

Country Report: Turkmenistan September 2021

[Turkmenistan](#) is the homeland of the Turkmen, a Turkic ethnic group that follows the Sunni branch of Islam. Turkmenistan is also home to smaller populations of Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Russians, Ukrainians, and other ethnic minorities.

In 1885, the [Russian Empire conquered the](#) Turkmen. In 1925, the Soviet Union created the [Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic](#). The Soviet administration banned the practice of Islam, forbade the practice of traditional Turkmen culture, and brought thousands of Russian and Ukrainian workers to develop the natural gas and petroleum industry.

When Turkmenistan gained its independence in 1991, former Communist Party leader [Saparmurat Niyazov](#) immediately established a one-party police state. Niyazov was known for his eccentric cult of personality. He renamed the days of the week. He banned lip-syncing, gold teeth, and he forced people to memorize his manifesto, the [Ruhnama](#).

The Niyazov regime [banned all](#) civil society organizations, political parties, and independent media. Political dissidents were detained, tortured, and often executed. Niyazov enacted a policy of “[Turkmenization](#),” which forced non-Turkmen minorities to use only the Turkmen language and dress only in Turkmen clothing. Non-Turkmen were fired from government jobs.

Niyazov died in 2006. His successor, [Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov](#), has continued Niyazov’s cult of personality. Political opponents are arrested and imprisoned. Independent media are prohibited. Civil society leaders are detained and often die in prison. The process of Turkmenization remains, shutting out [non-Turkmen minorities](#) from education and politics.

Turkmenistan today is one of the [most corrupt and totalitarian regimes](#) in the world, on a par with Kim Jong-Un’s North Korea and Teodoro Obiang’s Equatorial Guinea.

The U.S., EU, and the U.N. occasionally condemn human rights violations in Turkmenistan, yet they take no meaningful action. Turkmenistan has large [petroleum and natural gas reserves](#), the state oil company, Türkmenbaşy, is building a gas pipeline via Afghanistan and Pakistan to India with financing from the Asian Development Bank. Profits from gas sales will strengthen Turkmenistan’s oil and gas monopoly as well as its totalitarian government.

Genocide Watch considers Turkmenistan to be at **Stage 3: Discrimination**, **Stage 6: Polarization**, and **Stage 8: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch Recommends:

- The U.S., E.U., and the Asian Development Bank should block completion of Turkmenistan’s natural gas pipeline until it frees its political prisoners.
- International support for exiled opposition and monitoring groups, such as the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, should increase.