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Elections in Turkmenistan

2018 Parliamentary and Local Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

- When is Election Day?..... 1
- Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? 1
- What is the political system? 2
- Who is eligible to vote?..... 2
- How many registered voters are there? 3
- What is the election management body?..... 3
- How are electoral districts organized? 3
- Where and how will voters cast their ballots on Election Day? 4
- How many polling stations are set up on Election Day?..... 4
- How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?..... 4
- What technology will be used?..... 5
- How will voters be ensured access to information about the election? 5
- Who is managing security On Election Day? 5
- Where is vote counting and tabulation held? 5
- When will official results be announced? 5
- Who can observe during Election Day? How do they accredit?..... 6
- How will election disputes be adjudicated? 6
- Resources..... 7

Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Turkmen elections authorities as of March 23, 2018 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

The election of deputies of the *Mejlis* (Parliament) and members of *Khalk Maslakhaty* and *Gengeshes* (local representative bodies and self-governments) in Turkmenistan will be held on March 25, 2018, according to the decree of the *Mejlis* dated November 25, 2017.

The previous parliamentary elections, held on December 15, 2013, were the first to take place since the adoption of the 2012 Law on Political Parties¹ (*Syýasy partiýalar hakynda*) that provided a legal framework for the formation of political parties.² In response to President Berdymukhamedov's call for the establishment of a multi-party political system,³ the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs created the Party of Industrialist and Entrepreneurs (PIE) in August 2012. The Agrarian Party (AP) was established in 2014. PIE participated in the 2013 parliamentary elections, and currently holds 14 (out of 125) seats in the Parliament.⁴ The Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), which was formed in December 1991 and has dominated national politics for the last two decades, is the ruling party.⁵ Among the deputies elected to the *Mejlis* are representatives from the three largest public associations - 33 represent the Organization of Trade Unions, 16 represent the Women's Union,⁶ eight represent the *Magtymguly* Youth Organization, and seven represent groups of citizens.⁷

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Citizens will elect 125 members of Turkmenistan's unicameral Parliament (*Mejlis*), appointed for a five-year term. Members of the *Mejlis* are directly elected in single-mandate constituencies, each returning one deputy under a majoritarian system.

Regarding local elections, in the regions (*Velayats*), districts (*Etraps*) and cities (further details below) citizens will elect members of local representative bodies – known as *Khalk Maslakhaty*. In relevant administrative-territorial units, citizens will also elect representatives of local self-governments – *Gengeshes*. *Khalk Maslakhaty* and *Gengesh* representatives are appointed for five-year terms.

¹ This law, however, imposes a number of limitations: at least 1,000 members, parties can't be formed on ethnic or religious grounds, or be established on the basis of region or profession, obligation to permit representatives of the Ministry of Justice to be present at the public meetings.

² <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/116011?download=true>

³ 2013 parliamentary election didn't offer candidates aiming at a genuine choice between different political platforms. They were focusing instead on their support of the policies of the president and his government (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/116011?download=true>).

⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/316586?download=true>

⁵ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/316586?download=true>

⁶ The head of the Trade Union and the Women's Union is the same person, who simultaneously represents the DPT in the Parliament (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/316586?download=true>).

⁷ Despite numerous representatives, the 2013 parliamentary election didn't offer candidates presenting a genuine choice between different political platforms. Candidates were focusing instead on their support of the policies of the president and his government. Until December 2011, all public associations along with DPT were subsumed under the National Revival Movement (*Galkynysh*).

Political parties and groups of citizens enjoy the right to nominate candidates. The Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC) of Turkmenistan is responsible for the registration of the candidates. Registration begins 50 days and ends 25 days before the elections. In the 2018 elections, registration of candidates was conducted from February 3 to 27. The CEC registered 284 candidates running for seats in the *Mejlis*. Political parties nominated 168 of 284 candidates, while groups of citizens nominated 116 candidates.⁸ There are no requirements for gender representation of candidates or elected members of Parliament. However, female representation in the *Mejlis* is relatively high; 26.4 percent of members elected in the 2013 elections are women. The total number of candidates registered in 2018 for both the parliamentary and local elections is 16,558.⁹

In accordance with the CEC's decree of December 2, 2017, the election campaign commenced on December 4, 2017. The campaigning ends one day before Election Day.

The candidate who receives more than half of all votes is considered elected. A second round will be held between two leading candidates within two weeks if no candidate obtains an absolute majority of votes. There is no threshold requirement for participation of voters for the elections to be valid. The right to stand as a candidate to the *Mejlis* is granted to any eligible voter older than 25 who has legally resided in the country on a permanent basis for at least 10 years. Candidates who have reached the age of 21 and reside in the corresponding territory can be nominated to local bodies.

What is the political system?

The constitution (adopted in 1992 and last revised in 2016) states that Turkmenistan is a democratic and secular presidential republic. According to the constitution, the president is the head of the state and holds executive power. S/he chairs the Cabinet of Ministers – the Government of Turkmenistan. Legislative power is exercised by the *Mejlis* (Parliament), and is checked by the Supreme Court and lower-level courts. While a balance of power between the three branches of government is envisioned in the Constitution, in effect in this semi-presidential system the president wields considerable power and authority in all matters, making use of decrees and receiving support from a compliant parliament. Top officials in key ministries are appointed by the President, including the head of the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda.

Who is eligible to vote?

Citizens over 18 years of age by the day of an election are eligible to vote in Turkmenistan. A voter of sufficient age may yet be excluded from voting, however, if a court determines that a voter is incapacitated or if the voter is incarcerated.

⁸ From the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan 117, from the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan, 23, from the Agrarian Party of Turkmenistan 28, from groups of citizens of 116 candidates.

⁹ <http://saylav.gov.tm/ru/elections/44>

How many registered voters are there?

As of March 1, 2018, 3,286,138 voters out of 6.5 million people were registered in the country, including 23,377 voters who are eligible to vote abroad.¹⁰

What is the election management body?

The following election commissions will administer elections:

- 1) Central Commission for Elections and Referendums (CEC);
- 2) *Velayats* (province/regions) election commissions;
- 3) *Etrap* (district) election commissions, cities with the rights of *etraps* (hereinafter - election commissions of *etraps*, cities);
- 4) District election commissions (formed to conduct the election of deputies of the *Mejlis*);
- 5) Election commissions of cities in *etraps*, settlements and *Gengeshlyks* (administrative-territorial units); and
- 6) Precinct election commissions (PECs).

PECs are responsible for compiling voter lists based on information provided by the local executive bodies.¹¹

The CEC is formed by the president¹² for a five-year term and consists of a chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary and 12 members. The chairperson of the CEC is approved by the *Mejlis*. Nomination and formation of other commissions along with the number of the members of the election commissions differ and is managed by the relevant commissions.

According to the CEC, approximately 24,000 election commission members will be conducting the 2018 elections.

How are electoral districts organized?

The administrative-territorial structure of Turkmenistan consists of *Velayats* (provinces), cities with the right of *Velayats*; *Etraps* (districts), cities with right of districts; cities (towns) in district; settlements; and territories composed of one or more villages (administrative-territorial unit *Gengeshlyk*).

Electoral districts are formed by the relevant election commissions no later than 70 days before Election Day. For the parliamentary elections, the country is divided into 125 single-mandate constituencies (districts). Constituency boundaries should be formed with an equal number of voters; the number of voters in each constituency should not exceed 10 percent, and in remote localities 15 percent, of the average number of voters in constituencies. However, in reality this rule is not applied as the number of

¹⁰ <http://saylav.gov.tm/ru/elections/44>

¹¹ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/316586?download=true>

¹² The CEC members are nominated by the president, political parties and public associations.

registered voters per constituency varied significantly, e.g. from 10 percent up to 75 percent by comparison to a national average of 24,554 registered voters per constituency.¹³

For the local elections, a total of 7,340 electoral districts have been created in Turkmenistan. Thus, the total number of electoral districts is 7,465.

Where and how will voters cast their ballots on Election Day?

Electoral precincts (polling stations) are formed by the election commission of the respective districts (*etrap*) and by the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums (CEC) at diplomatic missions. In military units, remote and inaccessible localities, sanatoriums, hospitals and detention centers, polling stations may be formed at the request of the heads of these institutions.

Polling stations must be equipped with booths, writing materials for marking ballot papers (no pencils), places for issuing ballot papers and a ballot box.

During the 2017 presidential election, the CEC introduced new full-length voting booths with doors, which will also be used in the 2018 elections.

How many polling stations are set up on Election Day?

According to the CEC, a total of 2,604¹⁴ polling stations will open across the country at 7:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. Of the 2,604, 39 will be set up in Turkmenistan embassies and consulates worldwide. Polling stations can accommodate between 20 and 2,000 voters.

According to the Electoral Code, early voting began on March 15, 2018 and will end on March 24, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.

Voting outside the voting premises is conducted only on Election Day, based on a voter's request. In this case, mobile ballot boxes are taken to the voter's place of residence by members of the local PEC, accompanied by observers. Requests must be filed on Election Day, no later than six hours before the close of the polling station.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

Persons with disabilities will be able to vote at home via the mobile ballot box, which must be requested in advance through the PEC. Additionally, voters who "do not have the possibility/opportunity to fill in the ballot papers by themselves" have the right to invite into the booth any citizen of their choice, with the exception of polling station staff, observers, party/candidate agents, and members of public initiative groups. Braille ballots for blind or low vision voters are likely to be available on Election Day.

¹³ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/116011?download=true>

¹⁴ <http://saylav.gov.tm/ru/elections/44>

What technology will be used?

In the 2018 elections, the CEC will not employ any technology in the conduct of the elections. Traditional paper ballots and physical ballot boxes will continue to be used, as in past elections.

How will voters be ensured access to information about the election?

Informing voters is carried out by election commissions, state authorities, local self-government, mass media, legal entities and individuals.

The CEC has compiled and published 11 manuals, memos and regulations. Some of them were published in two languages (Turkmen and Russian) and some in three languages (Turkmen, Russian and English).

The specified free air-time on state television and radio channels is distributed among the candidates on equal terms. Periodical printed publications, except for publications established by public authorities and local self-government, should allocate free print spaces for materials provided by candidates.

It is prohibited to place campaign materials on monuments and buildings that have historical, cultural or architectural value, as well as in the premises of election commissions, at the entrance to them and in the voting premises. Official information on the candidates published by the CEC is allowed in PECs.

Representatives of the mass media are registered by the CEC.

Who is managing security On Election Day?

The Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees regular police, working closely with the Committee for National Security in matters of public safety.

Where is vote counting and tabulation held?

PEC members will conduct the vote count. After the completion of the counting process, PECs record the results in protocols signed by all members of the PEC. The results are announced by the PECs following this process. These results are immediately sent to the appropriate higher election commission and tabulated manually at the district level before being forwarded to the regional commission and then to the CEC. A copy of the protocol is submitted for public inspection in the premises of the polling station. Candidates or authorized representatives, observers, and representatives of the initiative group of a referendum are entitled to receive a certified copy of the protocol from the PEC. If there is any doubt about the validity of the ballot, the issue is resolved by the PEC through voting.

When will official results be announced?

Upon receiving data from lower-level commissions, the CEC summarizes the results data, draws up a protocol and announces results no later than the seventh day after the elections.

Who can observe during Election Day? How do they accredit?

To date, 4,072 national election observers have been accredited by political parties, public associations and groups of citizens.¹⁵ National observers are registered by respective *velayat* election commissions.

Invitations to foreign observers are sent by the president and the CEC. The official accreditation of international observers is carried out by the CEC. The 2018 elections will be observed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Decisions of election commissions and/or actions of their officials violating citizens' electoral rights, requirements of the Electoral Code, and other normative legal acts of Turkmenistan may be appealed to a higher election commission. The results of the elections can be appealed within three days after their announcement. Decisions of the CEC may be appealed to the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan.

¹⁵ From the Democratic Party-591; Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs-311; Agrarian Party-392; Trade unions-665; Union of Women-253; Youth organization-525, representatives of citizens' groups-226, from candidates 1109. Candidates may nominate one national observer for each polling station in the territory of their constituency.

Resources

- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: [Elections in Turkmenistan](#)
- [Central Commission for Elections and Referendums](#)
- Central Commission for Elections and Referendums: [Election Procedures](#)
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan](#)
- [Turkmenistan Press Agency](#)
- [State News Agency of Turkmenistan](#)
- [Embassy of the Turkmenistan, Washington D.C.](#)