of King's College and Ipsos MORI on "Public Perceptions about NATO" (2019) and The

German Marshall Fund of the United States on “European Union Perceptions Survey” (2022).

Research Questions

The main question of this research is “How is NATO's organizational image as a military alliance and ally perceived in Turkish society?” The research questions determined within the scope of this basic research question are as follows:

A.Q.1. What are the participants' perspectives on international organizations that affect global policies?

A.Q.2. Which countries do the participants consider as a friend or threat to Türkiye and which countries do they support Türkiye to cooperate with?

A.Q.3. How do participants evaluate NATO in general?

A.Q.4. Do the perceptions of NATO differ based on the demographic variables of the participants?

The Findings of the Research

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The research sample consists of individuals having citizenship of the Republic of Türkiye over the age of 18 and living in different regions and different cities of Türkiye. Within the scope of the research, survey questions were delivered to 1436 participants using online and face-to-face tools. The distributions of frequency and percentage values indicating the gender, age, marital status, education level, professional status, and household income levels of the participants are offered in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of the Participants

Gender	Percent	Frequency	Marital status	Percent	Frequency
Man	48.2%	692	Single	54.60%	784
Woman	51.8%	744	Married	45.40%	652
Total	100%	1436	Total	100%	1436
Age	Percent	Frequency	Profession	Percent	Frequency

18-25 years of age	42.8%	615	Housewife	9.75%	140
26-35 years of age	18.9%	271	Student	28.76%	413
36-45 years of age	22.4%	322	Worker	18.87%	271
46-55 years of age	11.3%	162	Civil Servant	17.06%	245
56-65 years of age	3.20%	46	Retired	5.78%	83
Over 65 years of age	1.40%	20	Self-Employment	11.91%	171
Total	100%	1436	Other	7.87%	113
			Total	100%	1436
Income Level	Percent	Frequency	Educational Level	Percent	Frequency
Less than TRY 11,400	18.38%	264	Primary school	6.3%	91
TRY 11.400-15.000	25.00%	359	Middle school	5.8%	84
TRY 15.000-25.000	27.86%	400	High school	30.4%	435
TRY 25.000-40.000	16.64%	239	University	51.5%	740
More than TRY 40,000	12.12%	174	Postgraduate	6.0%	86
Total	100%	1436	Total	100%	1436

Participants' Views on Some International Organizations and Countries

In this part of the study, participants were asked about their views regarding some international organizations that are determinant actors in global and regional policies. In this framework, the participants were asked, "Considering everything you have read, heard, and experienced, how positive or negative do you find the following organizations?" The findings are available in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Participants' Views on Some International Organizations

Countries	Very Negative		Negative		I am undecided		Positive		Very Positive		Total	Weighted average
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count		
Organization of Turkic States	4.66%	66	10.32%	146	27.63%	391	35.55%	503	21.84%	309	1415	3.6
Organization of Islamic Cooperation	13.08%	185	14.85%	210	31.20%	441	26.87%	380	14.00%	198	1414	3.14
NATO	9.85%	140	20.25%	288	37.55%	534	28.62%	407	3.73%	53	1422	2.96
European Union	12.18%	172	21.81%	308	34.21%	483	26.20%	370	5.60%	79	1412	2.91
United Nations	9.68%	138	21.33%	304	42.32%	603	23.86%	340	2.81%	40	1425	2.89
Arab League	25.72%	364	24.10%	341	36.96%	523	10.46%	148	2.76%	39	1415	2.4

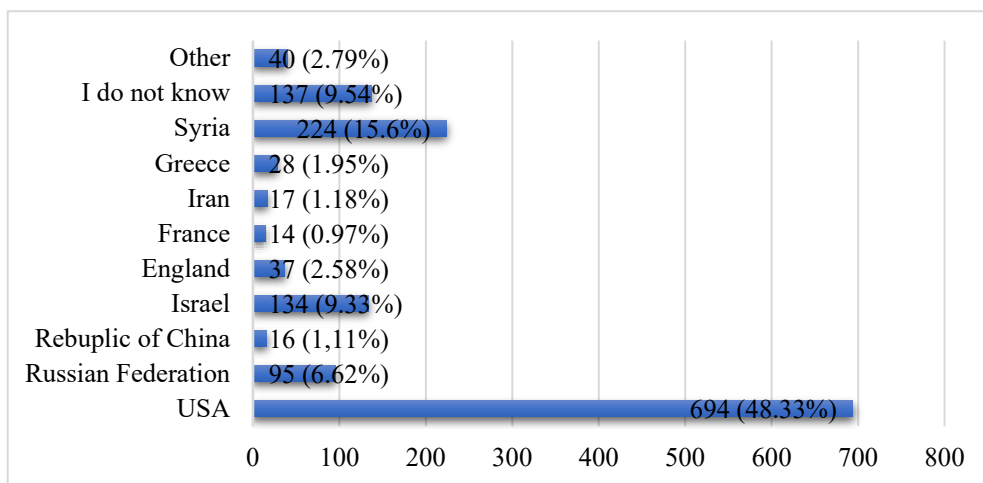
According to the findings in Table 2, the organization most positively evaluated among the international organizations that were presented to the participants was the Organization of Turkic States. Out of the 1415 participants who evaluated this organization, a total of 812 (57.39%) participants including 309 (21.84%) of whom were positive, and 503 (35.55%) of whom were very positive, stated that they had a positive attitude towards the Organization of Turkic States. 391 (27.63%) of the participants specified that they were undecided. On the one hand, a total of 212 (14.98%) participants, of which 146 (10.32%) were negative, and 66 (4.66%) were very negative, stated negative views regarding the Organization of Turkic States. Based on the research findings, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was the second most positively evaluated organization among the participants. This was followed by NATO, the European Union and the United Nations. The Arab League was the most negatively evaluated organization among these organizations.

The USA has begun to lose its influence in the Middle East region. In recent years, Türkiye has increasingly questioned the extent of American influence and some of the USA's policies in the Middle East. Türkiye has initiated to implement a new foreign policy that considers its own national interests. Especially the developments

after the Syrian Civil War, which started in 2011, have pitted Türkiye and USA against each other (Turaman and Çelik, 2018, p. 134). In addition to this, the Russia-Ukraine War, economic problems caused by the pandemic, and energy and food crises further increased the importance of the Organization of Turkish States for Türkiye. If Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, which have strong aspects in different fields, join forces within this organization, the member states of the organization will become even stronger (Akçapa, 2023, pp. 473). Based on the research findings, more than half of the participants evaluated the Organization of Turkic States positively.

In this part of the study, the participants' perceptions of threats towards Türkiye were also questioned. In this context, the participants were asked "Which country do you think poses the biggest threat to Türkiye?" The findings are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Distribution of Participants' Threat Perception Towards Türkiye

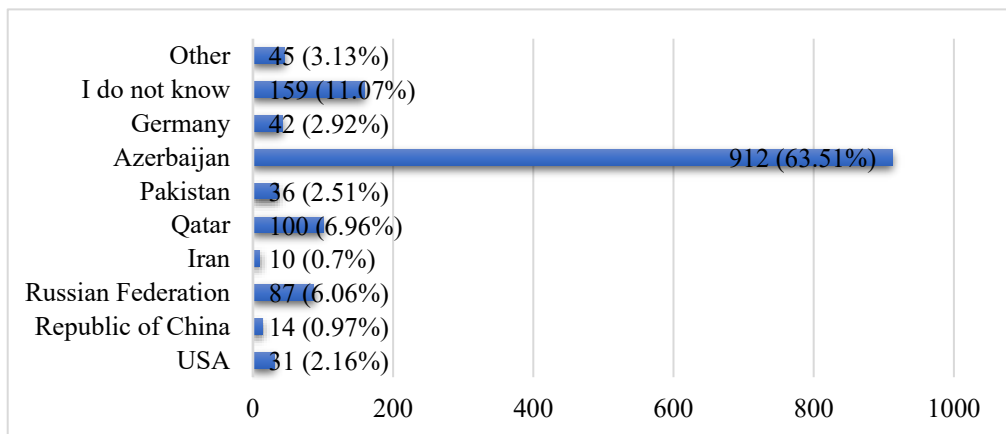


According to the findings in Graph 1, 694 (48.33%) of the 1436 participants who answered this question stated that the biggest threat to Türkiye comes from the United States of America. The US was followed by Syria, Israel, and Russia, respectively. Among the options presented to the participants, the UK, Greece,

China, and Iran did not have a significant participation ratio. Based on the findings, about half of the participants believe that the biggest threat to Türkiye comes from the United States. Similar to these findings, the German Marshall GMF's (2022) Perceptions of the European Union Survey also found out that participants perceived the United States as the main threat.

In this part of the study, a question was also asked to disclose the country participants consider to be Türkiye's closest friend. In this context, the participants were asked, "Who do you think is Türkiye's most important partner and friend?" The findings were offered in Graph 2.

Graph 2. Türkiye's Most Important Partner and Friend According to Participants



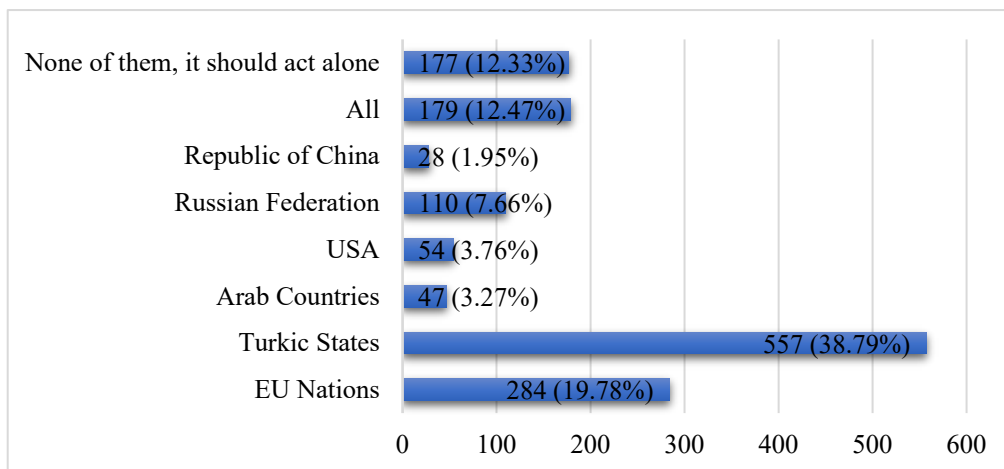
Based on the findings in Graph 2, 912 (63.51%) of the 1436 participants who answered this question asserted that they consider Azerbaijan as Türkiye's closest friend. Azerbaijan was followed by Qatar, the Russian Federation, Germany, Pakistan, the United States, the People's Republic of China, and Iran. Nevertheless, there was no significant participation in countries other than the Azerbaijan option.

Azerbaijan and Türkiye have deep ties both in terms of ethnicity and language, as well as in terms of history and culture. The phrase "One Nation, Two States" was first uttered by Heydar Aliyev to express how strong the ties between the two countries and their peoples are and is still frequently used today by both politicians

and the people of the countries. As a result of Armenia's attacks on Azerbaijani territory on September 27, 2020, the Second Karabakh War reaffirmed the importance and the current state of relations between the two countries. The war, lasting for about a month and a half, ended with a decisive victory of the Azerbaijani army and Azerbaijan regained some of the territories occupied by Armenia in the First Karabakh War. During and after this war, Türkiye played a crucial role in winning the war by providing Azerbaijan military, political and diplomatic support (Eraslan and Özdemir, 2021, pp. 315). The relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is a unique example in global politics. The findings of the research reveal that the participants support the strong relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan at the highest level.

This time, the participants were asked "With whom should Türkiye have the closest economic, political and military cooperation?" The findings are available in Graph 3.

Graph 3. Distribution of Participants' Views on Who Türkiye Should Cooperate with



Based on the findings in Graph 3, 557 out of 1436 participants (38.79%) expressed that Türkiye should cooperate with the Turkic Republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) economically, politically and militarily. 284 participants

(19.78%) also stated that Türkiye should cooperate with the European Union countries. 179 (12.47%) of the participants, however, stated that Türkiye should cooperate with all the countries presented to them, while 177 (12.33%) stated that Türkiye should act alone. This option was followed by the options of Russia, the USA, the Arab countries, and the People's Republic of China, respectively. Nonetheless, these countries did not have a significant share.

1.1.1. Participants' Views on Türkiye's Foreign Policy

In this part of the study, the participants were asked two questions regarding the direction Türkiye should follow in its foreign policy. At this stage, the participants were first asked "How should Türkiye's national interests be protected?" The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Participants' Views on How Türkiye Should Protect Its National Interests

	Percent	Frequency
It should act in cooperation with other countries	44.01%	632
It should act alone, not trust anyone	41.30%	593
I do not know	14.69%	211
Total	100%	1436

According to the findings in Table 3, 632 out of 1436 participants (44.01%) specified that Türkiye should cooperate with other countries to protect its national interests. On the other hand, 593 participants (41.30%) expressed that Türkiye should not trust anyone and should act alone in protecting national interests. 211 (14.69%) of the participants also stated that they had no information in this issue. Based on the findings, the participants seem to be divided regarding the issue of Türkiye's protection of its national interests. Nearly half of the participants believe that Türkiye should act alone, whereas the other half believe there should be cooperation.

In this part of the research, the participants were asked what kind of policy Türkiye should pursue in the Middle East, Balkans, and North Africa. In this context, the

participants were asked, "Should Türkiye play an active role in the Middle East, Balkans, and North Africa?". The findings can be accessed in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of the Policies Türkiye should pursue in the Middle East and North Africa According to the Participants

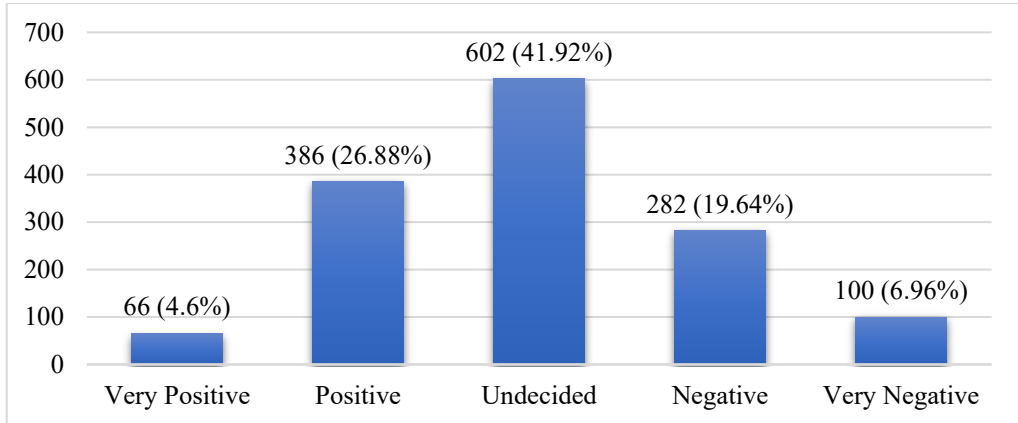
	Percent	Frequency
Türkiye should play a significant role in the Middle East, the Balkans, and North Africa	51.25%	736
Türkiye should not interfere in developments outside its borders and should only deal with its own domestic problems	28.56%	410
I do not know	20.19%	290
Total	100%	1436

According to the findings in Table 4, 736 out of 1436 participants (51.25%) claim that Türkiye should play a significant role in the Middle East, Balkans, and North Africa. 410 participants (28.55%) stated that Türkiye should not interfere in developments outside its borders and should only deal with its domestic problems. 290 of the participants (20.19%) stated that they did not have any information on this issue.

Türkiye has been pursuing a more active foreign policy in its region in recent years and has become increasingly involved in regional issues. Thanks to its proactive foreign policies in recent years, Türkiye has turned into a country that might actively use its military, economic and geopolitical power to solve regional and global crises (Bağcı and Demirel, 2023, pp. 513-514). Based on the research findings, most participants support Türkiye's effective foreign policy in the Middle East, the Balkans, and North Africa.

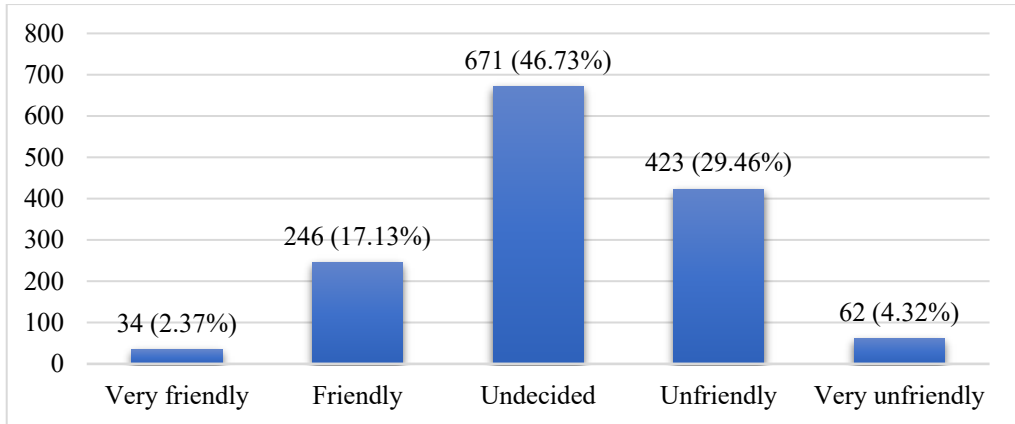
Participants' Views on NATO

In this part of the study, some questions were asked to measure the participants' views on NATO. The participants were asked, "Considering everything you have read, heard and experienced, how positive or negative do you find NATO?" The findings are available in Graph 4.

Graph 4. Distribution of Participants' Views on NATO

Based on the findings in Graph 4, out of 1436 participants who answered this question, a total of 452 (31.48%) participants evaluated NATO positively, including 66 (4.6%) very positively and 386 (26.88%) positively. 602 of the participants (41,92) stated that they were undecided in this issue. On the one hand, a total of 382 (26.6%) of the participants 282 (19.64%) negative and 100 (6.96%) very negative stated that they had a negative view regarding NATO. According to the findings, the number of participants evaluating NATO positively and negatively was close to one another, whereas the majority of the participants were undecided about their views of NATO.

This time, the participants' views of NATO's Türkiye policies were questioned in the study. In this context, the participants were asked, "What kind of policies does NATO exhibit towards Türkiye?" The findings are available in Graph 5.

Graph 5. Participants' Views on NATO's Policies Towards Türkiye

According to the findings in Graph 5, out of 1436 participants who answered this question, 34 (2.37%) were very friendly and 246 (17.13%) were friendly, which means that a total of 280 (19.5%) stated that NATO's policies towards Türkiye were friendly. 671 (46.73%) of the participants stated that they were undecided. On the one hand, 423 (29.46%) stated that NATO's policies towards Türkiye were unfriendly, whereas 62 (4.32%) stated that they were very unfriendly. Upon evaluating the findings in Graph 4 and Graph 5 together, it is evident that about half of the participants do not have a clear view regarding NATO and its policies towards Türkiye.

Article 5 of the NATO Treaty specifies that 'the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all of them all'. Such question as "Do you think that NATO would fight on Türkiye's side if a non-NATO country attacked Türkiye?" was also asked to the participants. The findings are available in Table 5.

Table 5. NATO's Standing with Türkiye in a Possible War According to the Participants

	Percent	Frequency
No, NATO will leave Türkiye alone	46.38%	666
I am undecided	29.32%	421
Yes, NATO will fight together with Türkiye	24.30%	349
Total	100%	1436

Based on the findings in Table 5, 666 (46.38%) of the 1436 participants who answered this question specified that NATO would leave Türkiye alone in a possible war. Whereas 421 (29.32%) of the participants were undecided, only 349 (24.30%) stated that NATO would fight together with Türkiye. These results give the impression that NATO does not give confidence to the majority of participants in fulfilling basic obligations.

Debates on whether Türkiye should remain in NATO and whether Türkiye should leave or be expelled from NATO have been taking place from time to time both in Turkish public opinion and in the public opinion and political discourse of some NATO member states. To disclose the views of the participants in this issue, the participants were also asked, "How would you vote if a referendum was organized in Türkiye on leaving NATO membership?" The findings are available in Table 6.

Table 6. Participants' Views on Türkiye's Leaving NATO in a Possible Referendum

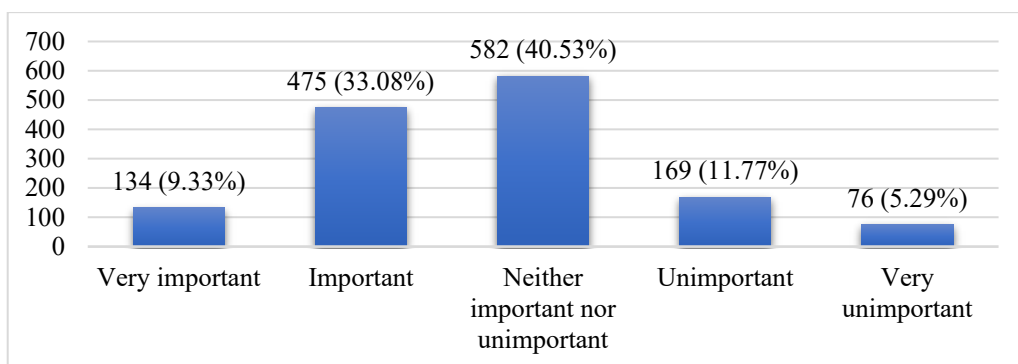
	Percent	Frequency
I would vote for Türkiye to remain a NATO member	39.69%	570
I am undecided	33.98%	488
I would vote for Türkiye to leave NATO	26.33%	378
Total	100%	1436

Based on to the findings in Table 6, 378 out of 1436 participants (26.32%) expressed that they would vote for Türkiye to leave NATO. Whereas 488 (33.98%) of the participants were undecided, 570 (39.69%) stated they would vote for Türkiye to remain a NATO member. Based on the findings, while the opposing sides could not

reach a majority, Türkiye's highest level of participation was for it to remain in the alliance.

A similar question was also posed to the participants regarding how important NATO is in Türkiye's future. In this context, the participants were asked, "How important do you think NATO is for Türkiye's future security?" The findings are offered in Graph 6.

Graph 6. The Importance of NATO for Türkiye's Security According to the Participants



According to the findings in Graph 6, out of the 1436 participants who answered this question, 134 (9.33%) stated that NATO is very important for Türkiye's future security whereas 475 (33.08%) stated this organization is important for Türkiye's future security, totaling 609 (42.41%) participants. Again, in this question, a significant portion of the participants (40.53%) stated that they were undecided. On the one hand, only 245 (17.06%) of the participants believe that the alliance is not important for Türkiye's security, 169 (11.77%) of them think that it is not important, and 76 (5.29%) think that it is very unimportant.

Finally, the participants were asked about their views of NATO's policies on the Russian-Ukrainian War and Sweden's inclusion in NATO. In this context, the participants were first asked, "To what extent do you support or oppose NATO's continued support for Ukraine in terms of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?" The findings are available in Table 7.

Table 7. Should NATO Support Ukraine According to the Participants?

	Percent	Frequency
Yes, it should support	42.48%	610
I am undecided	40.32%	579
No, it should not support	17.20%	247
Total	100%	1436

Based on the findings in Table 7, 610 out of 1436 participants (42.48%) asserted that they support NATO's continued support to Ukraine. 247 of the participants (17.20%) also stated that they were undecided in this issue. Nonetheless, 579 of the participants (40.32%) disclosed that they opposed NATO's continued support of Ukraine. Based on the findings, it is apparent that the participants were divided into two in the issue of NATO's continued support to Ukraine.

The decision on the approval of the Protocol on the Accession of the Kingdom of Sweden to NATO (Decision Number: 8141) was published in the Türkiye's Official Gazette dated 26 January 2024. The research data were collected before this date. In the study, participants were asked, "Do you support Sweden's NATO membership?" The findings are offered in Table 8.

Table 8. Participants' Perspectives on Sweden's NATO Membership

	Percent	Frequency
I am undecided	47.08%	676
No, I do not support	35.37%	508
Yes, I support	17.55%	252
Total	100%	1436

According to the findings in Table 8, 508 out of 1436 participants (35.37%) specified that they did not support Sweden's NATO membership. 676 of the participants (47.08%) were undecided in this issue. It is clear that the number of participants who stated that they support Sweden's NATO membership was only 252 (17.55%). This points out that direct support for Sweden's NATO membership is quite low among the participants. Another noteworthy finding is that about half of the participants did not have a clear view regarding this issue.

Finally, the research discussed Türkiye's involvement in this war if a NATO member country enters the war. In this context, the participants were asked, "If a NATO member country were to go to war, would you support Türkiye's participation in the war together with NATO members?" The findings are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Türkiye's Support for NATO in a Possible War According to the Participants

	Percent	Frequency
I am undecided	40.60%	583
No, it should not support	40.11%	576
Yes, it should support	19.29%	277
Total	100%	1436

Based on the findings in Table 9, 576 out of 1436 participants (40.11%) specified that if a NATO member country were to go to war, they would not support Türkiye's participation in the war together with NATO members. 583 of the participants (40.60%) also stated that they were undecided in this issue. Only 277 of the participants (19.29%) stated that they would support Türkiye's participation in the war together with NATO members in such a situation.

In this part of the study, the participants were asked to make some positive and negative judgments regarding NATO's image and to measure their level of participation with these judgments. The "NATO Perception Scale" was created for Türkiye by utilizing the research on "Public Perceptions about NATO" by King's College and Ipsos MORI (2019).

In the exploratory factor analysis to reveal the factor structure of the scale, the questions were grouped into eight items and two sub-dimensions. The findings are available in Table 10. The negative questions on the scale were reversed and included in the analysis.

Table 10. Results of Factor Analysis of NATO Perception

Items	Factors	

NATO is the most important institution for world peace.	11.4%	164	25.3%	363	37.9%	544	20.4%	293	5%	72	2.82	1.04
NATO is vital for Türkiye's national security.	10.9%	155	30.4%	437	37.8%	543	18.5%	266	2.4%	35	2.71	0.96
NATO always protects its member countries from external threats.	11.3%	162	30.9%	444	40.3%	579	15.1%	217	2.4%	34	2.66	0.94
NATO always takes care of Türkiye's national interests.	14.3%	206	31.7%	455	40.1%	576	11.4%	163	2.5%	36	2.55	0.95

Based on the findings in Table 11, it is evident that the level of participation with positive judgments about NATO image is at a low level. "NATO is the most important institution for world peace" was the statement with the highest level of positive participation. A total of 527 (36.7%) participants showed positive participation, including 164 (11.4%) of the 1436 participants who evaluated this judgment strongly agree and 363 (25.3%) agree. It is remarkable that the lowest level of participation among these statements is for the option "NATO always takes care of Türkiye's national interests". This is because, of the participants who evaluated this judgment, only 199 (13.9%) showed positive participation, including 163 (11.4%) agree and 36 (2.5%) strongly agree.

Within the scope of the "Negative Perception Dimension" of the NATO Perception Scale, the findings are available in Table 12.

Table 12. Distribution of Level of Participation with Negative Judgments Regarding NATO Image

	I strongly disagree		I disagree		I am undecided		I agree		I strongly agree		Weighted average	Standard Deviation
NATO fails to protect Türkiye's national security.	4.2%	60	10.0%	144	36.8%	528	36.5%	524	12.5%	180	3.43	0.97
NATO ignores Türkiye's interests	4.2%	60	13.2%	190	38.4%	551	33.2%	477	11.0%	158	3.33	0.97
NATO is unable to protect world peace.	5.1%	75	14.6%	209	34.9%	501	33.1%	475	12.3%	176	3.32	1.03
NATO serves only the interests of the United States.	4.8%	70	14.1%	203	39.8%	571	30.2%	433	11.1%	159	3.28	1.00

In the findings obtained in Table 12, it is clear that the participants' participation level in negative judgments about the NATO image is high. The statement "NATO fails to protect Türkiye's national security" received the highest level of participation. A total of 704 (49%) participants showed positive participation, including 524 (36.5%) of the total 1436 participants who evaluated this judgment agreed, and 180 (12.5%) strongly agreed. The least participated statement among the participants was "NATO serves only the interests of the United States of America". Upon evaluating the weighted scores in Table 3 and Table 4 together, it is clear that the participant's level of participation with negative judgments regarding NATO is higher.

To measure if the participants' perceived importance of NATO differs based on their demographic characteristics, the distribution of the data was first scrutinized and since the data were normally distributed in line with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test values, Independent Groups t-test and One Way Analysis of Variance (One Way Anova) were performed in the analysis (Table 13).

Table 13. Comparison of NATO Perception According to Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Variables		Positive Perception		Negative Perception		General Perception	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Gender	Woman	2.79	0.71	2.75	0.72	2.77	0.57
	Man	2.57	0.88	2.55	0.90	2.56	0.75
	Test value	5.189**		4.527**		5.873**	
	p	0.00		0.00		0.00	
Marital status	Married	2.59	0.88	2.55	0.90	2.57	0.74
	Single	2.76	0.73	2.74	0.73	2.75	0.60
	Test value	-3.924**		-4.366**		-5.023**	
	p	0.00		0.00		0.00	
Age	18-25 years of age (1)	2.82	0.70	2.79	0.74	2.81	0.57
	26-35 years of age (2)	2.60	0.84	2.56	0.84	2.58	0.74
	36-45 years of age (3)	2.48	0.81	2.53	0.81	2.51	0.68
	46-55 years of age (4)	2.72	0.91	2.60	0.95	2.66	0.76
	56-65 years of age (5)	2.76	1.01	2.65	1.01	2.70	0.75
	Over 65 years of age (6)	2.50	1.18	1.93	0.65	2.21	0.73
	Test value	8.687***		9.364***		12.326***	
	p	0.000*		0.000*		0.000*	
	Tamhane	1>2, 1>3, 4>3		1>2, 1>3, 1>6, 4>6, 5>6		1>2, 1>3, 1>6	
Educational Status	Elementary School (1)	2.70	1.05	2.89	1.06	2.80	0.64
	Middle School (2)	2.88	0.92	2.59	0.77	2.74	0.71
	High School (3)	2.67	0.78	2.74	0.83	2.71	0.66
	University (4)	2.68	0.77	2.59	0.78	2.63	0.67
	Postgraduate (5)	2.56	0.82	2.54	0.78	2.55	0.73
	Test value	1.796***		4.880***		2.517***	
	p	0.127		0.001*		0,040	
	Bonferroni	-		1>4, 1>5, 3>4		-	
Professional Status	Housewife (1)	2.78	0.81	2.71	0.79	2.74	0.63
	Student (2)	2.83	0.69	2.82	0.73	2.82	0.55
	Worker (3)	2.73	0.82	2.69	0.86	2.71	0.68
	Civil Servant (4)	2.42	0.77	2.37	0.78	2.40	0.69
	Retired (5)	2.71	1.08	2.65	1.07	2.68	0.80

	Self-Employment (6)	2.58	0.83	2.62	0.84	2.60	0.72
	Other (7)	2.63	0.80	2.52	0.76	2.57	0.68
	Test value	7.641***		8.615***		11.859***	
	p	0.000*		0.000*		0.000*	
	Tamhane	1>4, 2>4, 2>6, 3>4		2>7, 1>4, 2>4, 3>4, 6>4		2>7, 1>4, 2>4, 3>4, 5>4, 6>4	

* $p < 0.05$, **independent sample t-test, ***one-way analysis of variance

Upon analyzing the NATO perceptions of the participants in terms of their gender, it is evident that there is a statistically significant difference in positive, negative and general NATO perceptions according to the results of independent two sample t-test ($p < 0.05$). Positive ($\bar{x} = 2.79$), negative ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) and general ($\bar{x} = 2.77$) NATO perceptions of women were higher than those of men.

Upon analyzing the participants' perceptions of NATO in terms of their marital status, it is observed that there is a statistically significant difference in positive, negative and general NATO perceptions based on the results of the independent two sample t-test ($p < 0.05$). It is also clear that the positive ($\bar{x} = 2.76$), negative ($\bar{x} = 2.74$), and general ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) NATO perceptions of single participants are higher than those of married participants.

Upon analyzing the participants' perceptions of NATO according to their ages, *Tamhane's T2* was carried out since the equality of variances was rejected in the homogeneity of group variances test. It is also clear that the positive, negative and general NATO perceptions of the participants aged 18-25 are higher than those aged 36-45 and over 65. Moreover, the score of those in the 46-55 age range is higher than those in the 36-45 age range in terms of positive NATO perception. In terms of negative perception, the group with the lowest score is over 65 years of age.

Upon analyzing the participants' perceptions of NATO according to their educational status, Bonferroni was performed to determine the groups that showed a difference since the equality of variances was ensured in the homogeneity value test of group

variances. It is understood that participants with elementary school education have higher negative perceptions of NATO than those with university and postgraduate students. It is also seen that high school graduates have higher negative perceptions of NATO than university graduates.

Upon analyzing the participants' perceptions of NATO according to their professional status, *Tamhane's T2* was performed as the equality of variances was rejected in the homogeneity of group variances test. It is obvious that the positive, negative and general NATO perceptions of the participants whose professional status is a civil servant are low, whereas the students' perceptions of all NATO are higher.

Conclusion

NATO functions as a vital pillar of US foreign policy and acts beyond its borders as an instrument of peace and stability in many parts of the world via alliance power (Lindley-French, 2006). Nevertheless, despite NATO's growing importance, its status under international law and its position in the context of military operations can be a matter of debate (Grütters, 2016, pp. 211). Furthermore, NATO's enlargement is transforming European security, whereas at the same time it is increasing the scale and intensity of future wars. This is because an attack on a NATO member state can increase public support for war among allies in Europe and North America and potentially draw more countries into a war against a country outside the alliance. In contrast, NATO enlargement can act as a deterrent in Europe and reduce the likelihood of war (Tomz et al., 2023). From Türkiye's perspective, despite occasional problems in relations with NATO, Türkiye's position within NATO is strong in terms of its ideological ties, military capacity, strategic position and contributions to international security, and it plays a strategic role in NATO's expansion in terms of international security and stability (Armutlu, 2023, pp. 42).

Türkiye's role in NATO is shaped by its military capacity and diplomatic activities, intelligence sharing, and strategic position. From a geopolitical perspective,

Türkiye's NATO membership plays a crucial role in maintaining regional balance and stability by influencing the security dynamics along the alliance's eastern and southeastern borders. Nonetheless, despite the importance of Türkiye's role in NATO, it appears that the public perception is not the same. Considering the research findings, whereas the number of participants who evaluated NATO positively and negatively was close to one another, a large portion of the participants were undecided regarding their views towards NATO. This indicates that the participants have some questions and are confused regarding NATO. Likewise, about half of the participants could not reach a clear decision on NATO's policies towards Türkiye. Furthermore, the number of participants who believe that NATO's policies towards Türkiye are unfriendly is higher than those who think otherwise.

Within the scope of the research, to disclose what kind of image NATO has in the eyes of the participants, some positive and negative judgments were made regarding NATO and the NATO Perception Scale was adapted. According to the scale results, which are observed to have internal consistency, it is evident that the Turkish people's perceptions on the NATO image are both indispensable and unsafe. In this direction, it was also observed that there was a statistically significant difference in the positive, negative, and general NATO perceptions in the context of the participants' demographic data. In this context, to improve NATO's perception in Türkiye, steps/measures should be taken to better inform the Turkish public about NATO's role in Türkiye's security and Türkiye's contributions to the alliance. Ensuring that Türkiye has a greater say in NATO's decision-making processes and that Türkiye's security concerns are taken more seriously by NATO could also help to improve the alliance's image in Türkiye. Therefore, in an environment where the global balance of power has been changing, NATO may need to reconsider its policies and discourses towards Türkiye, its only partner on the Asian continent. By eliminating the negative perceptions and confusion regarding NATO in the minds of citizens of the Republic of Türkiye, one of the most important partners of the alliance, both sides will take advantage.

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