



# TURKMENISTAN

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1   Geography</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
Introduction . . . . .	6
Geographical Divisions . . . . .	7
<i>Karakum Desert</i> . . . . .	7
<i>Kugitang Mountains</i> . . . . .	7
<i>Kopet-Dag Range</i> . . . . .	7
Bodies of Water . . . . .	8
<i>Amu Darya River</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Tejen River</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Murghab River</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Atrek River</i> . . . . .	8
<i>Karakum Canal</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Lake Altyn Asyr</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Lake Sarykamysh</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Caspian Sea</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Kara-Bogaz-Gol Gulf (Garabogazkö)</i> . . . . .	10
Climate . . . . .	10
Major Cities . . . . .	11
<i>Ashgabat</i> . . . . .	11
<i>Turkmenabat</i> . . . . .	12
<i>Dashoguz (Dashowuz)</i> . . . . .	12
<i>Mary</i> . . . . .	13
<i>Turkmenbashi</i> . . . . .	13
Environmental Concerns . . . . .	14
Natural Hazards . . . . .	16
Chapter 1   Geography, Assessment . . . . .	17
Chapter 1   Geography, Assessment Answers . . . . .	18

<b>Chapter 2   History</b> . . . . .	<b>19</b>
Introduction . . . . .	19
Early History. . . . .	20
Turkmen Expansion . . . . .	20
Russian Colonial Rule . . . . .	21
Soviet Turkmenistan. . . . .	22
Independence and Niyazov’s Cult of Personality. . . . .	23
Recent Events . . . . .	25
Chapter 2   History, Assessment . . . . .	27
Chapter 2   History, Assessment Answers . . . . .	28
<b>Chapter 3   Economy</b> . . . . .	<b>29</b>
Introduction . . . . .	29
Agriculture . . . . .	31
Industry . . . . .	32
Energy . . . . .	33
<i>Natural Gas</i> . . . . .	33
<i>Gas Pipelines</i> . . . . .	33
<i>Gas-to-Liquid Plant.</i> . . . .	34
<i>Petroleum</i> . . . . .	34
Natural Resources . . . . .	35
Trade . . . . .	35
Tourism . . . . .	36
Banking and Finance . . . . .	37
<i>Banking.</i> . . . .	37
<i>Finance</i> . . . . .	37
Standard of Living . . . . .	38
Employment. . . . .	40
Outlook . . . . .	40
Chapter 3   Economy, Assessment . . . . .	41
Chapter 3   Economy, Assessment Answers . . . . .	42

<b>Chapter 4   Society</b> . . . . .	<b>43</b>
Introduction . . . . .	43
Ethnic Groups . . . . .	44
<i>Turkmen</i> . . . . .	44
<i>Russians</i> . . . . .	44
<i>Uzbeks</i> . . . . .	45
Languages . . . . .	45
Religion . . . . .	46
<i>Islam in Turkmenistan</i> . . . . .	47
<i>Eastern (Russian) Orthodox Church</i> . . . . .	48
Cuisine . . . . .	48
Traditional Dress . . . . .	49
Gender Issues . . . . .	50
Arts . . . . .	51
<i>Carpets</i> . . . . .	51
<i>Jewelry</i> . . . . .	52
<i>Literature</i> . . . . .	52
<i>Music</i> . . . . .	52
Sports and Recreation . . . . .	53
<i>Horseback Riding</i> . . . . .	54
Chapter 4   Society, Assessment . . . . .	55
Chapter 4   Society, Assessment Answers . . . . .	56
<b>Chapter 5   Security</b> . . . . .	<b>57</b>
Introduction . . . . .	57
Foreign Relations . . . . .	58
<i>United States-Turkmenistan Relations</i> . . . . .	58
Relations with Other Countries . . . . .	59
<i>Afghanistan</i> . . . . .	60
<i>Azerbaijan</i> . . . . .	60
<i>Iran</i> . . . . .	61

<i>Kazakhstan</i> .....	62
<i>Uzbekistan</i> .....	62
<i>Russia</i> .....	64
Police .....	64
<i>State Border Guards Service</i> .....	65
<i>The Presidential Guard Service</i> .....	65
Military .....	65
Cybersecurity .....	67
Issues Affecting Stability .....	67
<i>Economic Decline</i> .....	67
Terrorism and Drug Trafficking .....	68
Water Security .....	69
Outlook .....	70
Chapter 5   Security, Assessment .....	71
Chapter 5   Security, Assessment Answers .....	72
Further Readings and Resources .....	73
Online Articles .....	73
Books .....	74
YouTube .....	74
Final Assessment .....	75
Final Assessment Answers .....	78

# Chapter 1 | Geography



The Karakum desert  
Flickr / John Pavelka

## Introduction

Turkmenistan is located in Central Asia on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. It shares land borders with Iran in the south, Afghanistan in the south and the east, Kazakhstan in the north and Uzbekistan in the north and east. Turkmenistan shares the landlocked Caspian Sea with Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Turkmenistan is slightly larger than California.<sup>1</sup>

The most dominant feature of Turkmenistan's landscape is the vast Karakum Desert (karakum means black sand), a flat and arid expanse of land. The Kopet-Dag mountain range, which Turkmenistan shares with Iran along its southern border, is prone to severe earthquakes. The country's highest point is located in the Kugitang mountain range, which stretches along the far eastern border. In some places along the Caspian coast, elevations are at or below sea level. The Amu Darya River, which rises in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, supplies most of Turkmenistan's irrigation water.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the population of Turkmenistan is concentrated along the border with Iran in the south, and the border with Uzbekistan in the north and east. The capital, Ashgabat, is located north of the Iranian border on the edge of the desert. Other major cities include Mary, an ancient caravan stop along the Silk Road, and Turkmenbashi,

1 Global Security, "Turkmenistan—Geography," n. d., <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-geo.htm>  
2 Global Security, "Turkmenistan—Geography," n. d., <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-geo.htm>

a port city on the Caspian Sea which was renamed by Turkmenistan's former dictator Niyazov, who gave himself the title of Turkmenbashi, the head of all Turkmen.<sup>3</sup>

## Geographical Divisions

### *Karakum Desert*

The Karakum Desert covers all of central Turkmenistan (350,000 sq km or 135,135 sq mi) stretching from the northern to the southern border.<sup>4</sup> This sparsely populated desert has a population density of about one person per 6.5 sq km (2.5 sq mi). Sand ridges and dunes, shaped by shifting winds, form chains across the desert landscape that range from 2 to 20 m (7 to 66 ft) high. Clay deposits created by the rapid evaporation of floodwaters are evident, and salt flats can be seen in many depressions.<sup>5, 6</sup> The Karakum climate is severe; rainfall is rare, and soil temperature can reach 80°C (176°F). Fauna includes gazelles, foxes, wolves, rodents, lizards, snakes, and insects.<sup>7</sup>

### *Kugitang Mountains*

In the far southeast, near the Afghan and Uzbek borders, are the Kugitang Mountains (or Koitendag)—an extension of the Pamir-Alai Mountain Range—with elevations exceeding 3,000 m (9,842 ft). The name of these scenic mountains means “mountains of deep canyons” in Turkmen. Kattakol, the country's deepest lake, is located there, as well as a network of caves, abundant forests, huge canyons, mountain streams, and a plateau bearing traces of dinosaurs. The highest peak of this range, Mount Ayrybaba, which rises to 3,137 m (10,292 ft), is also the highest mountain in Turkmenistan. Rare species that live in this range include the spiral-horned markhor goat and the Bukhara urial, a mountain sheep.<sup>8, 9</sup>

### *Kopet-Dag Range*

The Kopet-Dag Range lies on the border between Turkmenistan and Iran. These mountains feature dry and sandy slopes that support desert vegetation in the lower elevations, grassland in the middle altitude, and evergreens in the highest elevations. The mountain range was created from the collision of the Arabian Plate with the Eurasian Plate. Because it is geologically young, it is susceptible to intermittent earthquakes of great destructive force. The range has a Mediterranean climate with warm, dry summers and cool, damp winters. The highest point of the Kopet-Dag is in Iran, rising to 3,139 m (10,356 ft). The Kopet-Dag oasis, an area of fertile, naturally-watered land, stretches along the northern foothills of the Kopet-Dag Range. Ashgabat, the capital, is located at the center of the oasis.<sup>10, 11</sup>

3 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

4 Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, “Country Profile: Turkmenistan,” February 2007, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Turkmenistan.pdf>

5 Boris Aleksandrovich Fedorovich, Agadjan G. Babayev, and Lewis Owen, “Karakum Desert,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 23 February 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Karakum-Desert>

6 Natasha Geiling, “This Hellish Pit Has Been on Fire for More Than 40 Years,” *Smithsonian*, 20 May 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/giant-hole-ground-has-been-fire-more-40-years-180951247/>

7 Advantour, “Turkmenistan—The Kara Kum Desert,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/nature/karakum.htm>

8 Advantour, “Koytendag,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/nature/mountains/koytendag.htm>

9 Eurasia Travel, “Kugitang Nature Reserve,” n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/cities/eastern\\_turkmenistan/kugitang\\_nature\\_reserve/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/cities/eastern_turkmenistan/kugitang_nature_reserve/)

10 Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, “Turkmenistan—Geography,” *Windows on Asia*, n.d., [http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/central\\_asia/turkmenistan/geography.htm](http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/central_asia/turkmenistan/geography.htm)

11 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., “Turkmenistan: Oases,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 19 January 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/ref598815>

# Bodies of Water

## *Amu Darya River*

The Amu Darya is the longest river in Central Asia and the primary source of water for Turkmenistan. The river is formed by the convergence of the Pyandzh and Vakhsh rivers along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border and flows along Turkmenistan's northeastern border.<sup>12, 13</sup> It has been heavily dammed and is now navigable only by small boats due to its dense sediment concentration. The diversion of the Amu Darya's water for massive irrigation projects caused a decline in the river water level, which in turn contributed to the disappearance of the Aral Sea.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

## *Tejen River*

The Tejen River, known as the Harīrūd in Afghanistan where it originates, follows a 1,130 km (702 mi) course. The river marks part of the Turkmenistan-Iran border before flowing into the steppes south of the Karakum Desert.<sup>17</sup> The Tejen is fed by mountain snowmelt, and the primary flow is between March and May. During the summer months, the riverbed is frequently dry.<sup>18</sup>

## *Murghab River*

The headwaters of the 978 km (608 mi) Murgab River are in the western Hindu Kush, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. From its origin, the river flows west and then north through Afghanistan, before crossing the border into Turkmenistan, where it is absorbed into the sands of the Karakum Desert.<sup>19, 20</sup> Increased concerns have been raised recently regarding the safety of the water drawn from the river; due to its heavy concentrations of salt, the water has become undrinkable.<sup>21</sup>

## *Atrek River*

Originating in the Kopet-Dag Mountains, the Atrek River becomes one segment of the border between Turkmenistan and Iran before flowing into the Caspian Sea, where it terminates in a boggy river delta.<sup>22</sup> The river valley is of great interest to archaeologists, who have found evidence of connections between Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures.<sup>23, 24</sup>

- 
- 12 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Turkmenistan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/>
- 13 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 14 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 21.
- 15 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Projects Sounding Alarm Bells in Region (Part 2)," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 30 August 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1054573.html>
- 16 Rolando Y. Wee, "The Karakum Canal in Turkmenistan," World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/karakum-desert-and-canal-turkmenistan.html>
- 17 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Harīrūd," 1 February 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Harirud>
- 18 John F. Shroder and Sher Jan Ahmadzai, *Transboundary Water Resources in Afghanistan: Climate Change and Land-Use Implications* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2016), 201.
- 19 T. Petr, "Coldwater Fish and Fisheries in Afghanistan," UN FAO Corporate Document Repository, 1999, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x2614e/x2614e08.htm>
- 20 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Morghāb River," 12 December 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Morghab-River>
- 21 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 113.
- 22 *Encyclopedia of Nations*, "Turkmenistan," Advameg, n.d., <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/geography/Slovenia-to-Zimbabwe-Cumulative-Index/Turkmenistan.html>
- 23 Alvin Powell, "First U.S.-Led Iran Dig in Decades," *Harvard University Gazette*, 7 April 2005, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2005/04/first-us-led-iran-dig-in-decades/>
- 24 Igor S. Zonn et al., *The Caspian Sea Encyclopedia* (New York: Springer, 2010), 43–44.



## Karakum Canal

The Karakum Canal is a 1,400 km (870 mi) long and one of the world's largest desert irrigation projects. The canal carries water from the Amu Darya River across the desert, irrigating about 9,841 sq km (3,800 sq mi) of agricultural land and also provides water to Ashgabat. Agricultural runoff increases the salt content in the Amu Darya River, which then pollutes farmland.<sup>25, 26</sup>

## Lake Altyn Asyr

Turkmenistan is creating another giant artificial lake in the Karakum Desert by flooding the Karashor Depression in the north through an extensive network of tributary canals. Known as Altyn Asyr (Golden Age Lake) or Turkmen Lake, the first stage of the lake was completed in the summer of 2009. The new lake is expected to support the development of a fishing industry and expand agricultural land. Part of the water for the lake will also come from Lake Sarykamysh on the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border. The estimated time to completion is 20 years at the cost of USD 4.5 billion. Environmentalists argue that a lot of the water will simply disappear into the desert's porous soil, leaving it extremely salty.<sup>27, 28, 29, 30</sup>

## Lake Sarykamysh

Lake Sarykamysh is located between the Caspian and Aral Seas. The lake was formed in the 1960s when drainage water flowing from agricultural fields flooded the natural Sarykamysh Depression. Three quarters of the lake is situated in Turkmenistan, and one quarter is in Uzbekistan. The lake is quite polluted, and its salinity is continually increasing, yet it supports fishing and migratory birds. The lake covers 3,200 sq m (34,444 sq ft), and its average depth is 8 m (26 ft).<sup>31, 32</sup>

## Caspian Sea

Scholars disagree over whether the Caspian, a completely landlocked body of water, is a lake or a sea. Because it is landlocked, the law of the sea (which extends navigation rights to all states) does not govern its waters.<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, the sea has been used only by the nations that border it: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. The Caspian has substantial proven oil reserves, although there is debate about exactly how much.<sup>34, 35</sup>

25 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Karakum Canal," 20 July 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Karakum-Canal>

26 Rolando Y. Wee, "The Karakum Canal in Turkmenistan," World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/karakum-desert-and-canal-turkmenistan.html>

27 Luke Harding, "Turkmenistan Tries to Green Its Desert with Manmade Lake," Guardian, 17 July 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/jul/17/turkmenistan-golden-age-lake>

28 Associated Press, "Huge Lake Being Filled in Turkmenistan Desert," NBC News, 16 July 2009, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31945853/ns/world\\_news-world\\_environment/t/huge-lake-being-filled-turkmenistan-desert/#.XX\\_EHGZ7IPY](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31945853/ns/world_news-world_environment/t/huge-lake-being-filled-turkmenistan-desert/#.XX_EHGZ7IPY)

29 Murat Sadykov, "Turkmenistan: Soviet-Style Vanity Fuels Artificial Lake Project," Eurasia Net, 9 September 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-soviet-style-vanity-fuels-artificial-lake-project>

30 Bradley Jardine, "Turkmenistan's Water Insecurity is a Man-Made Problem," *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>

31 Advantour, "Lake Sarykamysh," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/nature/lakes-springs/sarykamysh-lake.htm>

32 Exploring Tourism, "Turkmenistan—Lake Sarygamysh," n.d., <http://www.traveloturkmenistan.com/destinations/lake-sarygamysh/#.XboZUtVICUk>

33 Ben N. Dunlap, "Divide and Conquer? The Russian Plan for Ownership of the Caspian Sea," *Boston College International & Comparative Law Review* 27, no. 1 (2004): 115–130, <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/iclr/vol27/iss1/4/>

34 Oleg Konstantinovich Leontiev et al., "Caspian Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>

35 Bernard A. Gelb, "Caspian Oil and Gas: Production and Prospects," Congressional Research Service, 9 April 2002, <http://www.iwar.org.uk/news-archive/crs/9652.pdf>

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the division of oil rights proved contentious among border countries. In 2018, the Caspian's five littoral states finally signed an agreement on how to divide the Caspian's oil and gas resources.<sup>36, 37</sup> Turkmenistan has developed a multimillion-dollar resort on the shores of the Caspian to attract tourism.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Kara-Bogaz-Gol Gulf (Garabogazköl)***

Kara-Bogaz-Gol is an enormous salt-water lagoon on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea in northwestern Turkmenistan. It covers about 11,000 sq km (7,000 sq mi), and its average depth is 10 m (33 ft). Water from the Caspian Sea enters through a narrow inlet between two sandy spits that separate the lagoon from the sea. In 1980, the inlet was dammed due to concerns that too much water was flowing out of the diminishing Caspian Sea, and too much saline water was flowing back into the sea. The closure turned the area into a saline depression, causing an environmental disaster similar to that of the Aral Sea, as salt dust was blown over the land polluting the environment. In 1992, independent Turkmenistan removed the barrier and water filled it once more. The Kara-Bogaz-Gol has the world's largest deposit of natural marine salts; it is even saltier than the much smaller Dead Sea. The closest city to it is Turkmenbashi.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup>

## **Climate**

Most of Turkmenistan has a severe continental subtropical desert climate. Summers are long, hot, and dry, and winters are mild and dry. Average annual precipitation is approximately 191 mm (7.5 in) but varies substantially by region. The northeast typically receives less than 80 mm (3 in), while the Kopet-Dag Mountains in the southwest can receive as much as 400 mm (15.7 in) annually. Precipitation occurs mainly from October through April. Little rain falls during the summer.<sup>42, 43, 44</sup>

Temperatures throughout the year range from 14–16°C (57–61°F), with wide variations across the country. Summers are dry and hot; temperatures below 35°C (95°F) are rare. Desert temperatures can soar to extremes of 50°C (122°F). Winter temperatures are much cooler. In the far southern regions near the Afghanistan border, temperatures can fall to –33°C (–27°F). Near Ashgabat, the capital, it rarely dips below freezing (0°C or 32°F).

- 
- 36 Irish Times, "Landmark Caspian Sea Oil and Gas Agreement Signed by Five Nations," 12 August 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/landmark-caspian-sea-oil-and-gas-agreement-signed-by-five-nations-1.3593910>
- 37 Oliver Carroll, "Caspian Sea: After 22 Years of Wrangling, Deal over Oil and Gas Rich Body of Water Reached—And It's Good News for Russia," *Independent*, 10 August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-says-deal-to-settle-status-of-caspian-sea-reached-a8486311.html>
- 38 Farangis Najibullah, "Take It or Else: Turkmen Officials Forced to Spend Vacations at Overpriced State Resort," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/avaza-awaza-turkmen-officials-forced-to-spend-vacations-overpriced-state-resort/30041754.html>
- 39 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kara-Bogaz-Gol Gulf," 7 September 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kara-Bogaz-Gol-Gulf>
- 40 Dark Tourism, "Garabogazköl," n.d., <http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/turkmenistan/15-countries/individual-chapters/477-garabogazkoel>
- 41 UN Environment Programme, "The Inlet of the Bay of Kara-Bogaz-Gol Before and After the Construction of the Dam," n.d., <https://www.grida.no/resources/6132>
- 42 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Turkmenistan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/>
- 43 Nicolai Orlovsky and Leah Orlovsky, "Water Resources of Turkmenistan: Use and Conservation" (paper, Jacob Blaustein Institute for Desert Research, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Sede Boker Campus, Israel, n.d.), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.167.2605&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- 44 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Country Profile—Turkmenistan," 2012, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca0371en/CA0371EN.pdf>

Summer temperatures in the north rarely rise above 32°C (90°F), and winter temperatures commonly range from –9°C to –7°C (16°F to 20°F).<sup>45, 46</sup>

## Major Cities

### *Ashgabat*

Ashgabat, the capital, was founded in 1881 by the Russian Empire on the edge of the Karakum Desert, about 30 km (19 mi) north of the Iranian frontier. The city lies in an oasis on the northern edge of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. The city began as a military fort that functioned as the administrative center of the Transcaspian province (*oblast*). When the Transcaspian Railway was built in 1885, it sparked the town's expansion.<sup>47</sup>

In October 1948, an earthquake that lasted a few seconds and measured 7.3 on the Richter scale destroyed much of the city and some 40 villages that surrounded it. The Soviets reported that about 110,000 people died as a result of the earthquake, but in 2009, the president of Turkmenistan claimed that 176,000 people died at the earthquake and that the earthquake measured 10 on the Richter Scale. Regardless of the discrepancy, the Ashgabat earthquake is considered one of the world's deadliest.<sup>48, 49, 50</sup> Today, the estimated population of the city stands at 810,000 people.<sup>51</sup>

The city is home to the National Museum of History and Ethnography and the Turkmen Carpet Museum. Several important schools are in the city, including the Turkmen Academy of Sciences and various agricultural, medical, and technical institutes.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup>

After independence, authoritarian leader Saparmurat Niyazov began to rebuild Ashgabat as the centerpiece of his cult of personality. Vegetation, historical monuments, and houses were demolished and removed to make way for grandiose yet impractical projects at public expense. Niyazov's successor, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, set out to erase Niyazov's legacy and reconstruct the city once again. Today, Ashgabat holds such world records as having the largest enclosed observation wheel, the largest fountain, and the highest density of white marble buildings (more than 500).

---

45 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 22–23.

46 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

47 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Ashgabat," 15 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ashgabat>

48 Esri, "The 1948 Ashgabat Earthquake," n.d., <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=58b714cde17b46f58226d2690fba877>

49 Trend News Agency, "Over 176,000 People Suffered Earthquake in Ashgabat in 1948," 7 October 2009, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1554271.html>

50 Office Holidays, "Earthquake Memorial Day in Turkmenistan in 2020," n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/turkmenistan/earthquake-memorial-day>

51 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 14 November 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

52 *New World Encyclopedia*, "Ashgabat," n.d., <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ashgabat>

53 Alex Robertson Textor, "What's It Like to Vacation in Authoritarian Turkmenistan?" Adventure.com, 24 July 2018, <https://adventure.com/exploring-authoritarian-turkmenistan/>

54 Ayesha Sitra, "Ashgabat: The Weird, Wonderful and Eerily Empty Capital of Turkmenistan," South China Morning Post, 11 November 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/travel/article/2044390/ashgabat-weird-wonderful-and-eerily-empty-capital>

The city is often referred to as “the city of the dead” because its streets are often empty. In 2019, an ongoing economic crisis and currency issues made Ashgabat the world’s most expensive city for foreigners to live and work.<sup>55, 56, 57, 58</sup>

## Turkmenabat

Turkmenabat is Turkmenistan’s second largest city, with a population of over 234,000. It is the primary urban center in the eastern portion of the country, not far from the border with Uzbekistan. It began as a fortress on the Amu Darya River during the Bukhara emirate and grew into a Russian railroad settlement in the 19th century. During the Soviet era, the city was called Chardzhou, (also spelled Chärjew on some maps). In 1999, the city was renamed Turkmenabat. Today, Turkmenabat has the biggest port on the Amu Darya and functions as a center for cotton ginning, silk milling, and fur production. The nearby Kugitang reserve is home to rare animal and plant species.<sup>59, 60, 61</sup>

## Dashoguz (Dashowuz)

Located on the edge of the Karakum Desert in the oasis of Khiva, Dashoguz is the northernmost point of Turkmenistan, near the Uzbek border, and the country’s third-largest city. It was once a major stop along the Silk Road.<sup>62, 63</sup> In modern times, the city has become an important agricultural and industrial center, home to over 166,000 people.<sup>64, 65</sup> Residents suffer from a variety of health issues following the drying up of the Aral Sea, which has introduced windborne saline debris into the air.<sup>66, 67, 68</sup>

Dashoguz is the only large city in the northern part of the country. It is home to a sizeable ethnic Uzbek population as well as Tatars, Russians, Koreans, and Kazakhs.<sup>69</sup> Although it was a settlement in the Khanate of Khiva in the early 19th century, the Soviets transformed it into a modern administrative center.<sup>70</sup> After independence, the city assumed border functions to control border trade and block the smuggling of subsidized Turkmen goods and

- 55 Stanislav Volkov, “‘People Are Afraid to Say a Word’: Inside Ashgabat, Central Asia’s Closed City,” *Guardian*, 16 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/16/people-afraid-inside-ashgabat-turkmenistan-closed-city>
- 56 Bruce Pannier, “For Turkmenistan, Looking Good is Everything,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 12 January 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-economic-crisis-construction-hotels/28971663.html>
- 57 Wilson Chapman, “Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, is the World’s Most Expensive City for Expats,” *U.S. News*, 18 June 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-06-18/ashgabat-turkmenistan-is-the-worlds-most-expensive-city-for-expats>
- 58 Alex Robertson Textor, “What’s It Like to Vacation in Authoritarian Turkmenistan?” *Adventure.com*, 24 July 2018, <https://adventure.com/exploring-authoritarian-turkmenistan/>
- 59 World Population Review, “Population of Cities in Turkmenistan (2019),” 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkmenistan-population/cities/>
- 60 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Türkmenabat,” 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenabat>
- 61 Advantour, “Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/turkmenabat.htm>
- 62 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 101.
- 63 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Daşoguz” 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dasoguz>
- 64 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2005), 45–46.
- 65 World Population Review, “Population of Cities in Turkmenistan (2019),” 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkmenistan-population/cities/>
- 66 UNICEF, “Turkmenistan: Brining [sic] Water, Bringing Life to People in the Most Remote Areas of Turkmenistan,” *Real Lives*, n.d., [http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives\\_7182.html](http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives_7182.html)
- 67 Bruce Pannier, “New Bill Arrives for Damage to Aral Sea,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 30 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/new-bill-arrives-for-damage-to-aral-sea/29259882.html>
- 68 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “It’s Raining Salt: Toxic Aral Sea Storm Sparks Health Fears in Central Asia,” 29 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/toxic-aral-sea-salt-storm-sweeps-over-parts-of-uzbekistan-turkmenistan/29257503.html>
- 69 World Atlas, “The Biggest Cities in Turkmenistan,” 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/biggest-cities-in-turkmenistan.html>
- 70 Paul Brummell, “Dashoguz Region: The North—Dashoguz,” *Turkmenistan*, (December 2005): 164, <https://books.google.com/books?id=fG9zk5Y3MugC&pg=PA164&ots=Ea34cN2tRi&dq=Dashoguz%20%22Khanate%20of%20Khiva%22%20-wikipedia&pg=PA164#v=onepage&q=Dashoguz%20%22Khanate%20of%20Khiva%22%20-wikipedia&f=false>

gasoline into Uzbekistan.<sup>71, 72, 73</sup> The ancient city of Kunya-Urgench, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located near Dashoguz.<sup>74</sup>

## Mary

Located in a large oasis in the Karakum Desert close to the Murghab River in the southeast part of the country, Mary is Turkmenistan's most historic city. The city began as a settlement of the Oxus Civilization, which flourished in Central Asia more than 4,000 years ago.<sup>75, 76, 77</sup> Later referred to as Mouru in ancient Persian texts, the city was a provincial capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Alexander the Great took control in the third century BCE and renamed it Margiana. The Arabs gained control of the area in the seventh century CE, and the city became the capital of the Arab Caliphate in the ninth century.<sup>78</sup> In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks made it their capital and named it Merv. Under the Seljuks, Merv became a center of knowledge and learning.<sup>79, 80</sup> In 1221, the city was plundered by Mongol armies.<sup>81</sup> It did not reemerge as an urban center until the Russians annexed it in 1887. In 1937, the Soviet government changed the city's name to Mary.<sup>82</sup>

The ancient city of Merv was registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1999. Merv is the oldest and best-preserved oasis-city along the Silk Road in Central Asia. The archeological remains in the oasis span 4,000 years of human history. Ancient Merv is a large archaeological park.<sup>83, 84</sup>

## Turkmenbashi

Turkmenbashi, formerly known as Krasnovodsk, lies on the shores of the Caspian Sea. It was renamed in honor of the late president Saparmurat Niyazov, who bestowed the title Turkmenbashi (Head of all the Turkmen) upon himself. Built as a bridgehead for the Russian military campaign to pacify Central Asia in a race against the British, it became the last stop for the Trans-Caspian Railway in the late 19th century.<sup>85, 86</sup>

The city functions as the gateway to Turkmenistan and has a more Russian feel than the rest of the country. A

- 
- 71 Minority Rights Group International, "State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011," Refworld, 6 July 2011, 134–35, <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-1077-Full-text.pdf>
- 72 Institute for War and Peace Reporting, "Petrol Smuggling Rife on Turkmen-Uzbek Border," 16 May 2006, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/petrol-smuggling-rife-turkmen-uzbek-border>
- 73 Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project, "Profile of Internal Displacement: Turkmenistan," 18 October 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3f49147c4.pdf>
- 74 UNESCO, "Kunya-Urgench," n.d., <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/silk-road-themes/world-heritage-sites/kunya-urgench>
- 75 Michel Danino, "A Brief Note on the Aryan Invasion Theory," *PRAGATI Quarterly Research Journal* 3, no. 108 (April–June 2009): 5–20, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/191127057/A-brief-note-on-the-Aryan-Invasion-Theory-Michel-Danino>
- 76 Carl C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "Archaeology and Language: The Case of the Bronze Age Indo-Iranians," in *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, eds. Edwin F. Bryant and Laurie L. Patton (New York: Routledge, 2005), 142–177.
- 77 Andrew Lawler, "Central Asia's Lost Civilization," *Discover Magazine*, 30 November 2006, <https://www.andrewlawler.com/central-asias-lost-civilization/>
- 78 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Mary," 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mary-Turkmenistan>
- 79 Jeffrey Hays, "Early History of Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, [http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8\\_7a/entry-4801.html](http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7a/entry-4801.html)
- 80 British Museum, "Merv, Turkmenistan," 2017, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research\\_projects/all\\_current\\_projects/merv\\_turkmenistan/merv\\_turkmenistan.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/merv_turkmenistan/merv_turkmenistan.aspx)
- 81 Leo De Hartog, *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World* (Barnes and Noble, 1989), 111.
- 82 Bernard Cloutier (blog), "Turkmenistan," 1997, <http://berclo.net/page97/97en-turkmenistan.html>
- 83 UNESCO, "UNESCO Representative Visits Ancient City of Merv," UNESCO Office in Teheran, 21 August 2016, [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/tehran/about-this-office/single-view/news/unesco\\_representative\\_visits\\_ancient\\_city\\_of\\_merv/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/tehran/about-this-office/single-view/news/unesco_representative_visits_ancient_city_of_merv/)
- 84 Adventurous Travel, "Merv, Turkmenistan—A Forgotten City on the Silk Road," n.d., <https://www.adventurous-travels.com/posts/merv-turkmenistan-a-forgotten-city-on-the-silk-road>
- 85 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Turkmenbashi," 10 May 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenbashi>
- 86 Lonely Planet, "Turkmenbashi," 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat/background/history/a/nar/b95106cd-48c1-40ff-ada5-3003f24a059b/357814>

memorial commemorating Turkmen soldiers who were killed in World War II features a statue of former President Niyazov's father.<sup>87</sup> The city is the site of petrochemical works and a large oil refinery.<sup>88, 89</sup>

## Environmental Concerns

Turkmenistan faces many environmental problems. One of the main concerns is that climate change will reduce the amount of water available for use and at the same time, increase the demand for water. Turkmenistan lacks constant water surface flow, and the existing surface water is moderately polluted. Since almost 90% of water resources go to irrigation, the water flow of the Amu Darya is expected to decrease by 7–12% and the flow of Turkmenistan's other three large rivers (Murgab, Tejen, Atrek) are expected to decrease by 5–8% by 2030.<sup>90</sup>

With almost 70% of the land area defined as agricultural (67% permanent pasture and 4.1% arable land), the main environmental hazards are tied to the overuse of agricultural land.<sup>91</sup> Excessive irrigation has contributed to water erosion in the mountains, water logging of soil, and desertification by severely degrading the soil and water quality. Irrigation of the naturally saline desert soil has brought underground salts to the surface and made the soil even more saline, which in turn necessitated even more irrigation. The soil has become heavily contaminated with agricultural chemicals, such as pesticides and herbicides, which are applied in large doses to agricultural crops. Agricultural chemicals also contaminate the water supply through irrigation run-off. The degradation of the vegetative cover of pasture land due to overgrazing eventually causes wind erosion and drifting sand in the desert.<sup>92, 93, 94</sup>

The greatest contributor to the drying of the Aral Sea is the Karakum Canal, which diverts more water from the Amu Darya River (the other river that used to flow into the Aral Sea is the Syr Darya) than any other irrigation project around the Aral Sea basin. The drying of the Aral Sea is considered one of the world's worst ecological disasters.<sup>95</sup> In some areas around Dashoguz Province, salt storms cause acute respiratory diseases among children, and people who are forced to drink water with high salinity levels are inflicted with diarrhea and other waterborne diseases.<sup>96</sup>

- 
- 87 Remote Lands, "Turkmenbashi," n.d., <https://www.remotelands.com/destination/turkmenbashi>
- 88 Vladimir Razumovskiy, "Seydi Oil Refinery Gets First Oil from Yoloten Field," Turkmenistan.ru, 23 July 2006, <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/en/node/4831>
- 89 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Turkmenbashi," 10 May 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenbashi>
- 90 Harry Liiv, "Turkmenistan Environmental Challenges and Opportunities," United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 15 May 2013, [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar\\_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf)
- 91 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 6 January 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 92 Naturvernforbundet, Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, "Environmental Issues in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://naturvernforbundet.no/international/environmental-issues-in-turkmenistan/category947.html>
- 93 Harry Liiv, "Turkmenistan Environmental Challenges and Opportunities," United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 15 May 2013, [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar\\_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf)
- 94 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "The Central Asian Dust Bowl," Photo Gallery, 17 June 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/desertification-centralasia-turkmenistan-kazakhstan-uzbekistan/25019534.html>
- 95 Naturvernforbundet, Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, "Environmental Issues in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://naturvernforbundet.no/international/environmental-issues-in-turkmenistan/category947.html>
- 96 UNICEF, "Turkmenistan: Real Lives: Brining [sic] Water, Bringing Life to People in the Most Remote Areas of Turkmenistan," 2007, [http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives\\_7182.html](http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives_7182.html)

The Aral Sea, which is located in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, is situated in a large, flat desert basin. It is supplied with water from the Amu Darya in the south and the Syr Darya in the north. In 1960, the Aral Sea was the fourth-largest lake in the world. Moscow-centered economic planners diverted the rivers' waters to provide irrigation for Central Asia's cotton industry. As a result, the cotton industry flourished, but the sea began to shrink. By 2000, the water volume had dropped by 75%.<sup>97</sup> By 2015, only 10% of the surface remained, mostly within Kazakhstan.<sup>98</sup> Water levels in the northern portion of the lake, which is located in Kazakhstan, are rebounding slightly, mainly due to the construction of a dam on its southern edge.<sup>99</sup>

Pollution of the Caspian Sea and its coastal areas are a particular concern. The exploitation of the oil resources in the Caspian Sea poses potential environmental hazards to aquatic life and humans. The United Nations warned that the sea is in critical condition, with oil tankers alone dumping over 120,000 tons of pollutants annually. Sewage spills from cities bordering the sea exacerbate pollution. Overfishing, pollution from the extraction of oil and gas, and the declining water levels pose a threat to many species. Since 2000, thousands of seals died in the Caspian Sea. The catch of one of the most common fish (the Caspian kutum) decreased by more than 85% between 1950 and the 1990s. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the population of sturgeons declined by more than 90% since the early 1980s.<sup>100, 101, 102, 103</sup>

The energy sector generates about 90% of all industrial toxic waste. Emissions from the oil and gas industry account for 75–80% of the total national emissions of pollutants. An increase in greenhouse gas emissions is due to the growth in energy consumption.<sup>104</sup>

- 
- 97 Brian Clark Howard, "Aral Sea's Eastern Basin is Dry for First Time in 600 Years," *National Geographic*, 2 October 2014, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141001-aral-sea-shrinking-drought-water-environment/>
- 98 Rustam Qobil, "Waiting for the Sea," BBC News, 25 February 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/resources/1dt-a0c4856e-1019-4937-96fd-8714d70a48f7>
- 99 Shamil Zhumatov and Olzhas Auyezov, "Aral Sea: Big Fish is Back in Small Pond," Reuters, 1 June 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-aral-idUSKBN18S4ZV>
- 100 *Guardian*, "Pollution and Overfishing Plague the Caspian Sea," 11 March 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/mar/11/iran-caspian-sea-pollution-overfishing>
- 101 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan Needs to Balance Energy Development Desires with Environmental Risks—Watchdog Group," 13 September 2007, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-needs-to-balance-energy-ddevelopment-desires-with-environmental-risks-watchdog-group>
- 102 Andrea Palasciano, "Seals, Caviar and Oil: Caspian Sea Faces Pollution Threat," PHYS.org, 16 April 2019, <https://phys.org/news/2019-04-caviar-oil-caspian-sea-pollution.html>
- 103 Morteza Aminmansour, "Ecosystem and Environment Caspian Sea," Pars Times, n.d., [http://www.parstimes.com/environment/caspian\\_ecosystem.html](http://www.parstimes.com/environment/caspian_ecosystem.html)
- 104 Harry Liiv, "Turkmenistan Environmental Challenges and Opportunities," United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 15 May 2013, [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar\\_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/kdb/2013/Seminar_Turkmenistan/Liiv.1.pdf)

## Natural Hazards

Turkmenistan lies in a seismically active region that is at risk for earthquakes. The two most active and at-risk zones are in the regions of Turkmenbashi and Ashgabat. In December 2000, a powerful earthquake measuring about 7.5 on the Richter Scale struck western Turkmenistan about 250 km (155 mi) west of Ashgabat. A few casualties were reported by independent sources.<sup>105</sup>

Flooding caused by heavy rains is another natural hazard. There are significant flood hazards along the Atrek and Siraks rivers.<sup>106</sup> In 2019 and 2018, Ashgabat was inundated after weeks of heavy rains. According to World Bank estimates, around USD 700 million, which amounts to 2% of GDP, is lost annually due to flooding across the country.<sup>107, 108, 109</sup>

- 
- 105 Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Turkmenistan: Earthquake Causes Heavy Damage,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 7 December 2000, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1095291.html>
- 106 Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, “Central Asia and Caucasus Disaster Risk Management Initiative (CAC DRM)” (study review, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Geneva, Switzerland, n.d.), 49–51, [http://www.unisdr.org/files/11641\\_CentralAsiaCaucasusDRManagementInit.pdf](http://www.unisdr.org/files/11641_CentralAsiaCaucasusDRManagementInit.pdf)
- 107 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, “Turkmen Capital Inundated after Heavy Rains across Region,” 16 April 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-ashgabat-floods/29884409.html>
- 108 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: After Us, the Flood Will Come,” 22 May 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-after-us-the-flood-will-come>
- 109 World Bank, “Turkmenistan,” 2015, <https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/Turkmenistan.pdf>



# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | The capital of Turkmenistan is Turkmenbashi.                             | True | False |
| 2. | Most of Turkmenistan's land area is covered by desert.                   | True | False |
| 3. | All of Turkmenistan's rivers flow into the Caspian Sea.                  | True | False |
| 4. | Turkmenistan shares land borders with China and Russia.                  | True | False |
| 5. | A flu epidemic decimated the population of Ashgabat in the 19th century. | True | False |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
The capital of Turkmenistan is Ashgabat.
2. True:  
Nearly 80% of Turkmenistan's surface is occupied by the Karakum Desert (350,000 sq km or 135,135 sq mi), which covers all of central Turkmenistan, from the northern to the southern border. The Karakum climate is severe; rainfall is rare, and the soil temperature can reach 80°C (176°F).
3. False:  
Turkmenistan's only river that flows into the Caspian Sea is the Atrek. The Murgab and Tejen rivers are absorbed into the sands of the Karakum Desert, and the Amu Darya flows to the Aral Sea.
4. False:  
Turkmenistan borders the Caspian Sea, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.
5. False:  
A In 1948, Ashgabat was devastated by an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale. Nearly two-thirds of the population perished in the earthquake, making it one of the deadliest ever recorded. President Saparmurat Niyazov's mother and two brothers were killed in the earthquake.

## Chapter 2 | History



Ruins of ancient Nisa  
Flickr / Fraser Lewry

### Introduction

Turkmenistan did not exist as a political entity before 1924, as the nomadic peoples of the region lacked political unity.<sup>1,2</sup> Before that time, no borders or sense of national unity existed, and the identity of the region's peoples was based on tribalism.<sup>3,4</sup> The area that is now Turkmenistan has endured almost continuous invasions by its neighbors throughout its history; nevertheless, the Turkmen culture has endured. The harsh geography has served the Turkmen well, making the area difficult not only to conquer but also to secure.<sup>5,6</sup>

As nomads, the Turkmen prized mobility and viewed settled farming as an invitation to predatory behavior.<sup>7</sup> For centuries, Turkmen preyed upon settled communities and, in the absence of a centralized political authority,

---

1 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Turkic Peoples," 28 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkic-peoples>  
2 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 17–27.  
3 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2006), 21.  
4 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 17–27.  
5 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 25.  
6 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 23.  
7 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 25–30.

frequently fought each other for control over oases.<sup>8,9</sup> Scattered across a vast desert plain, the Turkmen depended for much of their history on livestock herding rather than agriculture.<sup>10, 11</sup> Chieftains established their bases at local water sources, since control of this scarce commodity conferred power.<sup>12</sup>

## Early History

Central Asia has always been a frontier zone between Asia and Europe. Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who founded the Achaemenid Empire, controlled the region in the sixth century BCE. Alexander the Great conquered the region during his expansionary campaign toward India in the fourth century BCE. Arab control in the seventh century CE introduced Islam to the inhabitants of the region.<sup>13, 14</sup>

The origins of Turkmen have been traced to the ninth century CE, when Turkic-speaking Oghuz tribes migrated from modern Mongolia into Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Oghuz expansion extended from the Volga River and the Ural Mountains to the Aral Sea and the steppe areas. The name Turkmen first appeared in the 10th century and referred to the Oghuz groups who accepted Islam.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

The Oghuz lacked a centralized power structure. Instead, they were ruled by chieftains who independently controlled their territories.<sup>19</sup> When the bonds that held together the loose confederation of the Oghuz began to weaken in the 11th century, a clan leader named Seljuk established an empire, centered in Persia, that encompassed parts of present-day Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey.<sup>20, 21</sup>

## Turkmen Expansion

The Seljuks' expansion campaigns afforded migration opportunities to the Turkmen, who began to settle in the area that would become modern Turkmenistan.<sup>22</sup> Prior to their arrival, most of this desert area had been uninhabited. Persians populated the habitable regions along the shores of the Caspian Sea, in the foothills of the Kopet-Dag mountains, and along the banks of the Amu Darya and Murgab rivers. Around the ancient city-state of

- 
- 8 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/1.htm>
- 9 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 17.
- 10 Jack Cassin, "Archeological Prehistory of Turkmenistan," 2000, [http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex3\\_prehist.htm](http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex3_prehist.htm)
- 11 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 21 November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 12 Eurasianet, "Desert Gold: Niyazov's Conflicted Approach to Turkmenistan's Water Woes," 16 April 2004, <https://eurasianet.org/desert-gold-niyazovs-conflicted-approach-to-turkmenistans-water-woes>
- 13 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 24, 27.
- 14 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 32.
- 15 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Turkic Peoples," 28 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkic-peoples>
- 16 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Oğuz," 28 December 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Oguz>
- 17 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Turkic Peoples," 28 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkic-peoples>
- 18 Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Turkmenistan," February 2007, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/Turkmenistan%20Profile.pdf>
- 19 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 32.
- 20 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/Turkmen-tribes-and-Russian-invasion>
- 21 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Seljuq," 1 June 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Seljuq>
- 22 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 32–33.

Merv (modern Mary), farming settlements had developed. These communities supported a merchant population that participated in the Silk Road commercial trade activities.<sup>23</sup>

In the 12th century, Turkmen and other Central Asian tribes overthrew the Seljuks. Over the next century, the area came under Mongolian domination as Genghis Khan's armies swept through the region. Under his harsh rule, many Turkmen-Oghuz of the steppe were pushed southward to the Karakum Desert and the Caspian Sea.<sup>24</sup>

By the 15th century, the southern part of modern Turkmenistan was under Persian control, and the northern part was dominated by the Uzbek-led states of Khiva and Bukhara. Until the mid-19th century, the territory of present-day Turkmenistan was a battleground for the competing Uzbek and Persian empires in which authority over the inhabitants was often more nominal than actual.<sup>25, 26</sup>

## Russian Colonial Rule

In the late 19th century, Turkmenistan became part of Russian Turkestan, which later came to be known as the Trans-Caspian District (or Province). Russia's first successful attempt to expand into the region occurred in 1869 when a Russian military force landed on the east coast of the Caspian Sea and established the port of Krasnovodsk (renamed Turkmenbashi in 1993).<sup>27, 28</sup>

In 1874, the Russians established the Transcaspian military district in the region. Between 1877 and 1881, Russian troops engaged in raids against the Turkmen tribes, many of whom were in the Khiva khanate's military forces. Settlements were destroyed, and hundreds of noncombatants were slaughtered. The Russians signed the Treaty of Akhal with the Persians later that year, establishing the border between Turkmenistan and Iran. This border remains largely unchanged.<sup>29, 30</sup>

The last significant resistance to the Russian encroachment on Turkmen territory was crushed at the Battle of Gokdepe (1881); Turkmenistan was then annexed into the Russian Empire. That same year, the Russians began building the Trans-Caspian railway across the Karakum Desert, between the Caspian Sea and the Amu-Darya River via Ashgabat and Merv, reaching Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent a few years later. The Trans-Caspian

- 
- 23 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/1.htm>
- 24 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.
- 25 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 33–34.
- 26 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History: Formation of the Turkmen Nation," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/2.htm>
- 27 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 29–30.
- 28 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History: Incorporation into Russia," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/3.htm>
- 29 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History: Incorporation into Russia," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/3.htm>
- 30 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/Turkmen-tribes-and-Russian-invasion>

Province was established as a colony of Russia to be used as a buffer against British colonialist intentions in the region. In 1899, the province became part of the governorate-general of Turkistan.<sup>31, 32, 33</sup>

## Soviet Turkmenistan

Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Trans-Caspian area witnessed many battles against the Bolsheviks. The Red Army captured Ashgabat in 1919 and by the end of 1920, most of Turkmenistan was under Bolshevik rule. Between 1921 and 1924, the Trans-Caspian Province (called Turkmen after 1921) formed part of the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). Turkmenistan was regarded as an *oblast* (an administrative region) of the Turkistan ASSR.<sup>34</sup>

The USSR was formally established in 1922, and in 1924, Turkmenistan was officially renamed the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), with the same national boundaries as today. The Soviets specifically drew boundaries throughout the region to fragment existing ethnic groups, forestalling any unification and subsequent threats to the central government in Moscow.<sup>35, 36, 37</sup>

Though most Turkmen were indifferent to Soviet Marxism, some embraced it. This marked the beginning of a new national identity. The unification of tribes through the creation of a common language substantially aided the nationalist agenda, yet the legacy of nomadic culture—groups based on genealogy—remained.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviets set up collective farms on which selected people were expected to live and work; those who resisted were often killed or jailed. At the same time, many Turkmen moved to the cities to work in state factories, accelerating the demise of the traditional nomadic lifestyle.<sup>39</sup> Others fled into the Karakum Desert or neighboring Iran and Afghanistan. More than 1 million Turkmen people became refugees during this time.<sup>40</sup>

Although Turkmen were still allowed to practice Islam, the government limited religious influence and promoted the official atheist position of the Soviet Union. This angered the Turkmen, who staged a revolt in 1927 that was not fully defeated until 1932. Thousands of Turkmen were executed in the aftermath, and Turkmen communist leaders were installed. Many ethnic Russians were also given government positions. The strategy was effective, and by the 1950s, an isolated Turkmenistan had become one of the most stable of the Soviet republics.<sup>41, 42</sup>

- 
- 31 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 30.
- 32 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: History: Incorporation into Russia," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/3.htm>
- 33 Jeffrey Hays, "Turkmenistan Under Russia and the Soviet Union," Facts and Details, April 2016, [http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8\\_7a/entry-4802.html](http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7a/entry-4802.html)
- 34 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/Turkmen-tribes-and-Russian-invasion>
- 35 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 38–39.
- 36 Gavin R.G. Hambly et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/Turkmen-tribes-and-Russian-invasion>
- 37 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 29–30.
- 38 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 4, 31–32.
- 39 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 38–39.
- 40 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 31.
- 41 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 40.
- 42 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 31.

## Independence and Niyazov's Cult of Personality

After the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991, the local Communist Party renamed itself the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.<sup>43</sup> The party's leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, survived the transition with his leadership intact. An engineer by training, he had joined the Communist Party in 1962, and by 1985, had been promoted to party chief for the republic. In June 1991, Niyazov ran unopposed for president and was elected the first president of independent Turkmenistan, with 99.5% of the vote. In 1994, his term in office was extended by a referendum until 2002.<sup>44, 45</sup> In 1999, he was anointed "President for Life" by parliament.<sup>46</sup>

Niyazov promoted a cult of personality and proclaimed himself Turkmenbashi, or "father of the Turkmen." Portraits of him appeared on the currency and on billboards on virtually every street corner, dominating public space with a sign proclaiming "Nation, People, Leader" (Halk, Watan, Turkmenbashi).<sup>47, 48</sup> Statues of him adorned virtually every town.<sup>49, 50</sup> State-run television news began with a prayer or greeting for Niyazov as his image appeared on the screen.<sup>51</sup> January was renamed Turkmenbashi, and in the capital of Ashgabat, a 250-foot gold statue of Turkmenbashi was installed on top of the Arch of Neutrality, rotating automatically to face the sun.<sup>52</sup>

In the late 1990s, Niyazov declared that neither the Quran nor the Bible offered sufficient spiritual vision, so he wrote the *Ruhnama* (The Book of the Soul), which subsequently replaced the Soviet-era primary school curriculum.<sup>53, 54</sup> *Ruhnama* provided a reinterpretation of the national history, in which Turkmenistan was represented as one of the greatest civilizations in the history of the world. Niyazov renamed the days of the week after himself, his family, and some of the more colorful characters in the *Ruhnama*.<sup>55, 56, 57</sup> The introduction of family members emphasized his Turkmen ethnic roots and distanced him from his career rise through the "foreign" Soviet system.<sup>58</sup> Copies of

- 
- 43 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 42–43.
- 44 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 33.
- 45 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Explaining the Presidential Election," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 8 February 2007, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1074577.html>
- 46 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 43.
- 47 Ted Rall, "All Turkmenbashi, All the Time," *Mother Jones*, 8 September 2000, <http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2000/09/rall2.html>
- 48 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 44.
- 49 Kristen Gillespie, "Niyazov's Cult of Personality Grips Turkmenistan," National Public Radio, 9 August 2007, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12316714>
- 50 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 118.
- 51 Stephen Brown and Konstantin Sheiko, "The Soviet Legacy and Leader Cults in Post-Communist Central Asia: The Example of Turkmenistan," in A. Vickers & M. Hanlon (eds), *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA*, 2006, Wollongong, Australia, Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, 1–13, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1620&context=artspapers>
- 52 David Remnick, "The Land of Turkmenbashi," *New Yorker*, 1 May 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/01/the-land-of-turkmenbashi>
- 53 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 44.
- 54 Stephen Brown and Konstantin Sheiko, "The Soviet Legacy and Leader Cults in Post-Communist Central Asia: The Example of Turkmenistan," in A. Vickers & M. Hanlon (eds), *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA*, 2006, Wollongong, Australia, Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, 1–13, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1620&context=artspapers>
- 55 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 44.
- 56 Ian Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbooks, 2006), 30.
- 57 David Remnick, "The Land of Turkmenbashi," *New Yorker*, 1 May 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/01/the-land-of-turkmenbashi>
- 58 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan: Introduction: Human Rights in Turkmenistan" (paper, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th session, May 2006), <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

the Ruhnama were placed in every office, school, and religious institution. Public readings were held frequently, and attendance was mandatory. Questions drawn from the book appeared on the written exam for a driver's license.<sup>59, 60</sup>

Niyazov banned opera, ballet, beards, and long hair for men, makeup for television anchors, smoking in public places, and gold-capped teeth. He renamed the month of April after his mother and dedicated a national holiday to celebrate local melons. He reduced secondary education by one year and established a Ministry of Fairness. He promised free natural gas and electricity for every citizen until 2030.<sup>61, 62</sup> In 2005, Niyazov closed all the hospitals in the country, claiming that people who needed hospitalization could come to Ashgabat for treatment. That same year, he ordered the closure of all rural libraries, since according to him, rural Turkmen could not read.<sup>63</sup> Though his more farfetched pronouncements received international attention, some observers argued that his oddities obscured the actions of a rational, calculating politician.<sup>64</sup>

Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian republic that did not offer airspace or facilities to the United States and coalition troops in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Citing its status as a permanently neutral country, the government initially steered clear of any involvement. It gradually altered its position, allowing U.S. and NATO forces to use facilities in the country to conduct refueling and supply operations for the Afghanistan campaign.<sup>65, 66</sup>

An alleged assassination attempt in November 2002 provided a pretext to crush all potential sources of internal opposition.<sup>67, 68</sup> Niyazov accused an exiled former foreign minister and Turkmenistan best-known dissident of having planned the plot, and after a Stalinist-style show trial that was broadcasted on television, the man was sentenced to life in prison.<sup>69, 70, 71</sup> Suspicion also turned against Uzbekistan, and the security police were sent to the Uzbek Embassy to look for suspects.<sup>72</sup>

Niyazov's sudden death from heart failure in December 2006 led to concerns that the country would descend into chaos, because of his personality cult, there was no provision for a successor. Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov,

- 
- 59 Bess Brown, "Saparmurad Niyazov," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saparmurad-Niyazov>
- 60 Jeffrey Hays, "Turkmenistan Under Saparmurad Niyazov," Facts and Details, February 2008, [http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8\\_7a/entry-4804.html](http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7a/entry-4804.html)
- 61 David Remnick, "The Land of Turkmenbashi," *New Yorker*, 1 May 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/01/the-land-of-turkmenbashi>
- 62 *Guardian*, "The Personality Cult of Turkmenbashi," 21 December 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/21/1>
- 63 Monica Whitlock, "Turkmen Leader Closes Hospitals," BBC News, 1 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4307583.stm>
- 64 Stephen Brown and Konstantin Sheiko, "The Soviet Legacy and Leader Cults in Post-Communist Central Asia: The Example of Turkmenistan," in A. Vickers & M. Hanlon (eds), *Asia Reconstructed: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the ASAA, 2006*, Wollongong, Australia, Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, 1–13, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1620&context=artspapers>
- 65 Jane's Defence, "Turkmenistan: External Affairs," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 June 2011.
- 66 Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, "Is the U.S. Violating Turkmenistan's Neutrality with the NDN?" *Sifting the Karakum*, 1 August 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61652>
- 67 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 43–44.
- 68 Ilan Greenberg, "When a Kleptocratic, Megalomanuacal Dictator Goes Bad," *New York Times*, 5 January 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/05/magazine/when-a-kleptocratic-megalomanuacal-dictator-goes-bad.html>
- 69 Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Turkmenistan," February 2007, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/Turkmenistan%20Profile.pdf>
- 70 *Guardian*, "The Personality Cult of Turkmenbashi," 21 December 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/21/1>
- 71 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Attempted Assassination of President Leads to Long List of Suspects," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 26 November 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1101489.html>
- 72 Ilan Greenberg, "When a Kleptocratic, Megalomanuacal Dictator Goes Bad," *New York Times*, 5 January 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/05/magazine/when-a-kleptocratic-megalomanuacal-dictator-goes-bad.html>



a deputy prime minister and Niyazov's dentist, was named interim head of government. In February of 2007, Berdymukhamedov won a special presidential election with 89% of the vote and became the second president of Turkmenistan. None of the candidates who ran against him represented political opposition.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>

## Recent Events

Berdymukhamedov served as health minister starting in 1997 and as deputy premier beginning in 2001. One of his tasks was to carry out Niyazov's 2005 order to close all the hospitals in the country outside of the capital.<sup>76, 77</sup> After securing the presidency in 2007, Berdymukhamedov promised to introduce reforms, allow unlimited access to the internet, and provide better education and higher pensions, but most of his promises proved to be empty. Although he dismantled some aspects of Niyazov's personality cult, he introduced some of his own, like naming a mosque after himself and filling bookstores with his own writings. By 2010, only 1% of the population had access to the internet.<sup>78, 79</sup>

Under Berdymukhamedov's watch, repression of nongovernmental organizations and activists continued, freedom of movement was severely curtailed, access to the internet and to other media sites continued to be blocked, and more media restrictions came into effect.<sup>80</sup>

Berdymukhamedov, commonly referred to as Arkadag (protector), won a second five-year term in February 2012, with over 97% of the vote.<sup>81</sup> In February 2017, a constitutional amendment was enacted to allow candidates over 70 years old participation in the presidential elections, as well as extended the presidential term in office from five to seven years. Berdymukhamedov took advantage of this amendment and was subsequently re-elected to a third term, with 97.69% of the vote. According to official statements, the turnout rate of eligible voters was over 97%. The eight candidates who ran against the president received little attention in the government-controlled media. Observers viewed the elections as a phony exercise in democracy since voting is controlled by the authoritarian regime.<sup>82, 83</sup>

In early July 2019, rumors began to spread around that the 62-year-old Berdymukhamedov had died when he disappeared from public view for several weeks. Unsupported speculations about the cause of his death—kidney failure—and about who might benefit from sowing such disinformation generated more attention for Turkmenistan

73 Mevlut Katik, "Turkmenbashi Dies, but Impact for Turkmenistan is Unclear," *Eurasia Insight*, 20 December 2006, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenbashi-dies-but-impact-for-turkmenistan-unclear>

74 BBC News, "Turkmenistan's 'Iron Ruler' Dies," 21 December 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6198983.stm>

75 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Explaining the Presidential Election," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 14 February 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/02/78707cdf-3e78-4dbb-b453-f367a7a4969a.html>

76 Monica Whitlock, "Turkmen Leader Closes Hospitals," BBC News, 1 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4307583.stm>

77 BBC News, "Turkmenistan—Profile," 3 July 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16095366>

78 BBC News, "Turkmenistan—Profile," 3 July 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16095366>

79 Reuters, "Turkmenistan Ends Ban on Opera and Circus," 21 January 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkmenistan-opera/turkmenistan-ends-ban-on-opera-and-circus-idUSL2129776520080121>

80 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan—Events of 2018," 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

81 BBC News, "Turkmenistan—Profile," 3 July 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16095366>

82 European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, "Turkmenistan," 27 June 2018, <https://www.europeanforum.net/uploads/countries/pdf/turkmenistan.pdf>

83 Reuters, "Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov re-elected as Turkmen president," *Deutsche Welle*, 13 February 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/gurbanguly-berdymukhamedov-re-elected-as-turkmen-president/a-37524932>

than any other domestic or international event ever did.<sup>84, 85</sup>

Berdymukhamedov reemerged into the public eye in August 2019, squashing the rumors with a video of himself riding a horse, driving donuts around the “Gateway to Hell” in a rally car, and shooting targets.<sup>86, 87</sup>

Turkmenistan has found new routes for getting its oil and natural gas to the global markets through the East–West pipeline (connecting Mary Province with the Caspian coast), Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline, the Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan–Kazakhstan–China (TUKC) gas pipeline, and the pipeline to Iran.<sup>88, 89, 90, 91</sup> In 2018, the five Caspian littoral countries (Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan) signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which divides up the oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea, paving the way for more energy exploration and pipeline projects.<sup>92, 93</sup>

Turkmenistan remains one of the world’s most secretive and oppressively ruled countries. Foreign media outlets have little access to Turkmenistan, religious and political expression are suppressed, no independent monitoring groups are allowed in the country, and many people have been victimized or have simply disappeared.<sup>94, 95</sup>

- 
- 84 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: Shortness of Death,” 23 July 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-shortness-of-death>
- 85 Tara John, “Turkmenistan Leader Drives Donuts around ‘Gateway to Hell’ in Footage Following Death Rumors,” CNN, 6 August 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/06/asia/turkmenistan-president-gateway-to-hell-intl/index.html>
- 86 BBC News, “Turkmenistan President Berdymukhamedov Reappears After Death Rumours,” 12 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49319380>
- 87 Tara John, “Turkmenistan Leader Drives Donuts Around ‘Gateway to Hell’ in Footage Following Death Rumors,” CNN, 6 August 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/06/asia/turkmenistan-president-gateway-to-hell-intl/index.html>
- 88 Shahnar Hajiev, “Turkmenistan Should Promote The Trans-Caspian Pipeline More Actively,” Euractiv, 2 September 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/turkmenistan-should-promote-the-trans-caspian-pipeline-more-actively/>
- 89 Alex Forbes, “Turkmenistan Sees Light at the End of the Tunnel,” Petroleum Economist, 10 June 2019, <https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/upstream/exploration-production/2019/turkmenistan-sees-light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel>
- 90 Kosatka, “Iran and Russia are Opposed to the Construction of a Gas Pipeline from Turkmenistan through Azerbaijan,” 13 August 2019, <https://kosatka.media/en/category/gaz/news/iran-i-rossiya-protiv-stroitelstva-gazoprovoda-iz-turkmenistana-cherez-azerbaydzhan>
- 91 Leo Kabouche, “The Energy Briefing: Despite Caspian Sea Agreement, Obstacles to Trans-Caspian Pipeline Remain,” Global Risk Insights, 2 September 2018, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2018/09/despite-caspian-sea-agreement-obstacles-trans-caspian-pipeline-remain/>
- 92 Luke Coffey, “A Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline: Start Small but Aim Big,” Heritage Foundation, 20 May 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/trans-caspian-gas-pipeline-start-small-aim-big>
- 93 Olzhas Auyezov, “Russia, Iran, and Three Others Agree Caspian Status, but Not Borders,” Reuters, 12 August 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-caspian-borders/russia-iran-and-three-others-agree-caspian-status-but-not-borders-idUSKBN1KX0CI>
- 94 BBC News, “Turkmenistan President Berdymukhamedov Reappears After Death Rumours,” 12 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49319380>
- 95 Human Rights Watch, “Turkmenistan—Events of 2018,” World Report, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 2 | History, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Turkmen arrived in the area that is present-day Turkmenistan from the Anatolian plateau in Turkey.   | True | False |
| 2. | The Trans-Caspian Province was a Russian territory that encompassed parts of present-day Turkmenistan.   | True | False |
| 3. | Ruhnama was the idolized wife of Turkmenistan's authoritarian ruler, Saparmurat Niyazov.   | True | False |
| 4. | Turkmenistan was the first Central Asian republic that offered its airspace and military facilities to the United States in the buildup to the war in Afghanistan. | True | False |
| 5. | President Niyazov was assassinated by a police officer in 2010.  | True | False |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 2 | History, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
The origins of Turkmen have been traced to Turkic-speaking Oghuz tribes that migrated from modern Mongolia into Central Asia during the ninth century CE.
2. True:  
The Trans-Caspian Province was established as a Russian colony on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, to be used as a buffer against British colonial intentions in Central Asia. It was bounded to the south by Iran and Afghanistan, to the north by the former Russian province of Uralsk, and to the northeast by the former Russian protectorates of Khiva and Bukhara.
3. False:  
The Ruhnama, or the Book of the Soul, was written by President Niyazov. The book provided a reinterpretation of the national history of Turkmenistan, claiming it was the greatest civilization in history; it was also considered a source of spiritual and moral guidance. The book was placed in every office, school, and religious institution. Public readings were held frequently, and attendance was mandatory.
4. False:  
Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian republic that did not offer airspace or facilities to the United States and coalition troops in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, citing its status as a permanently neutral country.
5. False:  
Niyazov died unexpectedly of heart failure in December 2006 at the age of 66. Before he died, he suffered several heart attacks and underwent a bypass operation.

## Chapter 3 | Economy



A commerce or trade building  
Flickr User: Beth

### Introduction

Despite the enduring image of Turkmen as nomadic horsemen, settled agriculture is not new to the region. An ancient village found near Ashgabat shows that agriculture was already being practiced in southern Turkmenistan 8,000 years ago. For centuries, the majority of Turkmen were semi-nomadic and planted crops on irrigated land and bred cattle. When Turkmenistan became part of the Russian Empire, and the Trans-Caspian Railway was completed (1885), capitalism began to penetrate the region's tribal-feudal system. The Soviets introduced cotton to Turkmenistan in the 1920s, and the country became the second largest cotton producer in Central Asia, after Uzbekistan. With the completion of the Karakum Canal in the 1960s, cotton production expanded even further.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2, 3</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Country Watch, "Turkmenistan Country Review," 2019, <http://www.countrywatch.com/Content/pdfs/reviews/B465M3L8.01c.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Advantour, "Turkmenistan History," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/history.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> Vusala Abbasova, "Turkmenistan Kicks Off Cotton Harvesting," Caspian News, 31 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkmenistan-kicks-off-cotton-harvesting-2017-8-30-32/>

When deposits of natural gas were discovered in Turkmenistan in the mid-1960s, Turkmenistan began to build its oil-and-gas industry. At the time, the Odjak natural gas field in north-eastern Turkmenistan was considered as one of the largest in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup>

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and independence in 1991, Turkmenistan experienced years of economic decline. A few economic reforms that encouraged foreign investment in the oil and gas sector helped revive the economy somewhat, but the autocratic government of Niyazov (1991-2006) made little progress improving the country's business climate. After Niyazov's death, high energy prices and new economic reforms allowed the government to embark on large development projects and subsidize utilities and social services, elevating Turkmenistan from the status of a 'lower middle income' country to 'upper middle income'.<sup>5, 6</sup>

Today, Turkmenistan has the world's fourth-largest natural gas deposits, after Russia, Iran, and Qatar. Petroleum, sulfur, iodine, salt, limestone, and cement also contribute to the chemical and construction sectors, making industry the country's dominant sector, amounting to 45% of gross domestic product (GDP). However, the agriculture sector, which contributes only 7.5% to the GDP, employs nearly 50% of the labor force.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>

In 2016 lower gas prices sent Turkmenistan's economy into a freefall. As of 2020, Turkmenistan is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the immediate post-independence period.<sup>10</sup> Low energy prices and poor harvests have led to economic stagnation and prompted the government to eliminate free access to water, gas, and electricity.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Corruption is endemic, and the business and legal systems are poorly developed.<sup>13, 14</sup> Because official economic statistics are not available, hard facts about the state of the economy and the living standards of the poor are difficult to ascertain.<sup>15, 16</sup>

- 
- 4 Turkmenistanyň Nebiti we Gazy, "For the 50th Anniversary of the Formation Of The Gas Industry of Turkmenistan," 18 August 2016, <https://www.oilgas.gov.tm/en/blog/379/for-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-formation-of-the-gas-industry-of-turkmenistan>
- 5 Advantour, "Turkmenistan History," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/history.htm>
- 6 Global Security, "Turkmenistan — Economy," n.d., <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-econ.htm>
- 7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 8 World Bank, "The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Country Context," 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview>
- 9 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Oil and Natural Gas Production," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article2?id=Turkmenistan-oil-and-gas-production>
- 10 Adam Hug, "Spotlight on Turkmenistan," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>
- 11 World Bank, "The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Economy," 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview#3>
- 12 Trading Economics, "Turkmenistan GDP Annual Growth Rate," 2019, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkmenistan/gdp-growth-annual>
- 13 Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index, 2018," 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>
- 14 GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal, "Turkmenistan Corruption Report," May 2016, <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/turkmenistan/>
- 15 Federal Research Division, "Country Profile—Turkmenistan," February 2007, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/Turkmenistan%20Profile.pdf>
- 16 World Bank, "The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Economy," 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview#3>

## Agriculture

Turkmenistan’s two most abundant cash crops are cotton (also known as “white gold”) and wheat. The government invests millions of dollars in the cotton and wheat sectors and dictates how much wheat and cotton will be grown, by whom, and where. Almost half of all irrigated lands are allocated to cotton cultivation.<sup>17, 18</sup> The state supplies farmers with seeds and irrigation water; then, it buys the harvest from the farmers at a below-market price and sells it on the international market at market-determined prices.<sup>19, 20</sup> Despite these practices, cotton is the most important source of income for most farmers. As a result, Turkmenistan produces more cotton per capita than any other country in the world.<sup>21, 22, 23</sup> The country ranks as the ninth-largest cotton producer in the world and the second-largest in Central Asia after Uzbekistan, with annual cotton production of over half a million tons in 2019.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup> Over 20 textile firms operate in the country. The government plans to increase investments in the textile industry to USD 2 billion by 2020 and expand annual export revenues. Cotton products are sold through auctions in Turkmenistan’s commodity and raw materials exchange.<sup>27</sup>

Although agriculture’s contribution to GDP has declined, currently accounting for 7.5%, nearly half the population depends on agriculture for its livelihood.<sup>28</sup> Cotton production and harvesting rely heavily on forced labor. Cotton picking is hazardous, and the living conditions of cotton pickers are harsh, leading to accusations against the government of relying on child and slave labor.<sup>29</sup>

In 2018, the United States banned the importing of cotton goods from Turkmenistan without providing a specific reason. Nevertheless, much of Turkmenistan’s cotton goes to Turkey, where it is used for garments carrying a “Made in Turkey” label.<sup>30, 31</sup> In the summer of 2019, 70 companies, including Nike, IKEA, H&M, and Gap, signed a pledge to halt usage of Turkmen cotton to ensure that forced labor output does not find its way into their products.<sup>32</sup>

17 Irrigation depends mostly on the Karakum Canal, which carries water across the country from the Amu Darya River.

18 Kamila Aliyeva, “Turkmenistan to Further Boost Cotton Industry,” *Al Jazeera*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/119190.html>

19 Global Agriculture Information Network, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Turkmenistan Cotton and Products Annual 2005,” GAIN Report, 23 June 2005, <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gainfiles/200506/146130080.doc>

20 Turkmen News, “2018 Turkmenistan Cotton Harvest Review—Government Still Relies on Forced Labor,” 1 February 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/2018-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest-review-government-still-relies-on-forced-labor/>

21 Vusala Abbasova, “Turkmenistan Kicks off Cotton Harvesting,” *Caspian News*, 31 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkmenistan-kicks-off-cotton-harvesting-2017-8-30-32/>

22 Central Intelligence Agency, “Turkmenistan,” *The World Factbook*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

23 USDA, “USDA, “Crop Explorer—Production Briefs—Central Asia,” 12 August 2019, [https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad\\_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs](https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs)

24 Hannah Abdulla, “Turkmenistan President Orders Ramp-up of Cotton Sowing,” *Just Style*, 3 May 2019, [https://www.just-style.com/news/turkmenistan-president-orders-ramp-up-of-cotton-sowing\\_id136124.aspx](https://www.just-style.com/news/turkmenistan-president-orders-ramp-up-of-cotton-sowing_id136124.aspx)

25 USAID, “Agriculture and Food Security,” 17 October 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/turkmenistan/agriculture-and-food-security>

26 USDA, “USDA, “Crop Explorer—Production Briefs—Central Asia,” 12 August 2019, [https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad\\_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs](https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs)

27 Kamila Aliyeva, “Turkmenistan to Further Boost Cotton Industry,” *Azer News*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/119190.html>

28 Central Intelligence Agency, “Turkmenistan,” *The World Factbook*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

29 Turkmen News, “2018 Turkmenistan Cotton Harvest Review—Government Still Relies on Forced Labor,” 1 February 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/2018-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest-review-government-still-relies-on-forced-labor/>

30 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: Kicking the Coke Habit,” 3 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-kicking-the-coke-habit>

31 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, “U.S. Bans Import of Cotton Products from Turkmenistan,” 24 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-bans-import-cotton-products-turkmenistan/29247850.html>

32 Responsible Source Networking, “Turkmen Cotton Pledge,” 24 July 2019, <https://www.sourcingnetwork.org/turkmen-cotton-pledge>

Decades of intensive farming, necessary to meet production quotas, have reduced the land's fertility. The dams on the Amu Darya and diversion of the river's water for agricultural use have reduced the Aral Sea's surface area by 75%. In recent years, hot, dry weather has reduced cotton yields, but wheat production recovered after water levels rose in the Amu Darya.<sup>33, 34, 35, 36</sup>

## Industry

Turkmenistan's primary industries are energy and textiles. The textile industry relies on the production of woolen carpets and rugs made in state-owned and private factories and on factories that produce high-quality silk and cotton textiles. Turkmen carpets and rugs made by the Tekke, Yomut, Salor, and Ersari people are called by those names and are well known in the West. Turkmen carpets are exported to more than 50 countries. Customs authorities enforce strict regulations over the import and export of carpets. People who wish to take carpets out of Turkmenistan must obtain a certificate from the Carpet Museum in Ashgabat, indicating that the carpet does not have historical value. Currently, the government plans to develop this sector through privatization.<sup>37, 38, 39</sup>

The food industry produces vegetable oil, meat and fish products, flour, and wine. The metal processing sector includes facilities that repair diesel locomotives, railcars, and agricultural machinery and a plant that produces equipment for oil fields and refineries.<sup>40</sup> Turkmenistan has nine chemical plants that produce fertilizers, acids, chemicals, and mineral salts. The government plans to increase fertilizer and iodine production; however, not all plants operate at full capacity due to technical complications.<sup>41</sup>

- 
- 33 D.J. Peterson, Rand Corporation (firm), "Chapter 4: The Land," in *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 102, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/commercial\\_books/CB367/chap4.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/commercial_books/CB367/chap4.pdf)
- 34 Vusala Abbasova, "Turkmenistan Kicks off Cotton Harvesting," Caspian News, 31 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkmenistan-kicks-off-cotton-harvesting-2017-8-30-32/>
- 35 Kamila Aliyeva, "Turkmenistan to Further Boost Cotton Industry," Azer News, 19 September 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/119190.html>
- 36 USDA, "Crop Explorer—Production Briefs—Central Asia," 12 August 2019, [https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad\\_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs](https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/pecad_stories.aspx?regionid=stans&ftype=prodbriefs)
- 37 Kamila Aliyeva, "Turkmenistan Plans Privatization of Carpet Industry," Azer News, 27 February 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/109520.html>
- 38 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/People#ref342785>
- 39 U.S. Department of Commerce, "Turkmenistan 2018," International Trade Administration, 2018, <https://tm.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/124/TurkmenistanCountryCommercialGuide2018.pdf>
- 40 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/People#ref342785>
- 41 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan Chemical Industry," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=Turkmenistan-Chemical-Industry>



# Energy

## Natural Gas

Turkmenistan sits atop of the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves, estimated to represent about 10% of the known global reserves. Most of the country's proven gas reserves are located in the Amu Darya basin in the southeast, in the Caspian basins, and in the eastern region of South Yolotan.<sup>42</sup> A network of pipelines links the natural gas deposits in western Turkmenistan with Ashgabat, Turkmenbashi, Cheleken, and the central regions.<sup>43</sup>

In 2018, Turkmenistan became dependent on the Chinese market for 94% of its gas exports after a two-year cutoff by Russia and a dispute over debt with Iran.<sup>44, 45, 46</sup> Currently, Turkmenistan is experiencing challenges in developing its gas reserves because of insufficient pipeline infrastructure and foreign investment. Attempts to diversify the economy, which was hit by low energy prices, are in progress.<sup>47</sup>

## Gas Pipelines

A plan to build a natural gas pipeline across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, then continuing onto Europe (known as the Trans-Caspian Pipeline), has been held up by Russia and Iran since the mid-1990s.<sup>48, 49</sup> In 2010, a 19-mile (30-km) pipeline between Turkmenistan and Iran was opened, an expansion of an older, smaller pipeline.<sup>50</sup>

In September 2010, the construction of a 3,666-km (2,277-mi) long natural gas pipeline—consisting of dual parallel lines that link Turkmenistan with China via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (TUKC)—was completed. It was the first high volume export pipeline built in Turkmenistan, one of the world's largest pipeline projects, with the goal of circumventing Russia. The pipeline is also known as the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline (CAGP). The cost of the project was estimated at USD 7.3 billion.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup> Another plan to build a 1,000-km (621-mi) pipeline to China via Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan has been subject to repeated delays since 2013.<sup>54, 55, 56</sup>

- 
- 42 Hydrocarbons Technology, "The World's Biggest Natural Gas Reserves," 11 November 2013, <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/features/feature-the-worlds-biggest-natural-gas-reserves/>
- 43 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/People#ref342785>
- 44 Michael Lelyveld, "China Nears Limit on Central Asian Gas," Radio Free Asia, 25 June 2018, [https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy\\_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html](https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html)
- 45 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Market Overview," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article2?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>
- 46 CoFace for Trade, "Turkmenistan—Risk Assessment," 2019, <https://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Turkmenistan>
- 47 U.S. Department of Commerce, "Turkmenistan 2018," International Trade Administration, 2018, <https://tm.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/124/TurkmenistanCountryCommercialGuide2018.pdf>
- 48 Bruce Pannier, "Russia, Iran Cite 'Ecological Concerns' in Opposing Trans-Caspian Pipeline," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 15 August 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-iran-trans-caspian-pipeline-turkmenistan/30111805.html>
- 49 Shahnar Hajiev, "Turkmenistan Should Promote the Trans-Caspian Pipeline More Actively," Euractiv, 2 September 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/turkmenistan-should-promote-the-trans-caspian-pipeline-more-actively/>
- 50 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/People#ref342785>
- 51 Wood Mackenzie, "Turkmenistan-China Gas Pipeline," 17 December 2018, <https://www.woodmac.com/reports/upstream-oil-and-gas-turkmenistan-china-gas-pipeline-11165314>
- 52 Hydrocarbons Technology, "The World's Biggest Natural Gas Reserves," 11 November 2013, <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/centralasiachinagasp/>
- 53 Olga Tanas, Anna Shiraevskaya, and Dan Murtaugh, "How Russia-China Gas Pipeline Changes Energy Calculus," *Washington Post*, 25 November 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/how-russia-china-gas-pipeline-changes-energy-calculus/2019/11/25/9aa81f40-0f49-11ea-924c-b34d09bbc948\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/how-russia-china-gas-pipeline-changes-energy-calculus/2019/11/25/9aa81f40-0f49-11ea-924c-b34d09bbc948_story.html)
- 54 Michael Lelyveld, "China Nears Limit on Central Asian Gas," Radio Free Asia, 25 June 2018, [https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy\\_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html](https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html)
- 55 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Market Overview," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article2?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>
- 56 CoFace for Trade, "Turkmenistan—Risk Assessment," 2019, <https://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Turkmenistan>

Construction of a pipeline delivering natural gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI pipeline) began in 2015. The total length of this gas pipeline will be more than 1,800 km (1,120 mi). The pipeline was scheduled to start operations in 2020; however, tensions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India have delayed the project.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup>

### **Gas-to-Liquid Plant**

In 2019, Turkmenistan opened the world's largest natural gas-to-gasoline plant outside Ashgabat at the cost of USD 1.7 billion. The Japanese company Kawasaki Heavy Industries led the project with the support of a Turkish construction company. The plant will process more than a billion cubic meters of natural gas annually and produce 600,000 tons of gasoline a year, among other liquid fuels.<sup>60, 61</sup>

### **Petroleum**

The available oil reserves in Turkmenistan are much smaller than natural gas, and only a small number of foreign petroleum companies operate in the country under production-sharing agreements.<sup>62</sup> Although much interest in the region has been shown, and many conferences and diplomatic efforts focusing on cooperation have been held, contracts and agreements have not been forthcoming. Russian and Chinese interests are positioned for greater involvement.<sup>63</sup>

The state controls all aspects of the energy sector. International firms hoping to operate within the country must be approved by the president and are bound to play a subordinate role to Turkmen companies. Turkmenistan refines most of its oil domestically in two refineries.<sup>64</sup> The refineries produce a range of products, including unleaded gasoline, petroleum coke, roadway materials, laundry detergent, hydro-treated diesel, and lube oil.<sup>65</sup> However, poor infrastructure makes it difficult to deliver oil to consumer markets, and nearly 80% of all petroleum is consumed domestically.<sup>66</sup>

Oil and natural gas exports make up 25% of GDP, and government revenues rise and fall according to energy prices. Public investment, which amounts to 40% of GDP, is dedicated to hydrocarbons.<sup>67, 68</sup>

- 
- 57 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/People#ref342785>
- 58 Michael Lelyveld, "China Nears Limit on Central Asian Gas," Radio Free Asia, 25 June 2018, [https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy\\_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html](https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/energy_watch/china-nears-limit-on-central-asian-gas-06252018100827.html)
- 59 Turkmenistanyň Nebiti we Gazy, "A Start Date for the Construction of the Pakistan TAPI Section Will Be Agreed in Mid-October," 14 October 2019, <http://www.oilgas.gov.tm/en/blog/2981>
- 60 Kawasaki, "Kawasaki Launches World's Largest GTG Plant in Turkmenistan," 28 June 2019, [https://global.kawasaki.com/en/corp/newsroom/news/detail/?f=20190628\\_1858](https://global.kawasaki.com/en/corp/newsroom/news/detail/?f=20190628_1858)
- 61 Gaukhar Erubaeva, "Giant Gas Plant Ready to Open in Turkmenistan," Caspian News, 9 April 2019, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/giant-gas-plant-ready-to-open-in-turkmenistan-2019-4-8-42/>
- 62 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Market Overview," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>
- 63 Crude Accountability (firm), *Turkmenistan's Crude Awakening: Oil, Gas and Environment in the South Caspian* (Alexandria, VA: Crude Accountability, 2009), 11–12, <http://www.crudeaccountability.org/en/uploads/File/turkmenistan/Turkmenistan%20Crude%20Awakening.pdf>
- 64 U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Turkmenistan," 8 June 2019, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm>
- 65 U.S. Department of Commerce, "Turkmenistan 2018," International Trade Administration, 2018, <https://tm.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/124/TurkmenistanCountryCommercialGuide2018.pdf>
- 66 Crude Accountability (firm), *Turkmenistan's Crude Awakening: Oil, Gas and Environment in the South Caspian* (Alexandria, VA: Crude Accountability, 2009), 14–16, <http://www.crudeaccountability.org/en/uploads/File/turkmenistan/Turkmenistan%20Crude%20Awakening.pdf>
- 67 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 68 CoFace for Trade, "Turkmenistan—Risk Assessment," 2019, <https://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Turkmenistan>

## Natural Resources

Turkmenistan is rich in mineral resources, but its mining sector is underdeveloped. The country's mountainous areas contain over 200 deposits of solid minerals, including sulfur, mineral salt, quartz sand, zinc, and numerous other minerals. Raw building materials such as sand, gravel rocks, clay, gypsum, and limestone are also abundant. The country is one of the world's top iodine and bromine producers.<sup>69, 70</sup>

The government is attempting to modernize and expand the mineral industry. By law, the state owns the subsoil and its minerals, which cannot be bought or sold. The sector is controlled by state-owned entities, many with ties to the gas and oil industry. Recent initiatives seek to expand the sector as part of a broader effort to modernize infrastructure and encourage foreign investment.<sup>71, 72</sup>

## Trade

In 2017, Turkmenistan's exports amounted to USD 7.1 billion and its imports to USD 3.35 billion, resulting in a positive trade balance of USD 3.75 billion. The country is the world's 95th-largest export economy.<sup>73</sup>

Turkmenistan's major export partners are China (83.7%) and Turkey (5.1%). The primary exports are gas, crude oil, petrochemicals, textiles, cotton fiber. The major import partners are Turkey (24.2%), Algeria (14.4%), Germany (9.8%), China (8.9%), Russia (8%), and the United States (6.6%). The primary imports are machinery and equipment, chemicals, and foodstuffs.<sup>74</sup>

Turkmenistan is a signatory to a 2004 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the United States, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>75</sup> Trade is hampered by slow customs procedures, a cumbersome contract registration process, and restrictive visa and taxation policies.<sup>76</sup>

---

69 U.S. Geological Survey, "2015 Minerals Yearbook: Turkmenistan," September 2019, <https://prd-wret.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/atoms/files/myb3-2015-tx.pdf>

70 Trend News Agency, "Ministry: Turkmenistan Is Interested in Attracting Investors to Mining Industry," 24 June 2013, <https://en.trend.az/casia/turkmenistan/2164198.html>

71 U.S. Geological Survey, "2015 Minerals Yearbook: Turkmenistan," September 2019, <https://prd-wret.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/palladium/production/atoms/files/myb3-2015-tx.pdf>

72 Trend News Agency, "Ministry: Turkmenistan Is Interested in Attracting Investors to Mining Industry," 24 June 2013, <https://en.trend.az/casia/turkmenistan/2164198.html>

73 Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/tkm/>

74 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

75 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Trade Agreements," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Trade-Agreements>

76 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Trade Barriers," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Trade-Barriers>

## Tourism

Tourism is regulated by the government, who are ambivalent toward foreign tourism. On the one hand, it needs the foreign currency income, but on the other, it is wary of foreign influence. In 2016, only 6,000 foreigners visited Turkmenistan, including those who came on official business.<sup>77</sup> Although every region of Turkmenistan has a rich array of tourist attractions, some visitors claim that they saw no other foreigners while visiting tourist sites.<sup>78, 79, 80</sup>

There are three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Turkmenistan: Kunya-Urgench, Mary (ancient Merv), and Nisa.<sup>81, 82</sup> The Darvaza gas crater (nicknamed “The Gates of Hell”) was created in 1971, when a group of Soviet geologists began drilling on top of a pocket of natural gas. The site collapsed under the weight of the equipment, triggering a chain of collapses that resulted in several open craters, the largest of which is about 70 m (230 ft) across and 20 m (65 ft) deep. The burning pit attracts many tourists every year.<sup>83, 84</sup>

Tourists have to hire guides who serve as minders when they travel around the county, but they are allowed to explore cities on their own.<sup>85</sup> Visa requirements are strict, and people who stay more than three days in the country have to register with the State Migration Service. IDs must be carried at all times, and the police often check documents. In 2017, the government introduced a tourism tax of USD 2 per day for all foreign visitors except diplomats. People who enter the county with a vehicle by land or sea have to pay USD 150 to cross the border. The border between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan has been closed to traffic as of October 2019.<sup>86</sup>

77 Turkmen News, “Is Turkmenistan Turning Its Back on Lucrative Foreign Tourism?” 6 May 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/spotlight/is-turkmenistan-turning-its-back-on-lucrative-foreign-tourism/>

78 World Travel Guide, “Turkmenistan Travel Guide,” 23 October 2019, <https://www.worldtravelguide.net/guides/asia/turkmenistan/>

79 State Committee for Tourism, “Why Travel to Turkmenistan?” n.d., <http://tourism.gov.tm/>

80 Alex Robertson Textor, “What’s it Like to Vacation in Authoritarian Turkmenistan?” Adventure, 24 July 2018, <https://adventure.com/exploring-authoritarian-turkmenistan/>

81 World Travel Guide, “Turkmenistan Travel Guide,” 23 October 2019, <https://www.worldtravelguide.net/guides/asia/turkmenistan/>

82 UNESCO, “*Turkmenistan*,” n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/tm>

83 Natasha Geiling, “This Hellish Pit Has Been on Fire for More than 40 Years,” Smithsonian, 20 May 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/giant-hole-ground-has-been-fire-more-40-years-180951247/>

84 Maeve Shearlaw, “Dropping in on Turkmenistan’s ‘Door To Hell’—In Pictures,” *Guardian*, 18 July 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/-sp-door-to-hell-turkmenistan-in-pictures>

85 Alex Robertson Textor, “What’s it Like to Vacation in Authoritarian Turkmenistan?” Adventure, 24 July 2018, <https://adventure.com/exploring-authoritarian-turkmenistan/>

86 World Travel Guide, “Turkmenistan Travel Guide,” 23 October 2019, <https://www.worldtravelguide.net/guides/asia/turkmenistan/>

## Banking and Finance

### Banking

The Central Bank of Turkmenistan is the country's national bank. The bank, established in 1991, regulates the banking system and supervises financial policies. The banking sector is dominated by six state-run banks, each specializing in a particular economic sector. Other banks that operate in the country are partly state-owned and subject to state control.<sup>87</sup>

The manat is Turkmenistan's national currency. In January 2015, the Central Bank devalued the manat by 19%, to an exchange rate of 3.5 manat to USD 1; a year later, it eliminated consumers' access to hard currency and placed additional limitations on currency conversion. In 2018, the black-market exchange rate in Ashgabat reached 25 manat per USD 1. It has been hovering around 18 manat in 2019. Until 2015, the exchange rate was 2.85 manat to USD 1.<sup>88</sup>

Corruption is endemic. Turkmenistan ranks 161st out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. On a scale of 0 to 100 (where 0 is highly corrupt, and 100 is equivalent to no corruption), Turkmenistan scored 20.<sup>89</sup> The business climate remains challenging due to corruption, state intervention, and authoritarianism.<sup>90</sup>

The domestic private sector's share of the economy is estimated at around 20% as of 2018 when the fuel and energy sector is excluded, that share becomes 63.1%. Privatization is proceeding slowly since few buyers are willing to meet the government's asking prices.<sup>91</sup>

### Finance

Hydrocarbons and petrochemicals are the main drivers of foreign investment, with some interest in the manufacturing, agriculture, and construction sectors. Generally, foreign investors face many obstacles and risks, including exchange rate restrictions, inconsistent regulations, endemic corruption, association with severe human rights abuses, and a lack of experience in dealing with foreign investors. As a result, foreign investors are encouraged to perform due diligence before signing contracts or agreements and to obtain advance payment for goods and services.<sup>92, 93, 94, 95</sup>

Turkmenistan was one of the top five landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) to receive the highest foreign direct investment (FDI), with USD 2 billion in 2018, after a decline of nearly 5% from the previous year. The other four countries on the LLDC list are Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Ethiopia. FDI flow varies according

87 Kamila Aliyeva, "Turkmenistan to Reorganize Its Banking Sector," Azer News, 10 July 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/115980.html>

88 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Market Overview," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>

89 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018," 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>

90 CoFace for Trade, "Turkmenistan—Risk Assessment," 2019, <https://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Turkmenistan>

91 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Market Overview," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>

92 Santander Trade Portal, "Turkmenistan: Foreign Investment," 2019, <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/turkmenistan/investing-3>

93 Shaun Walker, "Edge of Catastrophe: Report Warns Firms and Governments off Turkmenistan," *Guardian*, 14 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/14/edge-of-catastrophe-report-warns-firms-and-governments-off-turkmenistan>

94 Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan: 2011 Investment Climate Statement," March 2011, <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2011/157376.htm>

95 Santander Trade Portal, "Turkmenistan: Foreign Investment," 2019, <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/turkmenistan/investing-3>

to the country's level of development, industrialization, and economic diversification. Turkmenistan's scarcity of new projects and unwillingness to divest from existing projects caused some investors to close down their operations.<sup>96</sup> China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are the leading foreign investors.<sup>97</sup>

## Standard of Living

Turkmenistan has been classified as an upper-middle income country by the World Bank since 2012, with a GDP of USD 40.8 billion in 2018.<sup>98</sup> In 2017, Turkmenistan scored 0.706 on the Human Development Index (HDI), slightly below the average among countries placed in the "high human development" category, occupying 108th place out of 189 countries.<sup>99</sup> The HDI ranks countries based on a variety of indicators such as life expectancy, education, health, standard of living, and gender inequality. The highest score on the HDI is 1.0. Nations that score above 0.80 are considered to have "very high human development."<sup>100</sup>

The average life expectancy in Turkmenistan is 68 years, an increase of 5.2 years since 1990; however, it is still slightly lower than the global average of 70. The relatively low life expectancy is attributed to an inadequate health care system and limited access to clean water in some areas.<sup>101</sup> The fertility rate stands below the global average of 2.5 children per woman, with an average of 2.06 children per woman, the same rate as France. Maternal mortality is very low, at 7 deaths per 100,000 live births, the same rate as Germany and the United Kingdom. Cardiovascular diseases and strokes are the most common causes of death.<sup>102, 103, 104, 105</sup>

The expected years of schooling decreased slightly to 10.8 years, and the literacy rate stands at 99.7%. The gross national income per capita has been rising steadily since 1990, to USD 15,594.<sup>106</sup>

No reliable data about poverty or the economy are published in Turkmenistan.<sup>107</sup> However, in 2019, Turkmenistan was facing its worst economic crisis in three decades, leading to hyperinflation and widespread food shortages and breadlines. One estimate from mid-2018 put the annual inflation rate at almost 300%.<sup>108</sup> The severe economic crisis was likely caused by mismanagement of hydrocarbon revenues, low gas prices, the suspension of gas exports to Russia, artificially overvalued currency, harsh import controls, and poor harvests. According to the

96 UNCTAD, "World Investment Report—Special Economic Zones 2019," United Nations, 2019, [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2019\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2019_en.pdf)

97 Santander Trade Portal, "Turkmenistan: Foreign Investment," 2019, <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/turkmenistan/investing-3>

98 World Bank, "The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Country Context," 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview>

99 UNDP, "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update—Turkmenistan," 2019, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf)

100 World Population Review, "Human Development Index (HDI) by Country 2019," 20 September 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/hdi-by-country/>

101 Borgen Project, "Life Expectancy in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://borgenproject.org/tag/life-expectancy-in-turkmenistan/>

102 World Health Ranking, "Health Profile: Turkmenistan," October 2019, <https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/country-health-profile/turkmenistan>

103 World Health Organization, "Turkmenistan," 2016, [https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/tkm\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/tkm_en.pdf?ua=1)

104 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

105 Max Roser, "Fertility rate," Our World in Data, 2 December 2017, <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate>

106 UNDP, "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update—Turkmenistan," 2019, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf)

107 Asian Development Bank, "Poverty in Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://www.adb.org/countries/turkmenistan/poverty>

108 Chronicles of Turkmenistan, "Expert: Annual Inflation Rate in Turkmenistan Reached Almost 300%," 6 June 2018, <https://en.hronikatm.com/2018/06/expert-annual-inflation-rate-in-turkmenistan-reached-almost-300/>

IMF, the total imports of goods fell by 70% between 2014 and 2018.<sup>109, 110, 111</sup> Interestingly, while thousands of people were lining up to buy basic groceries, the government was spending over USD 2 billion on building an eight-lane highway between Ashgabat and Turkmenabat and blocking people from traveling outside of poor areas in search of work.<sup>112, 113, 114</sup>

In 2019, Ashgabat became the most expensive city in the world for foreigners, behind Zurich and Geneva, following a 40% increase in the cost of imports. A year earlier, the city was ranked 111th on the list of the world's most expensive cities. The drastic reduction in the standard of living of the population since the economic crisis has not been calculated into the latest HDI.<sup>115</sup>

---

109 Madeline Roache, "Hyperinflation and Hunger: Turkmenistan on 'Edge of Catastrophe'," Al Jazeera, 15 July 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/hyperinflation-hunger-turkmenistan-edge-catastrophe-190715200641553.html>

110 Sam Bhutia, "Turkmenistan Is Suffering an Economic Crisis of Its Own Making," Eurasianet, 6 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-is-suffering-an-economic-crisis-of-its-own-making>

111 Jakub Jakóbowski and Mariusz Marszewski, "Crisis in Turkmenistan: A Test for China's Policy in the Region," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, 31 August 2018, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2018-08-31/crisis-turkmenistan-a-test-chinas-policy-region-0>

112 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan Events of 2018," 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

113 Madeline Roache, "Hyperinflation and Hunger: Turkmenistan on 'Edge of Catastrophe'," Al Jazeera, 15 July 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/hyperinflation-hunger-turkmenistan-edge-catastrophe-190715200641553.html>

114 Turkmen Awtoban, "Construction Launch Ceremony of Ashgabat—Turkmenabat Highway is Started," 24 January 2019, <https://turkmenawtoban.com/en/news/construction-launch-ceremony-of-ashgabat--turkmenabat-highway-is-held/>

115 Steven Kilfedder, "Cost of Living Survey Highlights," ECA International, 19 December 2018, <https://www.eca-international.com/insights/articles/december-2018/cost-of-living-survey-highlights>

## Employment

Rampant unemployment is a severe problem facing the country. Although official statistics place the unemployment rate at 3–4%, foreign analysts and independent media surveys suggest that 50–60% of all Turkmen are unemployed, including over half of Ashgabat’s workforce. Unemployment is especially prevalent among youth. Despite government proclamations of support and cooperation toward the business community, dozens of small businesses closed down in Ashgabat in 2019.<sup>116, 117, 118</sup>

## Outlook

Turkmenistan is experiencing its worst economic crisis since independence. Low energy prices since 2014 have undermined the government’s ability to continue subsidizing utilities and foodstuffs. Basic goods are becoming scarce, prices are rising, and wages are shrinking. Currency restrictions, corruption, and a lack of diversification are contributing to economic stagnation.<sup>119, 120, 121</sup>

In 2019, the government announced the privatization of several state-controlled industries like roads, railways, maritime transport, telecommunications, and the national air carrier.<sup>122</sup> The same year, the government signed a five-year contract with Russia to supply natural gas, but the economy is expected to remain under severe pressure regardless. Economic growth is projected to be moderate in 2019 at 6%, and slightly lower in 2020 at 5.7%.<sup>123, 124</sup>

- 
- 116 Orient, Media—Turkmen News Agency, “In 2018, the Unemployment Rate in Turkmenistan Was the Lowest,” 23 January 2019, <https://orient.tm/en/in-2018-the-unemployment-rate-in-turkmenistan-was-the-lowest/>
- 117 *Economist*, “Turkmenistan Finds a Novel Solution to Mass Emigration,” 5 July 2018, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/07/05/turkmenistan-finds-a-novel-solution-to-mass-emigration>
- 118 Chronicles of Turkmenistan, “Turkmenistan Fears the Growth of Terrorism due to High Unemployment Rate,” 25 June 2019, <https://en.hronikatm.com/2019/06/turkmenistan-fears-the-growth-of-terrorism-due-to-high-unemployment-rate/>
- 119 Bruce Pannier, “Turkmenistan’s Uzbek Problem,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>
- 120 Farangis Najibullah, “Take It or Else: Turkmen Officials Forced to Spend Vacations at Overpriced State Resort,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 7 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/avaza-awaza-turkmen-officials-forced-to-spend-vacations-overpriced-state-resort/30041754.html>
- 121 Central Intelligence Agency, “Turkmenistan,” *The World Factbook*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 122 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: Research Defunded, Transportation Privatized, Government Downsized,” 31 January 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-research-defunded-transportation-privatized-government-downsized>
- 123 World Bank, “The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Country Context,” 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview>
- 124 Focus Economic, “Turkmenistan Economic Outlook,” 1 October 2019, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/turkmenistan>



# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Turkmenistan produces more cotton per capita than any other country in the world.                          | True | False |
| 2. | The United States is the world's top buyer of Turkmen cotton.  | True | False |
| 3. | Turkmenistan is trying to revive its dying carpet sector by auctioning rare carpets to foreign collectors. | True | False |
| 4. | Turkmenistan exports natural gas to China via a pipeline that crosses Russia.                              | True | False |
| 5. | Turkmenistan is one of the poorest countries in Central Asia.  | True | False |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment Answers

1. True:  
Almost half of all irrigated lands are allocated for cotton cultivation. For most farmers, cotton is the most important source of income. The state invests millions of dollars in the cotton sector. Cotton production and harvesting rely heavily on forced labor.
2. False:  
In 2018, the United States banned the importing of cotton goods from Turkmenistan without providing a specific reason for the ban. In the summer of 2019, 70 companies, including Nike, IKEA, H&M, and Gap, signed a pledge to halt usage of Turkmen cotton to ensure that forced labor does not find its way into their products.
3. False:  
Turkmen carpets are exported to more than 50 countries. Customs authorities enforce strict regulations over the import or export of carpets. People who wish to take carpets out of Turkmenistan must obtain a certificate from the Carpet Museum in Ashgabat, indicating that the carpet does not have historical value.
4. False:  
The Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline (CAGP) was the first high-volume export pipeline that was built in Turkmenistan, with the goal of circumventing Russia. The CAGP links Turkmenistan with China via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The pipeline was originally called the TUKC pipeline, after the countries it crosses (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and China).
5. False:  
Since 2012, Turkmenistan has been classified as an upper-middle income country by the World Bank. In 2017, Turkmenistan scored 0.706 on the Human Development Index and placed among countries in the “high human development” category, occupying the 108th place out of 189 countries.

## Chapter 4 | Society



Turkmen women in traditional garb.  
Flickr / nathan.groth

### Introduction

After independence, President Niyazov’s regime began to transform Turkmenistan’s tribal society into a unified nation by establishing a personality cult, eliminating the Russian influence on the country, and cutting off Turkmen from the outside world.<sup>1</sup> Today, Turkmenistan is one of the most isolated countries in the world. Tourism is curtailed, tourists have to be accompanied by an accredited guide at all times, and travel outside the country for Turkmen citizens, including for work in neighboring countries, is highly restricted.<sup>2, 3</sup>

The 2016 constitution declared that Turkmenistan is a secular democracy, but all aspects of public life are controlled by the president and his inner circle. Religious and political expression must be approved by the government, and those that are not approved are punished. Unregistered religious groups are banned and religious literature is censored. The government also bans certain people from traveling abroad and pressures citizens to persuade

- 1 Paul Stronski, “Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 2 Paul Stronski, “Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 3 Lonely Planet, “Entry & Exit Formalities—Turkmenistan,” 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/visas>

relatives who live abroad to return. Homosexual relations are criminalized and the laws inadequately protect women from discrimination.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

## Ethnic Groups

The U.S. government estimates the total population of Turkmenistan at 5.4 million. The government of Turkmenistan claims that Turkmenistan is a multinational country with a population of more than 6.2 million people from 100 different nationalities.<sup>7</sup> The majority of Turkmen are Muslim and Turkmen is the state language. Educational institutions teach Turkmen, English, and Russian.<sup>8</sup>

Turkmenistan is largely homogenous, with 85% of the population classified as Turkmen. The two largest minority groups are Uzbeks (5%) and Russians (4%). The rest of the population consists of Armenians, Kazakhs, Tatars, and Ukrainians.<sup>9, 10</sup>

### Turkmen

Ethnic Turkmen trace their origin to the mythical warrior Oghuz Khan and are descendants of the Oghuz tribe.<sup>11</sup> Turkmen are divided into five major tribes: the Teke, Ersary, Goklen, Yasyr, and Yomut. The largest tribe is the Teke (Tekke), consisting of two subdivisions: the Akhal (Ahal) Teke, who inhabit the populous Akhal region in the south, and the Mary Teke, who occupy the Mary region along the border with Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> President Berdymukhamedov is a member of the Akhal Teke as well as the majority of the country's senior officials.<sup>13</sup>

The Yomut (Yomud) tribe is divided between the Western Yomut, who inhabit the Balkan region, bordering the Caspian Sea and Iran, and the Northern Yomut, who are predominant in the Dashoguz region bordering Uzbekistan.<sup>14, 15</sup>

### Russians

Thousands of Russians relocated to Turkmenistan during the Soviet era. Many were brought in to fill administrative and other government positions and became the upper class of the republic. Following independence, the Turkmen regarded Russians as outsiders. Since many Russians held dual citizenship, they were not welcomed by the new government. In 2003, President Niyazov eliminated dual citizenship and many ethnic Russians returned

---

4 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

5 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>

6 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Events of 2018, World Report 2019," 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

7 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>

8 Embassy of Turkmenistan in France, "General Information," n.d., <https://france.tmembassy.gov.tm/fr/turkmenistan/general-information>

9 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 14 November 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

10 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 67.

11 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 20.

12 Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Turkmenistan," February 2007, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Turkmenistan.pdf>

13 Adam Hug, "Spotlight on Turkmenistan," The Foreign Policy Centre, July 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>

14 Global Security, "Turkmenistan—People," 14 June 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-pop.htm>

15 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 68.

to Russia. Turkmenistan has further demonstrated its animosity to ethnic Russians by banning Russian media, greatly reducing Russian studies and Russian language instruction in the educational system, and refusing to recognize degrees from Russian universities.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

## Uzbeks

Most ethnic Uzbeks live in the region near the border with Uzbekistan. Relations between the majority Turkmen and Uzbek minority have been strained. In 2006, the government closed all Uzbek-language schools and shut down the only Uzbek-language newspaper. In 2008, many ethnic Uzbeks were deported, dividing some families because not all members could obtain passports. Many Uzbeks have only temporary residence and are at constant risk of deportation. They also object to the requirement that they must give up their native dress in favor of the Turkmen costume. Uzbeks feel there is a systematic attempt to destroy their language and culture.<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>

## Languages

According to the constitution, the official language of Turkmenistan is Turkmen, which is a member of the Turkic language family. Turkmen was written with a modified Arabic script in the 1920s, then a modified Latin alphabet in the early 1930s, and finally a modified Cyrillic alphabet in 1938. After independence in 1991, Turkmenistan adopted a modified Latin alphabet consisting of 32 letters—23 consonants and 9 vowels. Turkmen is widely spoken in Turkmenistan, by about 72% of the population. There are several dialects in Turkmen such as Tekke, Yomut, Kharsali, Anauli, Salaries, Nerezim, and Goklen. Most government documents are written in Turkmen.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup> Although only a few people in Turkmenistan speak English, in 1993 English was named the second official language, and schools are required to teach English as a subject<sup>25</sup>

The second most spoken language in Turkmenistan is Russian, with about 12% of the population speaking the language. Russian is spoken mostly in Ashgabat and other major cities and towns across the country. However, the number of people who speak the language is declining as a result of government measures to reduce Russian language instruction throughout the country.<sup>26, 27</sup>

Uzbek, a Turkic language with some Persian, Russian, and Arabic influences, is spoken by about 9% of the

- 
- 16 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 17 Bruce Pannier, "Is Turkmenistan Being Pulled into Russia's Orbit?" Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 16 January 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iqshlog-ovozi-turkmenistan-pulled-into-russia-s-orbit/29713898.html>
- 18 Global Security, "Turkmen Language," 3 October 2013, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-language.htm>
- 19 News Briefing Central Asia, "Uzbek-Turkmen Talks Disappoint Both Ethnic Minorities," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, n.d., <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbek-turkmen-talks-disappoint-both-ethnic-minorities>
- 20 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan's Uzbek Problem," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>
- 21 Minority Rights Group International, "Turkmenistan: Uzbeks: Profile," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/uzbeks-4/>
- 22 Viktor Borisovich Zhmuida et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan/Cultural-life#ref1267640>
- 23 Graphic Maps, "Turkmenistan Languages," 1 May 2018, <https://www.graphicmaps.com/turkmenistan/languages>
- 24 Miaschi, John, "What Languages are Spoken in Turkmenistan?" World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-turkmenistan.html>
- 25 Graphic Maps, "Turkmenistan Languages," 1 May 2018, <https://www.graphicmaps.com/turkmenistan/languages>
- 26 Miaschi, John, "What Languages are Spoken in Turkmenistan?" World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-turkmenistan.html>
- 27 Global Security, "Turkmen Language," 3 October 2013, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-language.htm>

population. Uzbek is not taught in schools in Turkmenistan. Uzbek dialects include Tashkent, Afghan, and Ferghana.<sup>28</sup>

Other languages, such as Tatar, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, and Belarusian are spoken by about 7% of the population. Most of the speakers of these languages are immigrants from neighboring countries who also speak Turkmen.<sup>29, 30</sup>

## Religion

Turkmenistan is considered a secular country without an official religion. The constitution guarantees the separation of government and religion. Freedom of religion and the right to choose religion, express and disseminate religious beliefs, and participate in religious observances and ceremonies are also guaranteed in the constitution. In effect, however, Turkmenistan's version of Sunni Islam is the de-facto official religion.<sup>31, 32</sup>

According to the 2016 Law on Religious Organization and Religious Freedom, all religious organizations have to register with the Ministry of Justice, but the ministry will not register religious organizations if their goals or activities contradict the constitution or if they are not recognized as a religion by the grand mufti. The government can also dissolve religious organizations and prohibit activities of unregistered religious groups.<sup>33</sup>

Only recognized religious organizations can provide religious education to children and only up to four hours per week. Religious instruction is not included in the public-school curriculum. Citizens have a right to obtain religious education, but not in private settings, such as at someone's home or without the explicit knowledge of the government. Furthermore, unregistered religious groups are not allowed to provide religious education and people who meet for religious purposes in private settings without government approval can be subject to legal actions.<sup>34, 35</sup> In 2017, five Muslim men were sentenced to 12 years in prison for meeting privately to pray and study the work of Turkish theologian Said Nursi.<sup>36, 37</sup>

According to the U.S. government, 89% of the population is Muslim, most of whom are Sunnis. Small communities of Shia Muslims live along the border with Iran and consist of ethnic Iranians, Azeris, and Kurds. About 9% of the population are Eastern Orthodox—consisting of ethnic Russians and Armenians who belong to the Russian

28 Miaschi, John, "What Languages are Spoken in Turkmenistan?" World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-turkmenistan.html>

29 Graphic Maps, "Turkmenistan Languages," 1 May 2018, <https://www.graphicmaps.com/turkmenistan/languages>

30 Miaschi, John, "What Languages are Spoken in Turkmenistan?" World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-turkmenistan.html>

31 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

32 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religion in Turkmenistan," World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religion-in-turkmenistan.html>

33 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

34 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Event of 2018," World Report, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

35 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

36 Felix Corley, "Turkmenistan: Religious Freedom Survey, January 2017," Forum 18, 6 January 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2244](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2244)

37 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Event of 2018," World Report, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

Orthodox Church or the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>38, 39</sup> The remaining 2% include small communities of Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, Roman Catholics, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Jews, and evangelical Christians, such as Baptists and Pentecostals.<sup>40, 41</sup>

### *Islam in Turkmenistan*

During the Soviet era, Islam was suppressed, atheism was imposed on the population, mosques were closed, and religious practices of Islam were banned. After independence, Islam experienced a renaissance in the country, new mosques were built, and religion was again taught in religious schools.<sup>42</sup>

The majority of Turkmen do not practice religion in a formal way. Many mosques remain relatively empty, including Central Asia's largest mosque, the Turkmenbasy Ruhý Mosque in Niyazov's hometown of Gypjak, which is visited mostly by a large number of male worshippers only on Fridays.<sup>43</sup>

Islam in Turkmenistan can be described as a blend of Sufi mysticism, early shamanism, and Zoroastrianism.<sup>44</sup> Turkmen have long been perceived by conservative Muslims as practicing a form of folk Islam. The perception is based partly on a number of rituals Turkmen perform that do not originate in Islam, including the veneration of saints and the belief in charms and the evil eye.<sup>45</sup>

The significance of Sufism to Turkmen society is felt in worship at shrines and holy sites—an important part of daily life—despite the fact that the veneration of saints (in the place of God) is not permitted by more conservative interpretations of Islam. Many Turkmen, particularly in rural areas, pray at shrines for miracles through appeals to a shrine's patron saint.<sup>46</sup>

Many Turkmen mix pre-Islamic traditions with the Islamic faith to ward off the evil eye (bad luck).<sup>47</sup> It is common to see small salt containers, dried chili peppers, ram's horns, or twigs of the shrub *yuzerlik* tied together into the shape of a small broom above the front door of Turkmen houses. Many Turkmen carry a small piece of *dagdan* wood in their pockets for protection. Others wear bracelets made of camel hair woven with red, orange, black, and white wool. Some women wear silver jewelry with Quranic text tucked inside them and other amulets.<sup>48, 49, 50</sup>

38 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

39 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 14 November 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

40 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

41 Paula Slier, "Turkmenistan Capital as Ghostly as the Jews Who Still Live There," *Jewish Report*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2019/04/18/turkmenistan-capital-as-ghostly-as-the-jews-who-still-live-there>

42 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religion in Turkmenistan," *World Atlas*, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religion-in-turkmenistan.html>

43 Annette Bohr, "Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism," Chatham House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>

44 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>

45 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA, Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 72.

46 David Tyson, "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam Among the Turkmen," *Central Asia Monitor, Online Supplement 1* (1997), <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>

47 Carole Blackwell, *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 39.

48 Paul Theroux, "Letter from Turkmenistan: The Golden Man," *New Yorker*, 28 May 2007, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa\\_fact\\_theroux](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa_fact_theroux)

49 Eurasia Travel, "The Evil Eye," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/the\\_evil\\_eye/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/the_evil_eye/)

50 Advatour, "Turkmen Traditions," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/traditions.htm>

## Eastern (Russian) Orthodox Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church, the dominant faith of the Russian Empire, arrived in Turkmenistan during the Russian colonial occupation. The religion survived the Soviet era and the Russian minority in Turkmenistan retained its religious affiliation, which further set them apart from the Turkmen.<sup>51</sup> The senior Russian Orthodox priest is required to be a Turkmen citizen.<sup>52</sup>

## Cuisine

Turkmenistan's culinary traditions are rooted in its nomadic past. Meat plays an important role in the diet and includes beef, lamb, goat, and camel. Grains are also important staples, as most dishes include rice. Beans, vegetables, fruits, and dairy products round out common Turkmen fare. The national dish is pilaf, or *plov*, a combination of fried rice, mutton, carrots, onions, and garlic, cooked together in a heavy pot. *Plov* is eaten with a flatbread known as *churek*. Other popular dishes include *shashlyk* (meat kabobs), *karachorba* (meat soup with peppers), *shurpa* (soup from meat and vegetables) and *fitchi* (meat pies).<sup>53</sup>

Regional variations in cuisine reflect different natural habitats. Near the Caspian Sea in the southwest, fish is a significant part of the Turkmen diet. In the heartland, a well-known dish is *garyn*—sheep stomach stuffed with minced meat and fat. Preparation of *garyn* involves burying the stuffed stomach in hot sand and then air-drying it in a way that preserves the meat. In contrast to other Central Asians, Turkmen do not eat horsemeat because of the value of horses in the culture.<sup>54, 55</sup>

Vegetarian dishes are also common throughout Turkmenistan. Vegetable- and meat-filled dumplings such as *manti* and *samsa* and cornmeal pancakes are available from vendors. A mixture of beans, cornmeal, and other vegetables is often eaten as a meal. Noodles are common in many dishes.<sup>56, 57</sup>

Tea (*chai*) is by far the most popular beverage; many people go to teahouses (*chaikhana*s) to socialize and drink sweetened tea. *Chal* is fermented camel milk. Coffee is available in hotels and restaurants but is often beyond the means of ordinary Turkmen. Soft drinks are also available in major cities.<sup>58, 59</sup>

Alcohol is not prohibited, despite Turkmenistan being an Islamic country. Wine is made from grapes grown in the Ashgabat area and a locally-distilled vodka, called *Beyik Turkmenbashi Sovgad* (gift of the great Turkmenbashi), is a popular drink. While much of former president Niyazov's cult of personality has faded, the vodka named after

- 
- 51 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 72.
- 52 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report," 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>
- 53 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 84.
- 54 Dara Goldstein, "Turkmenistan on a Plate," January/February 2006, <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>
- 55 Aramco, "Turkmenistan on a Plate," January/February 2006, <https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>
- 56 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 128.
- 57 Joseph Kiprop, "The Culture of Turkmenistan," World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-culture-of-turkmenistan.html>
- 58 Dara Goldstein, "Turkmenistan on a Plate," January/February 2006, <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>
- 59 Aramco, "Turkmenistan on a Plate," January/February 2006, <https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>



him is still popular. Turkmen share a communal bottle with foreign visitors but pay a hefty price to consume it.<sup>60</sup>,  
61Alcohol products cannot be sold to people under the age of 21. Starting in January 2021, it will be illegal to sell  
alcohol on Saturdays and Sundays, or what the government identifies as non-working days<sup>62</sup>

## Traditional Dress

Clothing was designed to fit a nomadic way of life. Traditional dress is often worn daily, not only during festivals. Women wear a flowing, solid-color long dress called *koynek*. The dress has bright tones and is decorated with embroidery (*kesde*) around the neck. Pants called *balak* are worn under the *koynek*. Only the bottom border of the *balak* is visible under the *koynek*. Men wear loose blue trousers often tucked into their boots. A white shirt is worn over the pants and over it a robe made of silk or cotton, usually decorated with red, white, and black stripes.<sup>63, 64</sup>  
<sup>65</sup>At home, Turkmen wear knitted slippers or socks called joraps. The joraps can be made of wool, cotton, or silk; their geometric or floral designs vary by region.<sup>66, 67, 68</sup>

Although Turkmenistan is a predominantly Muslim country, women have never been obligated to wear a veil and very few women do so. Nevertheless, modest clothing is the style.<sup>69</sup> Women comb their hair away from the face, under a colorful scarf. Girls usually braid their hair. Headdresses worn on special occasions can be elaborate and their adornments can serve as displays of a family's wealth. Silver jewelry and pierced ears are common. Men wear soft lamb wool hats called *telpek* or *borek*, which indicate the tribe of the wearer. Young horsemen usually wear white hats and older men wear black and brown hats.<sup>70, 71, 72, 73</sup>

Many young Turkmen prefer Western dress, but there has been some pressure to return to traditional dress. Some consider Western clothing inappropriate. Often, traditional-style clothing and Western-style clothing are worn together.<sup>74, 75</sup>

- 
- 60 Bruce Pannier, "Keeping People's Spirits Up—A Shot of Turkmenbashi or the Kyrgyz Hose," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishlog-ovozi-turkmenistan-kyrgyzstan-vodka-alcohol/25365770.html>
- 61 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 84–85.
- 62 Azer News, "Turkmenistan Limits Retail Sale of Alcohol," 7 January 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/143626.html>
- 63 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress\\_code/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/)
- 64 Anur Tour "Turkmen National Costume," n.d., <https://tourstoturkmenistan.com/index.php?en/blog/turkmen-traditions/turkmen-national-costume.html>
- 65 Countries and their Cultures, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>
- 66 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress\\_code/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/)
- 67 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, *Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 75–76.
- 68 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 83.
- 69 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 83.
- 70 Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 60–61.
- 71 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress\\_code/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/)
- 72 Anur Tour "Turkmen National Costume," n.d., <https://tourstoturkmenistan.com/index.php?en/blog/turkmen-traditions/turkmen-national-costume.html>
- 73 Lonely Planet, "Turkmenistan in Detail," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/background/other-features/a/nar/74845b08-5f1f-4854-b7ab-5c6e2c6fec36/357813>
- 74 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress\\_code/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/)
- 75 Countries and their Cultures, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

## Gender Issues

The law prohibits discrimination based on gender and women ostensibly have full legal equality with men, including equal pay, access to loans, the ability to own a business, and access to government jobs. The law also grants prenatal and postnatal maternity leave and up to three years of unpaid maternity leave. However, the government does not always enforce the law, which does not specify penalties for discrimination.<sup>76</sup>

Discrimination in employment and occupation based on gender is widespread across all sectors of the economy and government. The government restricts women from working in some dangerous and environmentally unsafe jobs and a strong cultural bias against women in positions of power and leadership makes it difficult for them to secure higher-level positions. In general, women are viewed as mothers, responsible for childcare in families, and many are employed in low-paid jobs.<sup>77, 78</sup> The government does not acknowledge, address, or report on discrimination against, nor does it provide statistics on violence against them.<sup>79</sup>

Women account for 43% of the workforce and women's political participation is encouraging. In 2017, women made up more than 20% of the People's Councils, the speaker of parliament (*majilis*) was a woman named Akja Tajiyewna Nurberdiyeva, and nearly 25% of representatives in parliament were women.<sup>80, 81</sup>

The law prohibits violence in any form, but enforcement is inconsistent and there are no specific domestic violence laws that address domestic violence. Although the new Family Code establishes the age of consent at 18 and allows a person to marry at 17 only in special circumstances, forced and child marriages still occur in the country.<sup>82, 83</sup> According to reports, domestic violence against women is rampant, however, most incidents are unreported because victims are either unaware of their rights or afraid of more violence from husbands and relatives.<sup>84, 85</sup>

In 2015, the president signed Turkmenistan's first National Action Plan on Gender Equality, which seeks to combat gender-based violence and end discrimination against women. Other objectives include promoting equal access for women to quality education, health care, and the labor market. While some progress is being made, the

- 
- 76 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>
- 77 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>
- 78 UNFPA, "Taking Action to Promote Gender Equality in Turkmenistan," 11 February 2015, <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/news/taking-action-promote-gender-equality-turkmenistan>
- 79 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>
- 80 United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Reviews the Report of Turkmenistan," 10 July 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23355&LangID=E>
- 81 Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament, "H.E. Mrs. Akja Tajiyewna Nurberdiyeva—Biography," n.d., <https://www.gsws.ae/speaker/h-e-mrs-akja-tajiyewna-nurberdiyeva/>
- 82 United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Reviews the Report of Turkmenistan," 10 July 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23355&LangID=E>
- 83 CIS Legislation, "Family Code of Turkmenistan," 10 January 2012, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=50609>
- 84 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>
- 85 United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Reviews the Report of Turkmenistan," 10 July 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23355&LangID=E>

country is still far from reaching its goal. Women still marry early and thus have few opportunities to obtain a higher education or embark on a career. Only 40% of women attend tertiary school (colleges and universities).<sup>86, 87, 88</sup>

Antidiscrimination laws do not apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons. Society does not accept transgender individuals, and the government does not provide legal protection or recognition of gender identity. Homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the law, punishable by a maximum prison sentence of two years.<sup>89, 90</sup>

## Arts

Turkmenistan has strong traditions of weaving, metalworking, and pottery. Music and poetry are also important; many poems and epic stories have been set to music.<sup>91, 92</sup>

## Carpets

Turkmen carpets and rugs are among the national symbols of Turkmenistan and are sought after all over the world. Produced by nomadic tribes for centuries, these carpets have unique designs that reflect aspects of Turkmen culture and traditions through patterns, color harmony, and the density of the spaces between warps. Turkmen rugs are very distinctive, dominated by dark reds and repeated blue, and black and ivory *gul* print motifs (medallion-like design elements).<sup>93, 94, 95</sup>

In 2001, a Turkmen carpet was registered in *Guinness World Records* as the largest handwoven carpet in the world. The Golden Century Carpet, as it was called, is 14 m (46 ft) wide, 21.5 m (69 ft) long, and weighs 1, 200 kg (2,645 lbs). Forty people worked to create the carpet over seven months.<sup>96, 97, 98</sup>

Since 1992, Turkmenistan has been celebrating Carpet Day on the last Sunday of May to honor Turkmen carpets and rugs.<sup>99</sup>

- 
- 86 UN Women, "Turkmenistan Outlines Upcoming Key Gender Equality Activities," 3 August 2016, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/08/turkmenistan-outlines-upcoming-key-gender-equality-activities>
- 87 Mary Grace Miller, "Girls' Education in Turkmenistan," Borgen Project, 25 August 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/tag/gender-equality-in-turkmenistan/>
- 88 UNFPA, "Taking Action to Promote Gender Equality in Turkmenistan," 11 February 2015, <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/news/taking-action-promote-gender-equality-turkmenistan>
- 89 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan," 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>
- 90 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Event of 2018," World Report, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>
- 91 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 101.
- 92 Countries and their Cultures, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>
- 93 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 34.
- 94 Bukhara Carpets, "Background on Origins of Turkmen Rugs," n.d., <http://www.bukhara-carpets.com/oriental-rugs/about-turkmen-rugs.html>
- 95 Little Persia, "Turkmen Rugs," n.d., <https://www.little-persia.com/rug-guides/rug-origins/turkmen>
- 96 Daily Sabah, "Turkmenistan: Where Intricate Carpets Come to Life," 9 March 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/feature/2018/03/10/turkmenistan-where-intricate-carpets-come-to-life>
- 97 Jeffrey Hays, "Carpets in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, [http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8\\_7b/entry-4827.html](http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4827.html)
- 98 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmen Carpet Museum," n.d., [http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/cities/ashgabat/central\\_ashgabat/turkmen\\_carpet\\_museum/](http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/cities/ashgabat/central_ashgabat/turkmen_carpet_museum/)
- 99 Daily Sabah, "Turkmenistan: Where Intricate Carpets Come to Life," 9 March 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/feature/2018/03/10/turkmenistan-where-intricate-carpets-come-to-life>

## Jewelry

Most Turkmen jewelry is made from silver. Sometimes the silver is coated with a thin plating of gold and adorned with gems. The jewelry worn by women is more than a simple adornment; it also reveals her marital status and wealth. Single women wear embroidered caps with silver bangles and a pointed top. Such headgear can incorporate as many as 100 pieces of jewelry and more can dangle from the sides. Brides wear even more elaborate headwear. A bride from a wealthy family can wear a headpiece that weighs up to 13.6 kg (30 lbs).<sup>100, 101</sup>

## Literature

Turkmen literary tradition is a combination of pre-Islamic Turkic elements fused with Islamic influences. Epics, poems, fairy tales, legends, and stories are often sung or chanted. The *dastan* was an oral record of Turkmen history, values, culture, and language. A combination epic tale and poem that formed the basis of the oral tradition, the *dastan* was sung by singers (*bakshi*) who memorized thousands of lines and accompanied themselves with several instruments. The *bakshi* often traveled among the villages, reciting the poems and singing the stories. *Dastans* played an important role in forming Turkmen identity.<sup>102</sup>

The most celebrated Turkmen poet is Fragi Makhtumkuli (1770–1840). His poems embody mystical, lyrical, religious, social, and patriotic concerns. He saw the world as a tragic place and wished for his people to be liberated, though he doubted that liberty was possible. His skepticism was a source of great despair, and today Turkmen use his poems to invoke national unity.<sup>103, 104</sup>

## Music

The music of Turkmenistan has its origins in tribal nomadic history. Melodies were passed down through the ritual recitation of the *dastan*, and the *bakshi* would personalize them by adding their own interpretations.<sup>105, 106</sup> Traditional instruments include the *duitar*, a stringed instrument made of wood and resembling the two-stringed lute. The *tuiduk* is a wind instrument similar to *surnai*, an instrument played throughout Central Asia. The *zhulzhul* is an instrument shaped like a mountain goat or a bird and played by children. This instrument is essentially a clay pot with a mouthpiece and two holes which the player uses to create a melodic whistling sound.<sup>107, 108</sup>

Western Music is taking root in Ashgabat in some of the clubs that cater to westernized audiences. Although Western music is not prohibited by the authorities, concerts are rare and musicians can perform only if they have a license issued by the state. Turkmen enjoy pop music with Asian melodies and Western dance music.<sup>109</sup>

100 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 107.

101 Joseph Kiprop, "The Culture of Turkmenistan," World Atlas, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-culture-of-turkmenistan.html>

102 Countries and their Cultures, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

103 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2006), 108–110.

104 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 89.

105 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 139–140.

106 Smithsonian Folk Way, "Turkmen Epic Singing: Koroglu," n.d., <https://folkways.si.edu/turkmen-epic-singing-koroglu/world/music/album/smithsonian>

107 Jefferey Hays, "Music in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, [http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8\\_7b/entry-4825.html#chapter-3](http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4825.html#chapter-3)

108 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 50–51.

109 Chronicles of Turkmenistan, "Young, Loud, and Turkmen," 4 June 2013, <https://en.hronikatm.com/2013/06/young-loud-and-turkmen/>

The performance of U.S. pop singer Jennifer Lopez in July 2013 at the birthday party of President Berdymukhamedov is a testimony to the growing popularity of Western music in the country.<sup>110</sup>

## Sports and Recreation

Turkmen athletes participate in international competitions, and multifunctional stadiums, sports and recreation complexes, race courses, and sports facilities have been built around the country.<sup>111</sup>

Turkmenistan has a national hockey team that competes in international competitions. The team has won the Asian Games and qualified for the Asian Winter Games in 2021. There is also a professional ice arena and a sports complex for winter sports in Ashgabat.<sup>112</sup>

Soccer is a popular sport. Turkmenistan has been a member of FIFA and AFC since 1994. The country hosted several international soccer games and their soccer clubs also participate in the Commonwealth of Independent States Cup. The local leagues are called Ýokary Liga.<sup>113, 114</sup>

Turkmenistan is working on spreading the national wrestling style, called goresh. In the game, wrestlers have to force the opponent to touch the mat with any part of the body except the feet. The World Goresh Wrestling Federation has been operating since 2015, with its headquarters in Ashgabat. Goresh federations for this sport have been established in more than 20 countries, in Europe, Africa, and South America. Women also participate in this sport.<sup>115, 116</sup>

The 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games took place in Ashgabat in 2017. To host the games, Turkmenistan spent USD 7.3 billion to build an Olympic complex with an Olympic stadium and a water sports center consisting of the world's largest indoor swimming pool, as well as a new international airport. Today, Turkmenistan stands among a number of states that can host major international sports events.<sup>117, 118</sup> To make room for the massive complex, located on the outskirts of Ashgabat, thousands of structures were demolished and about 50,000 residents were forcibly relocated, in violation of international law.<sup>119</sup>

110 Miriam Elder, "Jennifer Lopez Sparks Controversy with Show for Turkmenistan President," *Guardian*, 20 June 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/30/jennifer-lopez-performance-turkmenistan>

111 Embassy of Turkmenistan, "Sport and International Sport Cooperation of Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://france.tmembassy.gov.tm/fr/turkmenistan/sport-and-international-sport-cooperation-of-turkmenistan>

112 Embassy of Turkmenistan, "Sport and International Sport Cooperation of Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://france.tmembassy.gov.tm/fr/turkmenistan/sport-and-international-sport-cooperation-of-turkmenistan>

113 Topend Sports, "Sports in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.topendsports.com/world/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

114 Ashgabat 2017, "Health and Happiness—The Motto of Sports Month in Turkmenistan," 5 April 2016, <http://ashgabat2017.com/news/2016-04-05T1929-Health-and-Happiness---The-motto-of-sports-month-in-Turkmenistan>

115 Embassy of Turkmenistan, "Sport and International Sport Cooperation of Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://france.tmembassy.gov.tm/fr/turkmenistan/sport-and-international-sport-cooperation-of-turkmenistan>

116 Euro News, "Word of the Day: Goresh," 15 August 2017, <https://www.euronews.com/2017/08/15/word-of-the-day-goresh>

117 Bruce Pannier, "Some Winner, Many Losers, after Turkmenistan Hosts Asian Games," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 September 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-asian-games-winners-losers-money-berdymukhammedov/28762293.html>

118 Embassy of Turkmenistan, "Sport and International Sport Cooperation of Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://france.tmembassy.gov.tm/fr/turkmenistan/sport-and-international-sport-cooperation-of-turkmenistan>

119 Farangis Najibullah, "Turkmenistan Gets Low Scores for Olympic-Sized Sports-Infrastructure Investment," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 May 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-aimag-infrastructure-investment-sports-white-elephant/28489622.html>

## ***Horseback Riding***

Horseback riding is a source of national pride and the cult of the horse is an essential feature of Turkmen culture. Historically for nomads who frequently engaged in warfare, a good horse often meant the difference between life and death. Given such an essential role in tribal survival, horses were well cared for by their masters.<sup>120</sup> Today, there are many competitive horse displays and races. One famous event requires riders to race on trips lasting up to 15 days. The most popular breed is the Akhal-Teke horse, which is the national symbol, particularly suited to the harsh environment of Turkmenistan.<sup>121, 122, 123</sup>

The state seal, which was created in 1992, bears the image of a white Akhal-Teke horse standing against a background of a blue sky. The Holiday of the Turkmen Horse was established in 1995 and is celebrated on 27 April with horse races at the hippodrome in Ashgabat.<sup>124</sup>

- 
- 120 Jonathan Maslow, "The Golden Horses of Turkmenistan," *Aramco World*, May/June 1997, <https://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/199703/the.golden.horses.of.turkmenistan.htm>
- 121 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, *Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 119.
- 122 Horse Hints, "Akhal-Teke," n.d., <http://horsehints.org/Breeds/Akhal-Teke.htm>
- 123 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, *Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 119.
- 124 Countries and their Cultures, "Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |   |      |       |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Oghuz Khan is the mythical ancestor of all Turkmen.                   | True | False |
| 2. | Alcohol is banned in Turkmenistan.                                    | True | False |
| 3. | The Uzbek minority enjoys a privileged status in Turkmenistan.        | True | False |
| 4. | Religious instruction is mandatory in public schools.                 | True | False |
| 5. | The dastan is an oral record of Turkmen history, values, and culture. | True | False |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment Answers

1. True:  
Turkmen tribes claim a common mythical ancestor, Oghuz Khan. This genealogical connection is strong within all Turkmen tribes.
2. False:  
Although Muslims do not drink alcohol, homemade vodka called Beyik Turkmenbashi Sovgad (The Gift of the Great Turkmenbashi) is a popular drink. Turkmen enjoy sharing a bottle of this drink with each other or with foreign guests.
3. False:  
Relations between the majority Turkmen and minority Uzbeks are strained. Many Uzbeks have only temporary residence and are at constant risk of deportation. In 2008, many ethnic Uzbeks were deported because they could not obtain passports.
4. False:  
Religious instruction is not included in the public school curriculum. Religious organizations can provide religious education to children up to four hours per week. Citizens have a right to obtain religious education, but not in private settings.
5. True:  
The dastan is combination of epic tale and poem that formed the basis of Turkmen oral tradition. The dastan was sung by bakhshi (singers) who memorized thousands of lines and performed with several instruments.



## Chapter 5 | Security



The corps of drums of the Military Institute of the Ministry of Defense of Turkmenistan.  
Wikipedia / Kerri-Jo Stewart

### Introduction

The nomadic tribes of Turkmenistan lived under the influence of the Seljuk Empire, the Mongol Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara, and the Russian Empire before they were incorporated into the Soviet Union. Since independence in 1991, creating a national identity and apart from the influences of Russia have become strategic challenges for Turkmenistan.<sup>1</sup>

Upon independence, Turkmenistan declared a policy of “positive neutrality.” As the least populated Central Asian country, with a population of just 5.4 million, it has faced serious threats from its neighbors—Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan by land, and Russia and Azerbaijan by the Caspian Sea—and had no capacity to stand against invasions. In 1995, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed Turkmenistan’s “permanent

1 Adam Hug, “Spotlight on Turkmenistan,” Foreign Policy Centre,” 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>

neutrality,” a stance that continues to define the country’s foreign policy.<sup>2,3</sup>

For the first 20 years after independence, Ashgabat remained deeply isolated while engaging in development and nation-building. During those years, Russia was the only route to transport Turkmen gas to the international market—the western route could not open due to ongoing maritime border disputes in the Caspian Sea. The southern route was closed because of the international embargo on Iran, and the southeastern route to Pakistan and India (TAPI pipeline) was blocked by instability in Afghanistan. Since 2009, with the opening of the Turkmenistan–Kazakhstan–China gas pipeline, Turkmenistan has been able to reduce its dependency on Russia and reach China. Today, Turkmenistan is becoming more active in regional and international cooperation projects but does not aspire to a leadership role in the region.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

## Foreign Relations

### *United States-Turkmenistan Relations*

The United States recognized Turkmenistan’s independence in 1991 and established diplomatic relations with Turkmenistan in 1992. In 2007, the two countries agreed to find ways to cooperate on political matters, human rights, economic and agricultural reform, education, health care, energy, and security. The two countries are partners in the New Silk Road vision, a competing plan developed by the United States and China aimed at reviving the ancient trade routes that connected Asia with Europe and promoting regional integration and economic cooperation in the region and beyond.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup> The largest share of foreign assistance provided by the United States to Turkmenistan (USD 430,000 in 2018) is dedicated to nonproliferation, antiterrorism, demining, and military education and training programs.<sup>11</sup>

Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian republic that did not support the United States and its allies in the campaign against Al Qaida and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001. The Turkmen government allowed access to its airspace and airfields only for humanitarian aid shipments and did not allow foreign troops on its soil.<sup>12,13</sup>

- 
- 2 Selçuk Çolakoğlu, “The New Concept of Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy,” Turkish Center for Asia Pacific Studies, 22 March 2013, <http://www.asianpacificcenter.org/turkmenistan-foreign-policy.html>
  - 3 Global Security, “Turkmenistan Foreign Relations,” 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-forel.htm>
  - 4 Selçuk Çolakoğlu, “The New Concept of Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy,” Turkish Center for Asia Pacific Studies, 22 March 2013, <http://www.asianpacificcenter.org/turkmenistan-foreign-policy.html>
  - 5 Adam Hug, “Spotlight on Turkmenistan,” Foreign Policy Centre, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>
  - 6 Annette Bohr, “Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism,” Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>
  - 7 James McBride, “Building the New Silk Road,” Council on Foreign Relations, 22 May 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/building-new-silk-road>
  - 8 Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Turkmenistan,” 8 July 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-turkmenistan/>
  - 9 U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan, “History of the U.S. and Turkmenistan Relations,” n.d., <https://tm.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/io/>
  - 10 Voice of America, “U.S.-Turkmenistan Relations,” 20 March 2013, <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/turkmenistan-silkroad-integration/1625377.html>
  - 11 Congressional Research Service, “Turkmenistan,” 20 November 2017, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10303>
  - 12 Jane’s Defence, “Turkmenistan: External Affairs: Foreign Policy Overview,” *IHS Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 June 2011.
  - 13 Global Security, “Turkmenistan—Foreign Relations,” 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-forel.htm>

Turkmenistan has been a member of the NATO's Partnership for Peace since 1994, but its ties to the organization are mostly symbolic.<sup>14</sup> In the late 2000s, Turkmenistan agreed to cooperate with NATO because of concern over instability in Afghanistan and increased Taliban activity on the Afghan-Turkmen border. After President Berdymukhamedov came to power in 2007, Turkmenistan participated in training programs to improve border security and combat drug and other illicit trafficking from Afghanistan, but relations with the West remained frosty.<sup>15</sup>

The United States has officially condemned human rights violations in the country. In January 2018, the United States again designated Turkmenistan as a Country of Particular Concern because of its infringement on religious freedom, and in May of that year, banned import of cotton products from Turkmenistan over allegations of human rights abuses.<sup>16, 17</sup>

The United States wants Turkmenistan to diversify its gas market with the Trans-Caspian pipeline, so that it carries Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Azerbaijan.<sup>18, 19</sup> The United States is also an avid supporter of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline, hoping that it will promote reconstruction in Afghanistan and facilitate reconciliation between Pakistan and India.<sup>20</sup>

## Relations with Other Countries

In 2018, Turkmenistan, Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan signed an agreement that establishes the formula for dividing the territorial waters and fishing zones in the Caspian Sea, but the issue of dividing the seabed that contains rich oil and gas fields is still subject to further negotiations. However, signing the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea has been an important step in easing tensions between the five countries that share the Caspian Sea.<sup>21, 22</sup>

The Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was signed by the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea—Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan—in August 2008, marking the first important step toward regional security and economic development. Russia and Iran are blocking progress on the issue of dividing the seabed.<sup>23</sup>

14 Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "U.S. relations With Turkmenistan," 8 July 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-turkmenistan/>

15 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>

16 USAID, "Statement by Administrator Mark Green on Designation of Countries of Particular Concern for Religious Freedom," Press Release, 5 January 2018, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jan-5-2018-statement-usaid-administrator-mark-green>

17 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "U.S. Bans Import of Cotton Products from Turkmenistan," 24 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-bans-import-cotton-products-turkmenistan/29247850.html>

18 Victoria Clement, "What Are U.S. Interests in Turkmenistan?" *Diplomat*, 18 June 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/what-are-us-interests-in-turkmenistan/>

19 Adam Hug, "Spotlight on Turkmenistan," Foreign Policy Centre, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>

20 Annette Bohr, "Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism," Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>

21 Market Watch, "Five Countries Bordering the Caspian Sea Met to Split Up Its Oil Riches," 12 August 2019, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/five-countries-bordering-the-caspian-sea-met-to-split-up-its-oil-riches-2019-08-12>

22 BBC "Caspian Sea: Five Countries Sign Deal to End Dispute," 12 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45162282>

23 IISS, "The Caspian Sea Treaty," November 2018, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/the-caspian-sea-treaty>

## Afghanistan

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, relations between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan strengthened. The leaders of the two countries share a vision of economic cooperation and projects to boost their economic growth. Turkmenistan provides funds for the Afghan railway network and technical support for the Afghan carpet industry. In 2016, Turkmenistan opened the first rail link with Afghanistan, intended to extend to Tajikistan.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>

The fall of the Taliban opened up the possibility of a trans-Afghan pipeline for Turkmen gas exports. In December 2010, the TAPI gas pipeline deal was signed by Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.<sup>27</sup> The project costs have risen to nearly USD 10 billion, from the original estimate of USD 3.3 billion, and security issues surrounding the pipeline are still unresolved.<sup>28</sup>

Since 2014, Turkmen security forces have clashed with Taliban fighters and allied jihadist groups on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Instability on the porous Afghan border prompted Turkmenistan to mobilize reserve troops and combat equipment, build fences, set up new border posts, and carry out incursions into Afghan territory on a large scale.<sup>29</sup>

In February 2019, the leaders of the two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement after discussing bilateral trade, energy, cultural ties, and the ongoing construction of the TAPI natural gas pipeline. Turkmenistan has also expressed interest in helping with the peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.<sup>30</sup>

## Azerbaijan

During President Niyazov's rule, the relationship between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan was often described as a "cold war." Niyazov's death in 2006 created the possibility for reducing tensions. After the election of President Berdimukhamedov, the Turkmen embassy in Baku was reopened, and in May 2008, President Berdimukhamedov visited Azerbaijan for the first time.<sup>31</sup> However, disputes over how to divide the Caspian Sea's seabed, which contains oil and gas reserves, continue to jeopardize plans for a natural gas pipeline and hurt bilateral relations.<sup>32,</sup>

33, 34

- 
- 24 M. Ashraf Haidari, "Afghanistan and Turkmenistan: A Model for Regional Economic Cooperation," *Diplomat*, 6 July 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/afghanistan-and-turkmenistan-a-model-for-regional-economic-cooperation/>
- 25 Tolo News, "Afghanistan, Turkmenistan Expand Economic, Trade Ties," 27 August 2015, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistanturkmenistan-expand-economic-trade-ties>
- 26 Daily Mail, "Turkmenistan Opens First Rail Link with Afghanistan," 28 November 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-3977936/Turkmenistan-opens-rail-link-Afghanistan.html>
- 27 Peter Dale Scott (blog), "Afghanistan, Turkmenistan Oil and Gas, and the Projected Pipeline," 16 May 2002, <http://www.peterdalescott.net/q7.html>
- 28 Annette Bohr, "Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism," Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>
- 29 Annette Bohr, "Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism," Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>
- 30 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmen, Afghan Presidents Sign Strategic Partnership Agreement," Afghan Online Press, 21 February 2019, <http://www.aopnews.com/central-asia/turkmen-afghan-presidents-sign-strategic-partnership-agreement/>
- 31 Fuad Mukhtarli August, "With Berdimuhamedow in Baku, Turkmenistan Looks to Increase Caspian Economic Integration," Caspian News, 9 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/with-berdimuhamedow-in-baku-turkmenistan-looks-to-increase-caspian-economic-integration-2017-8-9-59/>
- 32 Alexandros Petersen, "Nabucco and Trans-Caspian Relations," Atlantic Council, 18 September 2009, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nabucco-and-transcaspian-relations/>
- 33 Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Relations: Shattered Brotherhood," Eurasia Daily Monitor, 27 June 2012, <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkmenistan-relations-shattered-brotherhood/>
- 34 Market Watch, "Five Countries Bordering the Caspian Sea Met to Split Up Its Oil Riches," 12 August 2019, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/five-countries-bordering-the-caspian-sea-met-to-split-up-its-oil-riches-2019-08-12>

Despite the ongoing disagreements, officials in Ashgabat know that good relations with Azerbaijan are critical to Turkmenistan's desire to diversify gas export routes beyond Russia and China.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the gas pipeline project to Europe through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, the two countries are exploring more opportunities for cooperation. Implementation of the Agreement on Transit and Transport Cooperation (also known as the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement), which was signed by Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey in 2017, will connect by railway and highway the Afghan province of Herat with Ashgabat and the port of Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan, and then continue on to Baku, Azerbaijan, Tbilisi, Poti, Batumi, Ankara, and Istanbul.<sup>36, 37</sup>

In 2018, Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev visited Ashgabat and signed several agreements with Turkmenistan's president, including for cooperation in the areas of economy, trade, transport, communication, technology, science, education, energy, and the Caspian Sea.<sup>38</sup>

## Iran

Since its independence, Turkmenistan has had good relations with Iran. Two railway lines connect the two countries; there are two gas pipelines running from Turkmenistan to northern Iran, and Turkmenistan also exports electricity to Iran. Turkmenistan's policy of "positive neutrality" means that Turkmenistan has never participated in international sanctions against Iran.<sup>39</sup> In 2017, however, relations with Iran deteriorated when Turkmenistan stopped gas exports to Iran to power its energy-starved northeastern regions. The Turkmen government demanded that Iran pay a decade-old outstanding gas debt of USD 1.8 billion, which Iran disputes and has no intention of paying.<sup>40, 41, 42, 43</sup>

Iran is not one of the major trade partners of Turkmenistan, but in 2019, Iran's trade with Turkmenistan hovered above USD 300 million. Iran's exports to Turkmenistan include potatoes, apples, sugar, cement, plastic products, construction materials, tiles, and ceramics.<sup>44</sup>

- 
- 35 Fuad Mukhtarli August, "With Berdimuhamedow in Baku, Turkmenistan Looks to Increase Caspian Economic Integration," Caspian News, 9 August 2017, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/with-berdimuhamedow-in-baku-turkmenistan-looks-to-increase-caspian-economic-integration-2017-8-9-59/>
- 36 Azer News, "Turkmenistan to Further Strengthen Good-Neighborly Relations with Azerbaijan," 21 December 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/143024.html>
- 37 Azer New, "Ilham Aliyev: Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Relations Reached New Level," 18 October 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/139368.html>
- 38 New Times, "Ashgabat Agreements: Azerbaijan Opens New Horizons for Cooperation," 30 November 2018, <http://newtimes.az/en/organisations/5922>
- 39 Bruce Pannier, "The Strangely Boring Visit of Iran's President to Turkmenistan," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 30 March 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-iran-rohani-turkmenistan-boring-visit/29135737.html>
- 40 Bruce Pannier, "The Strangely Boring Visit of Iran's President to Turkmenistan," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 30 March 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-iran-rohani-turkmenistan-boring-visit/29135737.html>
- 41 Reuters, "Iran Ready to Seek Arbitration in Turkmenistan Gas Row," 29 January 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkmenistan-iran-arbitration/iran-ready-to-seek-arbitration-in-turkmenistan-gas-row-idUSKBN1F118K>
- 42 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmen Cutoff of Iran Leaves Dwindling Gas Options for Ashgabat," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 2 January 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-iran-gas-dispute-dwindling-options/28209476.html>
- 43 Orkhan Jalilov, "Iran & Turkmenistan Try to Put Gas Dispute behind Them," Caspian News, 6 May 2019, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-turkmenistan-try-to-put-gas-dispute-behind-them-2019-5-16-17/>
- 44 Financial Tribune, "Iran's Trade with Turkmenistan Tops \$300m," 28 January 2019, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/96423/irans-trade-with-turkmenistan-tops-300m>

The two countries have mutual interests in joint projects in the Caspian Sea and regional and international cooperation. In early 2018, the presidents of the two countries met in Ashgabat and oversaw the signing of 13 agreements that covered a variety of areas, from culture, arts, and education to customs, agriculture, and aviation. The main interest, however, was energy.<sup>45, 46</sup>

## **Kazakhstan**

There is a growing recognition among Central Asian states that deepening regional trade is mutually beneficial. Since 2017, Kazakhstan—headed by outgoing President Nursultan Nazarbayev—has been increasingly pursuing opportunities to boost regional cooperation and distance itself from Russia.<sup>47</sup>

In April 2017, President Berdymukhamedov visited his Kazakh counterpart to discuss bilateral relations in energy, transit, and transport, and also mark the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During that visit, the two leaders signed a treaty on strategic partnership and an agreement on demarcation of the Kazakh-Turkmen state border.<sup>48</sup>

The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway, which was launched in 2014, connects the landlocked countries with the Persian Gulf. The 930-km (578-mi) route runs from western Kazakhstan through Turkmenistan to northwestern Iran. The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan section of the line opened in 2013, leading to a 38% boost in bilateral trade.<sup>49</sup> The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) now includes China and Uzbekistan and runs from Teheran to Shanghai. The total length of the route is about 10,000 km (6,213 mi) and the total travel time is about 14 days.<sup>50, 51</sup>

The two countries were among the founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) in 1992, along with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup>

## **Uzbekistan**

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have enjoyed good relations since President Berdymukhamedov came to power in 2006. Furthermore, until Uzbekistan's leadership change in 2016, Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian neighbor with which Uzbekistan enjoyed good relations.<sup>55</sup>

45 Fars News Agency, "Ashgabat: Turkmenistan Eager for Broader Ties with Iran," 13 May 2019, <https://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13980223000787>

46 Catherine Putz, "What Is Iran's Interest in Maintaining Relations with Turkmenistan?" *Diplomat*, 29 March 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/what-is-irans-interest-in-maintaining-relations-with-turkmenistan/>

47 Annette Bohr, "Kazakhstan: Reaching Out to Central Asian Neighbours," Chatham House, 4 December 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/kazakhstan-reaching-out-central-asian-neighbours>

48 Malika Orazgaliyeva, "Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan Sign Strategic Partnership Agreement, Border Accord," *Astana Times*, 20 April 2017, <https://astanatimes.com/2017/04/kazakhstan-turkmenistan-sign-strategic-partnership-agreement-border-accord/>

49 Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran Launch Railroad to Get Trade on Track," *Eurasianet*, 3 December 2014, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-turkmenistan-and-iran-launch-railroad-to-get-trade-on-track>

50 On the MoS Way, "Uzbekistan Joins China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway Corridor," 6 August 2019, <https://www.onthemosway.eu/uzbekistan-joins-china-kazakhstan-turkmenistan-iran-railway-corridor/?cn-reloaded=1>

51 The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200 km long multi-modal network of ship, rail, and road routes for the transport of freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe.

52 Azer News, "Turkmenistan Initiates Adoption of UN Resolution on Aral Sea," 30 May 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/151459.html>

53 Phillip Pangalos, "Facing Up to the Challenges of the Fast Disappearing Aral Sea," *Euro News*, 31 August 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/08/31/facing-up-to-the-challenges-of-the-fast-disappearing-aral-sea>

54 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "The History of IFAS Creation," n.d., <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/56?breadcrumbs=no&title=aral>

55 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan's Uzbek Problem," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>

Today, Turkmenistan is an important trade partner of Uzbekistan.<sup>56</sup> In 2018, Berdymukhamedov paid a state visit to Uzbekistan to celebrate the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>57</sup> In 2019, Berdymukhamedov again visited Uzbekistan for an official visit to discuss the enhancement of trade, economic and investment ties, and cooperation on matters such as security, transportation, science, technology, education, communication, and culture.<sup>58, 59, 60</sup>

The Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China (TUKC) gas pipeline project, which began operations in 2009, is a testament to their cooperation. Uzbekistan has also accepted Turkmenistan's invitation to participate in the TAPI gas line project. In 2019, the two countries began cooperating on a project to establish an Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman transport and transit corridor.<sup>61</sup>

Turkmenistan's construction of the Altyn Asyr (Golden Era) Lake, also known as Lake Turkmen, which opened in 2009, has raised concerns in Uzbekistan that the Amu Darya River will be depleted and cause severe water shortages in Uzbekistan. The withdrawal of water from the Amu Darya to the Karakum Canal is another cause for concern in Uzbekistan.<sup>62, 63, 64</sup>

The demarcation of the border between the two countries has been under negotiations since 2001. In the early 2000s, talks on border issues almost ceased.<sup>65</sup> In 2019, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan discussed the issues of delimitation and demarcation of the common state border and prepared a draft of the demarcation of some sections of the border.<sup>66, 67</sup> The development of the border regions is a high priority for both countries.<sup>68</sup>

Uzbekistan's government has never shown much interest in the ethnic Uzbek community in neighboring Turkmenistan. While there are no reliable official figures on Uzbeks in Turkmenistan, the population of ethnic Uzbeks is estimated at a little below 10%. Ethnic Uzbeks tend to live near the border with Uzbekistan.<sup>69</sup> Turkmenistan's

- 
- 56 Azer News, "Turkmenistan among Important Trade Partners of Uzbekistan—Envoy," 5 September 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/137126.html>
- 57 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmen President Berdymukhammedov Wraps up Official Visit to Uzbekistan," 24 April 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmen-president-berdymukhammedov-wraps-up-visit-uzbekistan/29189761.html>
- 58 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "President of Turkmenistan Arrived in the Republic of Uzbekistan on a Working Visit," n.d., <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/1765>
- 59 Alberto Turkstra, "Note of Comment on Relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Ahead of the Visit by President Berdimuhamedov to Tashkent," European Institute for Asian Studies, April 2018, <https://www.eias.org/news/note-of-comment-on-relations-between-turkmenistan-and-uzbekistan-ahead-of-the-visit-by-president-gurbanguly-berdimuhamedov-to-tashkent/>
- 60 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, "The Presidents of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Stand for the Intensification of the Intergovernmental Dialogue," 28 November 2019, <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/1766>
- 61 Azer News, "Turkmenistan among Important Trade Partners of Uzbekistan—Envoy," 5 September 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/137126.html>
- 62 Murat Sadykov, "Turkmenistan: Soviet-Style Vanity Fuels Artificial Lake Project," Eurasianet, 9 September 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-soviet-style-vanity-fuels-artificial-lake-project>
- 63 Ramon E. Collado, "Water War in Central Asia: The Water Dilemma of Turkmenistan," Geo Political Monitor, 30 November 2015, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/water-war-in-central-asia-the-water-dilemma-of-turkmenistan/>
- 64 European Parliament Think Tank, "Water Disputes in Central Asia: Rising Tension Threatens Regional Stability," 28 October 2015, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2015\)571303](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2015)571303)
- 65 Relief Web, "Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential," 4 April 2002, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/central-asia-border-disputes-and-conflict-potential>
- 66 Azer News, "Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan Prepare Common State Border Draft Demarcation," 6 May 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/150230.html>
- 67 Azer News, "Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan Discuss Delimitation of Common Border," 13 November 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/158426.html>
- 68 Azer News, "Turkmenistan among Important Trade Partners of Uzbekistan—Envoy," 5 September 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/137126.html>
- 69 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan's Uzbek Problem," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>

discriminatory policies have adverse effects on minority Uzbeks, especially in the eastern provinces of Dashoguz and Lebap.<sup>70</sup>

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are the only former Soviet republics in Central Asia that are not members of the Russian-sponsored Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which consists of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>71</sup> Permanent neutrality has also helped Turkmenistan avoid membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, which is also sponsored by Russia.<sup>72</sup>

## Russia

Since independence, Turkmenistan's relations with Russia have been strained over the mistreatment of ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan and gas pricing. Between 2016 and 2019, Russia stopped purchasing Turkmen gas, depriving the country of important source of currency.<sup>73</sup> Russia objects to any pipeline across the Caspian Sea, as it would provide an alternative to the Russian pipeline infrastructure that transports Central Asian gas to Europe. Another issue affecting relations is Russia's concern about the security situation on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Russia has offered Ashgabat military aid to deter terrorist threats originating in Afghanistan.<sup>74, 75, 76</sup>

## Police

Turkmenistan's policy of permanent neutrality has steered its security services away from addressing external threats and toward a focus on internal threats to the regime.<sup>77</sup> Law enforcement is overseen by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Security (KNB), successor to the Soviet-era KGB.<sup>78</sup> The police force consists of about 25,000 members and is equipped with small arms and some armored vehicles. Local law enforcement handles issues related to general law and order. Investigations related to corruption and drug-related crimes are under the auspices of the Serious Crime Squad. Violent crime falls under the regional internal affairs directorates. The traffic police are particularly notorious for their solicitation of bribes.<sup>79</sup>

During the 10-year tenure of internal affairs minister Isgender Mulikov, the Turkmen police were often characterized as unprofessional and brutal; corruption, lawlessness, torture, and disregard for the law were all associated with

- 
- 70 Minority Groups International, "Turkmenistan Uzbeks," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/uzbeks-4/>
- 71 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmen President Berdymukhammedov Wraps up Official Visit to Uzbekistan," 24 April 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmen-president-berdymukhammedov-wraps-up-visit-uzbekistan/29189761.html>
- 72 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 73 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Russia's Gazprom Resumes Buying Turkmen Gas after Three-Year Halt," 16 April 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-gazprom-turkmenistan/29883131.html>
- 74 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 75 Arkady Dubnov, "A New Russian Turn to Turkmenistan?" Carnegie Moscow Center, 18 February 2016, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/62814>
- 76 Marcin Kaczmariski, "Russia-China Relations in Central Asia: Why Is There a Surprising Absence of Rivalry?" Asan Forum, Open Forum, 19 August 2019, <http://www.theasanforum.org/russia-china-relations-in-central-asia-why-is-there-a-surprising-absence-of-rivalry/>
- 77 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 78 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Berdymukhammedov Shuffles Turkmen Security Officials," 6 October 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-reshuffle-/27291035.html>
- 79 Jane's Defence, "Turkmenistan: Security and Foreign Forces: Police," *IHS Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 11 November 2009.



the police force. In October 2019, Mulikov was removed from office by the president. Two months later, he was convicted of abuse of office and receipt of bribes, and was reportedly sentenced to 20–25 years in prison.<sup>80, 81, 82</sup>

Since October 2019, the new minister of internal affairs has taken measures to tackle corruption in the police force by installing cameras to monitor officers attempting to extort bribes. Law enforcement employees were also ordered to lose weight or lose their jobs, regardless of their rank, year of service, or qualifications.<sup>83</sup>

### ***State Border Guards Service***

The Turkmenistan Border Guards Service is an independent agency that reports directly to the president and is deployed along the borders of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iran; it is generally inept and likely engages in the trafficking of illegal goods into the country. Turkmen border guards who engaged with militants along the border with Afghanistan have been killed and even reportedly refused to fight back against the Taliban and other militants, raising questions about the ability of these troops to protect the state from outside threats.<sup>84, 85, 86</sup>

### ***The Presidential Guard Service***

The Presidential Guard Service is an elite personal protection service charged with the protection the president, consisting of about 2,000 bodyguards and security officers. This unit has broad powers to detain anyone suspected of posing a threat to the president or the administration. One of its charges is to stamp out all political and religious dissent in the nation. With wide access to intelligence in all areas, this unit also guards political prisoners and is responsible for physical security at military and civil installations.<sup>87</sup>

## **Military**

The president of Turkmenistan is the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and General of the Army. The military's role focuses on protecting the land borders with Afghanistan and Iran as part of antiterrorism and antidrug campaigns. The air force's main role is to ward off potential air attacks from Uzbekistan. The navy is charged with protecting Turkmen interests in the Caspian Sea, particularly guarding against possible attacks from Iran and Azerbaijani forces.<sup>88</sup>

- 
- 80 Turkmen News, “Sacked after Ten Years at the Top—What Brought down Turkmenistan’s Interior Minister?” 4 October 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/opinion/what-brought-down-turkmenistan-s-interior-minister/>
- 81 Turkmen News, “Turkmenistan’s Former Interior Minister, Presidential Security Chief Convicted of Abuse of Office,” 4 December 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/turkmenistan-s-former-interior-minister-presidential-security-chief-convicted-of-abuse-of-office/>
- 82 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, “‘Because of My Greed...’: Former Turkmen Interior Minister Convicted of Abuse of Power, Corruption,” 4 December 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/former-turkmen-interior-minister-convicted-of-abuse-of-power-corruption/30307100.html>
- 83 Farangis Najibullah, “Fat Cops in Turkmenistan Told ‘Lose Weight or Lose Job,’” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 25 November 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/fat-cops-in-turkmenistan-told-lose-weight-or-lose-job-/30291506.html>
- 84 Paul Stronski, “Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 85 Bruce Pannier, “More Turkmen Troops Killed along Afghan Border,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 27 May 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishlog-ovozi-turkmen-troops-killed-afghan-border/25400833.html>
- 86 Jane’s Defence, “Turkmenistan: Security and Foreign Forces: Police,” *IHS Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 11 November 2009.
- 87 Jane’s Defence, “Turkmenistan: Security and Foreign Forces: Police,” *IHS Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 11 November 2009.
- 88 Jane’s Defence, “Turkmenistan: Armed Forces,” *IHS Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 22 December 2010.

The armed forces of Turkmenistan rank 75th in size out of 137 globally, with an estimated 36,500 active military personnel. Military service is compulsory for two years for males between 18 to 27 years of age. Males can also enroll in military school, beginning at the age of 15. The armed forces rank third in the Central Asia region after Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Officers are trained at the Ashgabat Military Institute, and some receive training in foreign countries, mainly in Russia, Pakistan, Turkey, China, and Ukraine.<sup>89, 90, 91</sup>

According to one Russian source, the armed forces of Turkmenistan have 702 T-72 tanks, 1,660 armored personnel carriers, 540 mortars and recoilless rifles, and 96 towed howitzers. Some of the army's light trucks are armed with M2 Browning .50 caliber machine guns. Figures about military equipment are collected from several sources and cannot always be verified. Some figures are collected from pictures depicting military parades.<sup>92</sup>

The army deploys Land Rover Defenders, modified Toyota pickup trucks, and Austrian Achleitner PMV Survivor II armored cars. In 2015, there were rumors that Turkmenistan bought the HQ-9 air defense system and Wing Loong UAV from China.<sup>93</sup> It has been estimated that Turkmenistan has 712 combat tanks, 1,940 Armored fighting vehicles, 68 self-propelled artillery pieces, 270 towed artillery pieces, and 110 rocket projectors.<sup>94</sup>

The Turkmen Air Force allegedly maintains a fleet of 314 combat aircraft, mostly old MiG-23 fighter planes and 20 Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships. A flyover of MiG-29 fighter jets over Ashgabat during a military parade in 2014 suggested that these planes, along with an unknown number of Su-25 jets, are used to guard Turkmenistan's airspace.<sup>95</sup> A Turkmen government website reported in 2012 that MI-17B-5, Augusta-109, and Eurocopter-145 helicopters; and SU-25 and MIG-29 combat aircraft performed a flyover during a military equipment presentation on the Caspian coast.<sup>96</sup> The total aircraft strength is estimated at 72, with 24 fighter, 44 attack, and 3 transport aircraft. The total helicopter strength is 25, including 10 attack helicopters.<sup>97</sup>

In October 2015, the president appointed the head of the country's security service as minister of defense and deployed reservists along the border. In 2019, the authorities again began registering army reservists as tensions along the Afghan border increased. The government has also launched a program to modernize its military

89 New Central Asia, "Military Strength of Turkmenistan," 19 August 2019, <http://www.newscentralasia.net/2019/08/19/military-strength-of-turkmenistan/>

90 Global Fire Power, "Turkmenistan Military Strength: 2019," [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=turkmenistan](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=turkmenistan)

91 World Population Review, "Countries with Mandatory Military Service 2019," 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-with-mandatory-military-service/>

92 21st Century Asian Arms Race, "Isolationist Turkmenistan Is Rearming Too," 27 March 2016, <https://21stcenturyasianarmsrace.com/2016/03/27/isolationist-turkmenistan-is-rearming-too/>

93 21st Century Asian Arms Race, "Isolationist Turkmenistan Is Rearming Too," 27 March 2016, <https://21stcenturyasianarmsrace.com/2016/03/27/isolationist-turkmenistan-is-rearming-too/>

94 Global Fire Power, "Turkmenistan Military Strength," 2019, [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=turkmenistan](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=turkmenistan)

95 21st Century Asian Arms Race, "Isolationist Turkmenistan Is Rearming Too," 27 March 2016, <https://21stcenturyasianarmsrace.com/2016/03/27/isolationist-turkmenistan-is-rearming-too/>

96 Turkmenistan Golden Age, "In the Name of the Peaceful Life of the Fatherland," State News Agency of Turkmenistan, 6 September 2012, <http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/eng/?id=1237>

97 Global Fire Power, "Turkmenistan Military Strength," 2019, [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=turkmenistan](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=turkmenistan)

capabilities by purchasing military equipment from Russia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Israel, Italy, Japan, Turkey, Ukraine, and China.<sup>98, 99, 100</sup>

Turkmen forces are not intended to conduct offensive operations beyond their borders and there have been no efforts to establish rapid deployment capabilities. It is not apparent whether the military has the capability to repel external attacks.<sup>101, 102</sup>

## Cybersecurity

Internet penetration is estimated at 15% of the population. Opposition websites and social media platforms based outside the country are blocked by the government. To control the flow of information, the state sometimes blocks access to the internet and cellular service. The high costs of accessing the internet and government monitoring of internet use in public places and homes further limits availability.<sup>103, 104, 105</sup>

Turkmenistan ranked 143rd on the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) of 2018, and is seen as a country that has started to initiate commitments to cybersecurity. However, Turkmenistan did not participate in GCI 2018, refusing to answer questions or validate data for the CGI initiative, which monitors the cybersecurity commitment of 193 International Telecommunication Union member states.<sup>106</sup> In September 2019, the president approved a new cybersecurity law that established a cybersecurity service under the Ministry of Industry and Communication.<sup>107,</sup>

108

## Issues Affecting Stability

### *Economic Decline*

The lack of available data from the government makes it difficult to ascertain the precise level of poverty in the country. Turkmenistan's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2018 puts the country in the high human development category, positioning it at 108 out of 189 countries and territories along with Uzbekistan. The HDI

- 
- 98 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 99 21st Century Asian Arms Race, "Isolationist Turkmenistan Is Rearming Too," 27 March 2016, <https://21stcenturyasianarmsrace.com/2016/03/27/isolationist-turkmenistan-is-rearming-too/>
- 100 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmenistan Said to Register Reservists as Tension Mounts on Afghan Border," 15 January 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-said-to-register-reservists-as-tension-mounts-on-afghan-border/29711468.html>
- 101 Jane's Defence, "Turkmenistan: Armed Forces," *IHS Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 22 December 2010.
- 102 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan's Afghan Policy Revealed," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 27 October 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-turkmenistan-afghanistan-taliban-border/27330020.html>
- 103 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 104 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "German Tech Firm's Turkmen Ties Trigger Surveillance Concerns," 8 February 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/german-tech-firm-s-turkmen-ties-trigger-surveillance-concerns/29759911.html>
- 105 Digital Defenders, "Insights into Internet Freedom in Central Asia: Turkmenistan," 2014, <https://www.digitaldefenders.org/turkmenistan/>
- 106 ITU, "Global Cybersecurity Index 2018," 2019, [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2018-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2018-PDF-E.pdf)
- 107 Huseyn Hasanov, "Law on Cybersecurity Developed in Turkmenistan," Trend News Agency, 7 September 2019, <https://menafn.com/1098975152/Law-on-cybersecurity-developed-in-Turkmenistan>
- 108 Azer News, "Turkmenistan Cooperates with Turkey in Cyber Security," 29 November 2019, <https://www.azernews.az/region/159013.html>

is a summary for assessing long-term progress in three areas: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. In spite of Turkmenistan's high ranking on the HDI, it is estimated that about 36% of the population can be characterized as impoverished.<sup>109</sup> Officially, the unemployment rate is 3.8%, but unofficial estimates put the real figure much higher. Underemployment is another problem, particularly in rural areas where many Turkmen work in subsistence farming.<sup>110, 111, 112</sup>

The economic downturn of recent years has led to growing dissatisfaction and occasional protests and dissent.<sup>113</sup> With 8% inflation in 2019, and the currency losing its value in the black market, food insecurity plagues the population, prices for basic goods are skyrocketing, and purchasing power is declining.<sup>114, 115</sup> In 2019, the government stopped paying for gas, water, and electricity, breaking the social contract it had put in place in the early 1990s.<sup>116, 117</sup> With widespread food shortages, malnutrition will probably worsen and will likely contribute to Turkmenistan's already high child mortality rate—45.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018, the highest in Central Asia.<sup>118, 119, 120</sup>

## Terrorism and Drug Trafficking

Turkmenistan supports some regional and international efforts to fight terrorism. In 2019, the president approved a new antiterrorism law that defines crimes that are considered as terrorist acts.<sup>121</sup> The presence of Turkmen citizens in Syria and Iraq fighting for various terrorist groups demonstrates that Turkmenistan suffers from some degree of radicalization. The worsening economic situation, growing poverty and unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, and tight control of religious activities can contribute to religious radicalization.<sup>122</sup>

Turkmenistan has no recent history of terrorism, but terrorism and drug trafficking from Afghanistan are a concern.<sup>123, 124</sup>

- 
- 109 UNDP, "Turkmenistan: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century," Human Development Report, 2019, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf)
- 110 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 111 Heritage, "2019 Index of Economic Freedom: Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/turkmenistan>
- 112 Asian Development Bank, "Poverty in Turkmenistan," 2018, <https://www.adb.org/countries/turkmenistan/poverty#tabs-0-2>
- 113 Sam Bhutia, "Turkmenistan Is Suffering an Economic Crisis of Its Own Making," Eurasianet, 6 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-is-suffering-an-economic-crisis-of-its-own-making>
- 114 Julie Zaugg, "A Hermit Nation Ruled by an Egomaniac: Is Turkmenistan on the Brink of Collapse," CNN, 11 August 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/10/asia/turkmenistan-caspian-sea-intl-hnk/index.html>
- 115 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmenistan's Currency Slumps on Black Market amid Economic Crisis," 23 October 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmen-currency-slumps-black-market-amid-economic-crisis/28810831.html>
- 116 Eurasianet, "Lines, Price Rises and Expensive Booze—The Cost of Happiness in Turkmenistan," 10 January 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/lines-price-rises-and-expensive-booze-the-cost-of-happiness-in-turkmenistan>
- 117 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Turkmenistan Cuts Last Vestiges of Program for Free Utilities," 26 September 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-cuts-last-vestiges-of-program-for-free-utilities/29511308.html>
- 118 Turkmen News, "Turkmenistan Has Highest Child Mortality Rate in Central Asia," 12 July 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/turkmenistan-has-highest-child-mortality-rate-in-central-asia/>
- 119 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 120 Heritage, "2019 Index of Economic Freedom: Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/turkmenistan>
- 121 Bureau of Counterterrorism, U. S. Department of State, "Country Report on Terrorism 2017," September 2018, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt\\_2017.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt_2017.pdf)
- 122 Akram Umarov, "How Serious Is Religious Radicalization in Turkmenistan?" European Eye on Radicalization, 18 June 2019, <https://eeradicalization.com/how-serious-is-religious-radicalization-in-turkmenistan/>
- 123 Victoria Clement, "What Are U.S. Interests in Turkmenistan?" *Diplomat*, 18 June 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/what-are-us-interests-in-turkmenistan/>
- 124 Gov.UK, "Foreign Travel: Turkmenistan," 6 December 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/turkmenistan/terrorism>

Turkmenistan is not a major producer of drugs, but it is located along the route of Afghan drugs moving to Turkey, Russia, and Europe.<sup>125</sup> There is some evidence that heroin abuse is rising in Turkmenistan and efforts are being made to capture drug shipments from Afghanistan.<sup>126, 127</sup>

## Water Security

Turkmenistan is considered the ninth most water insecure in the world. The Karakum Desert which covers 80% of the country has an average annual precipitation of 11.9 mm (0.47 in). In June 2015, Turkmenistan recorded its hottest month in history when temperatures reached 47.2°C (116.96°F).<sup>128</sup>

Turkmen are the largest consumers of water per capita in the world. The capital Ashgabat with its huge parks and fountains, consumes the same amount of water as the city of Chicago, even though Chicago is home to four times more people than Ashgabat. In 2008 Ashgabat entered the Guinness Book of Records as the city with the greatest number of fountain pools in a public space. A 2013 decree ordering the planting of over three million trees as part of the greening project of Turkmenistan requires heavy irrigation to keep the trees alive.<sup>129, 130</sup>

Turkmenistan's economy depends highly on the production of cotton. Nearly 50% of Turkmenistan's population is employed in agriculture and cotton contributes 8% to GDP. The country therefore needs vast amounts of water, and water scarcity is seen as a national security threat. Furthermore, if the government fails to provide water for the population, it risks the weakening of its hold on power and the rise of internal strife.<sup>131, 132</sup>

The Amu Darya River, Turkmenistan's major water source, is shared by Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan use most of the Amu Darya's total water flow, mostly for irrigation of agricultural crops, but also for hydropower generation, industry, and drinking water. The **Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC)**, established in 1992 by the Central Asian countries that share the Amu Darya, is responsible for water allocation and monitors water use and other issues in the region.<sup>133</sup>

In recent years, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have begun expressing concerns about climate change, water mismanagement, outdated infrastructure, poor regional cooperation, and large irrigation projects. The President of Uzbekistan took his concerns even further in 2012 by claiming that disagreement over water usage could lead to war.<sup>134</sup>

- 
- 125 Congressional Research Service, "Turkmenistan," 20 November 2017, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10303>
- 126 Institute for the Study of War, "Turkmenistan and Afghanistan: Overview," n.d., <http://www.understandingwar.org/turkmenistan-and-afghanistan>
- 127 U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan: Integrated Country Strategy," 3 August 2018, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Turkmenistan\\_UNCLASS.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Turkmenistan_UNCLASS.pdf)
- 128 Bradley Jardine, "Turkmenistan Water Insecurity Is a Man-Made Problem," *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 129 Ramon E Collado, "Water War in Central Asia: The Water Dilemma of Turkmenistan," *Geopolitical Monitor*, 30 November 2018, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/water-war-in-central-asia-the-water-dilemma-of-turkmenistan/>
- 130 Bradley Jardine, "Turkmenistan Water Insecurity Is a Man-Made Problem," *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 131 Ramon E Collado, "Water War in Central Asia: The Water Dilemma of Turkmenistan," *Geopolitical Monitor*, 30 November 2018, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/water-war-in-central-asia-the-water-dilemma-of-turkmenistan/>
- 132 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 14 November 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 133 Amu Darya Basin Network, "Amu Darya River Basin," n.d., <http://amudaryabasin.net/content/amu-darya-river-basin>
- 134 Ramon E Collado, "Water War in Central Asia: The Water Dilemma of Turkmenistan," *Geopolitical Monitor*, 30 November 2018, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/water-war-in-central-asia-the-water-dilemma-of-turkmenistan/>

In 2019, the Turkmen government stopped allocating free water to households and transitioned to a metered system, warning citizens to refrain from wasting water.<sup>135</sup>

## Outlook

In spite of possessing the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves, Turkmenistan's geographic and political isolation limit its ability to capitalize upon its resources. The country faces several threats, including water and food shortages, climate change, rising instability in neighboring Afghanistan, Russian aggression, and a loss of economic interest from the West. Turkmenistan is indebted to Beijing and supplies China natural gas at a steep discount. Relations with Iran are tense and relations with its other neighbors—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan—are tainted by unresolved issues, such as the maritime border dispute in the Caspian Sea.<sup>136</sup>

Turkmenistan's economic situation will most likely continue to deteriorate due to a prolonged drop in hydrocarbon prices and a growing competition in the global gas markets. The leadership has squandered the country's resources through corruption and mismanagement of the economy, leaving it cash poor and forcing the government to scrap the generous subsidies it previously used to placate the population.<sup>137, 138</sup> The policies of the isolationist authoritarian regime threaten the country's long-term stability and future.<sup>139</sup>

---

135 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Water Fuss About Nothing," 23 April 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-water-fuss-about-nothing>

136 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>

137 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>

138 Sam Bhutia, "Turkmenistan Is Suffering an Economic Crisis of Its Own Making," Eurasianet, 6 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-is-suffering-an-economic-crisis-of-its-own-making>

139 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Relations between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have been strained over the division of natural resources in the Caspian Sea. | True | False |
| 2. | Russia provides Turkmenistan funds to build a gas pipeline to Europe through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan.                 | True | False |
| 3. | Water security is a serious concern for the government of Turkmenistan.  | True | False |
| 4. | Turkmen armed forces are not trained to conduct offensive operations beyond their borders.                                   | True | False |
| 5. | Turkmenistan does not participate in the international sanctions against Iran.   | True | False |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Afghanistan is not among the countries that share the Caspian Sea. The countries that surround the Caspian Sea are Turkmenistan, Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. In 2018, the five countries signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which established a formula for dividing the sea's water and fishing zones.
2. False:  
Russia objects to any pipeline across the Caspian Sea, as it would provide an alternative to the Russian pipeline infrastructure that transports Central Asian gas to Europe.
3. True:  
Turkmenistan needs vast amounts of water to irrigate its agricultural crops, framing water scarcity as a national security threat. Furthermore, Turkmenistan's inhabitants are the largest consumers of water per capita in the world.
4. True:  
Turkmenistan's policy of permanent neutrality directed the security services away from addressing external threats and focused instead on internal threats to the regime. Turkmenistan declared "positive neutrality" in 1991 because, as the smallest Central Asian country in terms of population, it has faced serious threats from neighbors Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Azerbaijan. It has no capacity to stand against invasions.
5. False:  
Turkmenistan's policy of "positive neutrality" means that Turkmenistan has never participated in international sanctions against Iran.



# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Further Readings and Resources

### Online Articles

Bhutia, Sam. “Turkmenistan Is Suffering an Economic Crisis of Its Own Making.” Eurasianet, 6 September 2019. <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-is-suffering-an-economic-crisis-of-its-own-making>

Bohr, Annette. “Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-Authoritarianism.” Chatham House: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 8 March 2016. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-03-08-turkmenistan-bohr.pdf>

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State. “2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Turkmenistan.” 13 March 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkmenistan/>

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State. “Turkmenistan 2018 International Religious Freedom Report.” 21 June 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>

Congressional Research Service. “Turkmenistan.” 20 November 2017. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10303>

European Parliament Think Tank. “Water Disputes in Central Asia: Rising Tension Threatens Regional Stability.” 28 October 2015. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2015\)571303](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2015)571303)

Export.gov. “Turkmenistan—Market Overview.” 21 July 2019. <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Market-Overview>

Hajiev, Shahnar. “Turkmenistan Should Promote the Trans-Caspian Pipeline More Actively.” Euractiv, 2 September 2019. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/turkmenistan-should-promote-the-trans-caspian-pipeline-more-actively/>

Hug, Adam. “Spotlight on Turkmenistan.” Foreign Policy Centre, 2019. <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FPC-Spotlight-on-Turkmenistan-publication.pdf>

Human Rights Watch. “Turkmenistan: Events of 2018, World Report 2019.” 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. “U.S. Bans Import of Cotton Products from Turkmenistan.” 24 May 2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-bans-import-cotton-products-turkmenistan/29247850.html>

Robertson T., Alex. “What’s It Like to Vacation in Authoritarian Turkmenistan?” *Adventure*, 24 July 2018. <https://adventure.com/exploring-authoritarian-turkmenistan/>

Stronski, Paul. “Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30 January 2017. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>

Tanas, Olga, and Anna, Shiraevskaya, Dan, Murtaugh. “How Russia-China Gas Pipeline Changes Energy Calculus.” *Washington Post*, 25 November 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/how-russia-china-gas-pipeline-changes-energy-calculus/2019/11/25/9aa81f40-0f49-11ea-924c-b34d09bbc948\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/how-russia-china-gas-pipeline-changes-energy-calculus/2019/11/25/9aa81f40-0f49-11ea-924c-b34d09bbc948_story.html)

Theroux, Paul. “Letter from Turkmenistan: The Golden Man.” *New Yorker*, 28 May 2007. [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa\\_fact\\_theroux](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa_fact_theroux)

UNDP. “Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update—Turkmenistan.” 2019. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/TKM.pdf)

World Bank. “The World Bank in Turkmenistan—Country Context.” 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkmenistan/overview>

## Books

Brummell, Paul. *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide. Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press, 2005.*

## YouTube

“Dispatch: The Importance of Turkmenistan.” YouTube video, 3:41. A report by Eugene Chausovsky. Posted by Stratfor, 21 Oct 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSTBINMoMIY>

“Turkmenistan—Ashgabat.” YouTube video, 28:36. A video by aderoo2. Posted by aderoo2. 20 February 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8RAYCWJmMA>

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | The Amu Darya is Turkmenistan's most important river.  | True | False |
| 2. | Turkmenbashi is a city named after Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Niyazov.   | True | False |
| 3. | The Karakum Canal connects the Caspian Sea with the Aral Sea.  | True | False |
| 4. | Turkmenistan lies in a seismically active region that is prone to massive earthquakes.   | True | False |
| 5. | Altyn Asyr is the highest mountain in Turkmenistan, located at the center of the Karakum.  | True | False |
| 6. | After the death of President Niyazov, the government adopted a new constitution that restored civil liberties and introduced free and competitive elections. | True | False |
| 7. | President Berdymukhamedov was declared "President for Life" by parliament in 2006.   | True | False |
| 8. | President Niyazov promoted Turkmen ballet and opera to ingratiate his country to the West.   | True | False |
| 9. | Turkmenistan became the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) after the establishment of the Soviet Union.   | True | False |

10.	The current president of Turkmenistan won three presidential elections by a substantial margin.	True	False
11.	Oil and gas make up a large portion of Turkmenistan's economy.	True	False
12.	<i>Manat</i> is the national dish, served on religious holidays and celebrations.	True	False
13.	Turkmenistan is a hot spot for international adventure tourism.	True	False
14.	Turkmenistan is one of the world's most corrupt countries.	True	False
15.	Foreign investors take a high risk when they invest in Turkmenistan.	True	False
16.	Western music is banned in Turkmenistan.	True	False
17.	Turkmenistan has special holidays that celebrate horses and carpets.	True	False
18.	Turkmenistan built an Olympic town to host the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games.	True	False
19.	Homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under Turkmenistan law.	True	False
20.	English is recognized as one of the official languages of Turkmenistan.	True	False
21.	The United States has officially condemned human rights violations in Turkmenistan.	True	False

- |     |   |             |              |
|-----|---|-------------|--------------|
| 22. | The government of Turkmenistan provides free gas, electricity, and water to all its citizens. | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |
| 23. | Turkmenistan stopped gas exports to Iran after mounting pressure from the United States.      | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |
| 24. | Turkmenistan is a part of the International North-South Transport Corridor.                   | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |
| 25. | Turkmenistan has compulsory military service.   | <b>True</b> | <b>False</b> |

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

## Final Assessment Answers

1. True:  
The Amu Darya is the longest river in Central Asia and the primary source of water for Turkmenistan. The river is formed by the convergence of the Pyandzh and Vakhsh rivers along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border and flows along the nation's northeastern border.
2. True:  
The city of Krasnovodsk was renamed Turkmenbashi in honor of President Niyazov, who gave himself the title "Turkmenbashi" (Head of all the Turkmen). The city lies on the shores of the Caspian Sea.
3. False:  
The Karakum Canal carries water from the Amu Darya River across the desert to Ashgabat. The canal is a 1,400 km (870 mi) long artificial river and one of the world's largest desert irrigation projects. The Karakum Canal is the greatest contributor to the drying of the Aral Sea.
4. True:  
The two most active zones are in the regions of Turkmenbashi and Ashgabat, which are located near the Kopet-Dag Mountain Range. Because the Kopet-Dag Range is a geologically young, it is susceptible to intermittent earthquakes of great destructive force.
5. False:  
Altyn Asyr is a giant artificial lake that Turkmenistan is creating in the Karakum Desert by flooding the Karashor Depression through an extensive network of tributary canals. Altyn Asyr (Golden Age Lake) is also called Turkmen Lake. Mount Ayrybaba, which rises to 3,137 m (10,292 ft) in the Kugitang mountain range, is the highest mountain in Turkmenistan.
6. False:  
Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov promised to introduce reforms after securing the presidency in 2007; however, his authoritarian rule continues unabated. Turkmenistan is considered one of the world's most repressive and isolated countries.
7. False:  
Saparmurat Niyazov, who became president of Turkmenistan after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, was anointed "President for Life" by parliament in 1999. He died in 2006.
8. False:  
Niyazov banned opera and ballet, saying they were alien to Turkmen culture.
9. True:  
In 1924, Turkmenistan was formally renamed the Turkmen SSR, with national boundaries that exist today. The boundaries fragmented existing ethnic groups, forestalling any unification and subsequent threats to the Soviet government in Moscow.

10. True:  
President Berdymukhamedov won a special presidential election in 2007, with 89% of the vote; in 2012, he won more than 97% of the vote; and in 2017, he was re-elected to a third term with 97.14% of the vote. According to official statements, the turnout rate of eligible voters was over 97%.
11. True:  
Turkmenistan is one of the most important producers of natural gas in the world. Oil and gas exports make up 25% of the country's GDP.
12. False:  
The Turkmen manat (TMT) is the national currency of Turkmenistan, subdivided into 100 tenne.
13. False:  
In 2016, only 6,000 foreigners visited Turkmenistan, including those who came on official business. The few foreign travelers who come to the country do not encounter other foreigners while visiting tourist sites. In 2017, the government introduced a tourism tax of USD 2 per day for all foreign visitors except for diplomats.
14. True: In  
2018, Turkmenistan ranked 161st out of 180 countries on the corruption perception index of Transparency International. On a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt, and 100 is equivalent to no corruption, Turkmenistan scored 20 along with Haiti, Cambodia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
15. True:  
Foreign investors seeking to conduct business in Turkmenistan have to contend with strict state control, exchange rate restrictions, inconsistent regulations, endemic corruption, association with severe human rights abuses, and a lack of experience in dealing with foreign investors.
16. False:  
Western music is taking root in Ashgabat in many clubs that cater to a westernized audience. Although Western music is not prohibited by the authorities, concerts are rare, and musicians can perform only if they have a license issued by the state.
17. True:  
The Holiday of the Turkmen Horse was established in 1995 and is celebrated on 27 April with horse races at the hippodrome in Ashgabat. Since 1992, Carpet Day has been celebrated on the last Sunday of May to honor Turkmen carpets and rugs.
18. True:  
Turkmenistan spent USD 7.3 billion to build an Olympic town with an Olympic stadium and a water sports center in Ashgabat for the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games. The complex is home to the world's largest indoor swimming pool.
19. True:  
Homosexual conduct is punishable by up to two years in prison. Antidiscrimination laws do not apply to LGBT persons.
20. True:

In 1993, English was named the second official language, and schools were required to teach English as a subject.

21. True:  
In January 2018, the United States again designated Turkmenistan as a Country of Particular Concern because of its infringement on religious freedom.
22. True:  
Free utilities were introduced by President Niyazov in 1992, but in 2019, the government eliminated the full gas, water, and electricity subsidies, breaking this social contract.
23. False:  
23. Turkmenistan stopped gas exports to Iran in order to demand that Iran pay a decade-old outstanding gas debt of USD 1.8 billion. Iran disputes the claim and appears to have no intention of paying the debt.
24. True:  
The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) stretches from Teheran to Shanghai through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. The total length of the route is about 10,000 km (6,213 mi), and the total travel time is about 14 days.
25. True:  
Military service is compulsory for two years for males between 18 to 27 years of age. Males can also enroll in military school, beginning at the age of 15.