

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Turkmenistan

Score:	2009	2010	Change	<p style="font-size: small;">Authority Trends, 1991-2010: Turkmenistan © 2011</p>		
Polity:	-9	-9	0			
Democ:	0	0	0			
Autoc:	9	9	0			
Durable:		19				
Tentative:		No				
SCODE	TKM	CCODE	701	Date of Report	1 June 2011	
Polity IV Component Variables						
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP	
2	1	4	1	4	1	
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)						
End Date			Begin Date			
			27 October 1991 (Ind.)			
Polity Fragmentation: No						
Constitution	26 September 2008					
Executive(s)	President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow (DPT); appointed acting president 21 December 2006 following the death of President Niyazov; elected 11 February 2007, 89.2%					
Legislature	Unicameral: Assembly (125 seats; all candidates pre-approved by president, elected on single candidate ballots; Democratic Party of Turkmenistan only party allowed; most recent balloting, 14 December 2008) Note: the new Constitution, passed 26 September 2008, abolished the People's Council and expanded the number of deputies in the National Assembly to 125					
Judiciary	Supreme Court					

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

Originally gaining power as the designated communist ruler of the former Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan, President Niyazov has governed this country since 1985. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, President Niyazov gained the presidency of this newly independent state through an unopposed election in 1992. Despite the establishment of a democratic constitution in 1992, President Niyazov maintains a personal monopoly on power through the use of political repression and constitutional manipulation. President Niyazov's term in office was extended through a highly questionable referendum in 1994 and in December 1999 the rubber-stamp Parliament voted to approve his appointment as president-

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

for-life. In February 2001 President Niyazov announced that he would step down from office by 2010, but his death in December 2006 pre-empted this planned power transition. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow assumed the post of acting-president after Niyazov's death. On 11 February 2007 elections (later described as blatantly falsified by the international community) were held for the presidency, with all candidates hailing from the DPT. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, then serving as acting president, won these elections with eighty-nine percent of the vote.

Executive Constraints: Unlimited Authority (1)

Reminiscent of Stalin, President Niyazov actively sought to maintain his rule through the creation of a personality cult in which he presented himself as the champion of national sovereignty. Niyazov, who called himself Turkmenbashi (Father of Turkmen), held a monopoly on power within Turkmenistan, ruling by decree, an arrangement that appears to have been retained by his successor Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. Under Niyazov Turkmenistan was a personalistic dictatorship in which the dominant party, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT, former Communist Party), served at his behest. Neither the DPT, the fifty-member National Assembly, nor the judiciary has any significant autonomy from the executive branch. The legislature meets infrequently and does not enjoy genuine independence from the executive branch. Its members are pre-approved by the president who can remove them from office at will. Whether or not President Berdimuhamedow will be able to command the party and government as comprehensively as his predecessor remains to be seen.

Political Participation: Repressed Competition (1)

Politics in this Central Asian country have long revolved around the clan-based structure of Turkmen society. Turkmen society can be divided into five major tribes; two of these tribes, the Yomud and President Niyazov's Tekke clan, have traditionally dominated the country's political life. In an effort to control the clan-based factionalism of Turkmen society (as well as the potential challenge from Islamic fundamentalists), President Niyazov sought to strengthen national unity in the country by creating a "Turkmen" identity and by proscribing all opposition political parties. There are no legal opposition parties within Turkmenistan. The ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (formerly the Communist Party and still consisting largely of members of the pre-independence Soviet nomenklatura) maintains control over the political system through fraud, intimidation and the distribution of oil-funded state largesse.

The regime continues to ban all political parties except the DPT. While a small opposition movement exists abroad, all internal opposition activities are actively repressed. In February 2000, members of the Turkmen opposition convened in Stockholm urging Niyazov to release political prisoners, among them jailed opposition leaders. The 1994, 1999, and 2003 parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) cited lack of provisions for nongovernmental parties to participate and the executive branch's control of the nomination of candidates and refused to send even a limited assessment mission. The government continues to exercise complete control over the media, censoring all newspapers and forbidding independent criticism of government policy. Criticism of officials is only permitted if it directed at those who have fallen out of favor with the president. In May 2000, the government withdrew the operating licenses of all private Internet providers.

In November 2002 President Niyazov came under machine-gun fire in the capital. The government accused "mercenaries" acting on the orders of exiled opposition leaders as being behind the assassination plot. The opposition, in turn, accused the President of staging the incident as an excuse to crackdown on democratic forces. Although the future of political participation under President Berdimuhamedow is unknown, there is scant evidence in the first years of his rule to believe the repressive methods of the Niyazov era will be eased under his rule.