



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# TURKMENISTAN

**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
26 March 2023

**ODIHR Election Assessment Mission**  
**Final Report**



Warsaw  
9 October 2023

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**TURKMENISTAN  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
26 March 2023**

**ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report<sup>1</sup>**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for the 26 March parliamentary elections. The mission assessed the compliance of the electoral process with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

The 26 March parliamentary elections took place in an environment that lacked genuine competitiveness and pluralism, where despite constitutional guarantees fundamental freedoms, are very restricted. Media is tightly controlled by the state, with limited access to the Internet further restricting voters' rights to information. Despite expressed commitment to increase the accessibility of elections, the legal framework for elections does not provide a sound legal basis for the conduct of democratic elections and the lack of sufficient regulation of the process caused legal uncertainty. The election administration lacked independence and significant shortcomings were identified throughout the management of the election process. The right to stand remains unduly restricted and candidates did not offer voters genuine political alternatives. The campaign and all campaign finances were strictly managed by the CEC and lacked visibility and meaningful voter engagement.

Turkmenistan is a presidential republic, with legislative power vested in a 125-member parliament. The executive enjoys a wide constitutional remit, with an ineffective framework for checks and balances. The political and institutional environment prevents political parties from representing genuine alternatives and in practice all parties contesting the election supported the President. Recent constitutional reforms, reduced the already marginal role of the legislature.

The legal framework for elections is overall insufficient for the effective conduct of elections and gaps are not adequately regulated by the CEC. Election legislation and regulations are not made available to the public beyond media announcements when they are enacted, thereby diminishing access to information and legal certainty. Recent amendments to election legislation were only related to the elimination of the upper chamber and did not address previous ODIHR EAM recommendations.

The elections were administered by the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC), as well as Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs) and Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). The roles and relations between these and other state institutions are unclear, and members of lower level commissions generally lacked basic understanding of their tasks and responsibilities. The appointment procedure for commission members overall does not safeguard the election administration's independence and impartiality. The CEC's activities lacked transparency as they took place in the absence of public sessions and published decisions, and there were doubts as to the role and responsibilities of ConECs and PECs in carrying out their responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Turkmen and Russian languages.

According to the CEC, a total of 3,509,339 voters were registered, including at 42 diplomatic representations abroad. There is no permanent voter register, with voter lists compiled by the PECs before each election, which runs counter to international good practice. There are no safeguards in place against multiple registrations. Absence of recent population figures prevents the assessment of the accuracy and inclusiveness of voter registration. The law continues to restrict voting rights of prisoners and persons with mental disabilities, at odds with international standards.

According to the CEC, all 258 candidates nominated by three political parties and groups of citizens, were registered. The 10-year residency requirement for registration as a candidate and a ban on anyone with an unexpired or unexpunged criminal record contravene international standards. Some ConECs met by the ODIHR EAM did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of their responsibilities, including the knowledge of the names of the candidates in their respective constituencies and/or the entities that nominated them, raising doubt about their role in the process. There are no special measures in place to increase the number of women in public and political life, however, of the 41 women (15.9 per cent) candidates, 32 were elected (25.6 per cent).

The law contains provisions which allow candidates to campaign and enjoy equal rights, hold meetings with voters and access the media. In practice, the campaign lacked genuine competition and the election administration rigidly organised uniform outreach activities, such as the publishing of contestants' biographies in print media, airing their pre-recorded messages on state TV and holding limited meetings with voters. These closed events were not advertised and did not feature any meaningful exchanges with voters. The absence of campaign visibility stood in contrast to the widespread presence of billboards depicting the President and the National Leader. Together with the lack of genuine political alternatives, these factors raised concerns about the contestants and voters' right to access the freedoms of association, assembly and expression and the blurring of the line between state and party.

Campaign events and related expenditure were managed directly by the election administration. Contestants did not incur any costs. The regulatory framework is insufficient to ensure effective implementation of the principles of independence and pluralism for political contestants enshrined in the law.

The media landscape is characterized by state monopoly. Information is distributed exclusively through the State News Agency, with three main TV channels sharing a single news programme. Media directors and editors-in-chief are appointed by the President. The absence of media pluralism and independence, and the ensuing information vacuum, affords voters no opportunity to make informed choices. The sole broadcast news programme did not cover the campaign and no candidate expressed interest in opportunities to broadcast their platforms beyond the standardised pre-recorded 10-minute TV presentation, further limiting voter's access to information on the campaign.

The Electoral Code provides that party, citizen and international election observers, accredited by the CEC, are entitled to have access to all stages of the electoral process. Citizen observers were nominated by political parties, candidates, public associations and groups of citizens. However, independent observation is hampered by the absence of independent organised civil society. None of the state-endorsed entities followed a methodology or engaged in a systematic observation of the whole process. Contrary to the law and international good practice, the ODIHR EAM was not allowed to observe some parts of the process, including election commission sessions and the tabulation of results.

The law provides for a system of complaints and appeals that is generally in line with international principles of judicial review and right to appeal. Complaints can be lodged with the election administration and courts. However, guarantees of access to an independent adjudicating body are insufficient as all judges and members of the CEC adjudicating election disputes are appointed by the

President. The effectiveness of election dispute resolution mechanism remains to be tested as no complaints were filed during these or previous elections.

In line with ODIHR's methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not observe election day processes in a systematic or comprehensive manner. The election day was calm. In the small number of visited polling stations, the ODIHR EAM noted multiple indications of ballot box stuffing and discrepancies in reported turnout figures. While additional security features have been added to ballots, as previously recommended by ODIHR, the practices of family and proxy voting were also evident in the visited polling stations observed, with series of identical signatures observed in most polling locations visited. Where the ODIHR EAM observed, counting procedures were not respected, and further indications of ballot box stuffing were noted, while tabulation could not be observed. The CEC announced the final results on 29 March, with all 125 legislators elected in the first round.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in Turkmenistan in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations relate to election day procedures, election campaign, media, election administration and voter registration. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to improve the electoral process and address recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan (MFA) to observe the 26 March parliamentary elections and in line with its mandate the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for these elections.<sup>2</sup> The ODIHR EAM, headed by Corien Jonker, consisted of six election experts from five OSCE participating States. The ODIHR EAM was based in Ashgabat from 12 to 30 March, but the experts also visited the Ahal region (*velayat*) before and on election day.

The electoral process was assessed for its compliance with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and with the national legislation. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner. However, mission members visited a limited number of polling stations during opening, voting and counting.

The ODIHR EAM wishes to thank the authorities of Turkmenistan for the invitation to observe these elections, as well as the MFA and its delegation to the OSCE, the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC), and other state and local authorities for their assistance and co-operation. The ODIHR EAM also wishes to express gratitude to the representatives of political parties, candidates, public associations, media, embassies of OSCE participating States and international organizations for their co-operation, and special gratitude to the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat for its co-operation and support.

## III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Turkmenistan is a presidential republic. An early presidential election, held in March 2022, was won by Serdar Berdymuhamedov after Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov stepped down following 15 years in

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<sup>2</sup> See [previous ODIHR reports](#) on Turkmenistan.

office.<sup>3</sup> The 2016 Constitution provides for the separation of powers, but in practice there are no effective checks on the executive that exercises a wide constitutional remit relative to parliament.<sup>4</sup>

Legislative power is vested with the parliament (*Mejlis*) elected for a five-year term. The 26 March parliamentary elections were called on 12 January.<sup>5</sup> The *Mejlis* shares the right of legislative initiative with a wide range of institutions, including the President, Supreme Court, as well as the newly constituted People's Council (*Halk Maslahaty*) and office of the National Leader at the moment held by the former President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, the father of the current President. According to ODIHR EAM interlocutors representing the *Mejlis*, legislators regularly vote unanimously in support of new legislation, with virtually no bills rejected.<sup>6</sup>

The political landscape remains unchanged and continues to lack genuine pluralism, with all three registered political parties, including those that self-identify as opposition, supporting the President and National Leader and not offering political alternatives. The outgoing legislature elected in March 2018 included representatives nominated by all three parties, that together held just under two-thirds of the seats, with the remainder nominated by groups of citizens.<sup>7</sup> Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of association, and peaceful assembly, in practice the formation of independent civil society organizations and political parties remains severely restricted and public gatherings are prohibited.<sup>8</sup> No new political parties have been registered since 2015. There is no independently organised civil society, with all existing organizations operating under the auspices of the government.<sup>9</sup> These and other continued restrictions on fundamental freedoms, are contrary to international standards, OSCE commitments and UN Human Rights Committee recommendations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ODIHR conducted an online NAM but did not observe the 2022 early presidential election.

<sup>4</sup> See 2016 [ODIHR Comments on the Draft Constitution of Turkmenistan](#). The President has the right to form and preside over the Cabinet of Ministers, appoint and dismiss governors of regions (*velayat*), heads of districts (*etrap*) and cities, all judges of the Supreme Court and other courts, as well as all members of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC).

<sup>5</sup> Regional, district and local elections also took place on 26 March. Voters in all five *velayats* could cast four ballots, while those in Ashgabat cast three (there are no local authorities below the *etrap* or district city in the capital).

<sup>6</sup> There are no publicly available records of parliament's legislative activities or plenary votes taken. Despite requests, the ODIHR Election Assessment Mission (EAM) was not able to obtain such information either.

<sup>7</sup> As a successor to the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, the Democratic Party (DP) was the only registered political party until 2012. In 2018, the Democratic Party (DP) was elected in 55 constituencies, and the Agrarian Party (AP) and Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (PIE) in 11 constituencies each (1 MP nominated by a group of citizens later joined the AP). Forty-seven of the outgoing MPs were nominated by groups of citizens.

<sup>8</sup> The UN Human Rights Committee, expressed concerns about "excessive restrictions on the establishment and functioning of political parties" and recommended that the State party "take all measures necessary to guarantee the proper functioning of political parties free from unnecessary interference and ensure that any limitations on the establishment of a political party are construed narrowly and that the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality are strictly adhered to. It should, to this end, bring its regulations and practice governing the establishment, registration and functioning of political parties into full compliance with articles 19, 22 and 25 of the Covenant and relevant international standards." See [UN Human Rights Committee \(HRC\) Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Turkmenistan](#), 20 April 2017, paragraphs 46-49.

<sup>9</sup> There are 135 registered public associations, mostly in the area of sports and recreation. Leading associations have large national membership, with the Youth Union (with 900,000 members) and Women's Union (880,000 members) among the most significant. Both organizations are subsidized from the state budget and express allegiance to the President and his policy lines in their statutes. Notwithstanding entities that focus on persons with disabilities, there are no independent human rights defender organisations registered in Turkmenistan.

<sup>10</sup> The UN Human Rights Committee stated that "assemblies are rare owing to a fear of reprisals for expressing any dissenting views and [...] insufficient venues are designated for holding authorized assemblies." It also expressed concerns about "reports of forcible mass mobilization of the population for participation in various mass events organized by the authorities (arts. 19 and 21)." See [UN HRC Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Turkmenistan](#), 20 April 2017, paragraphs 44-45 on access to the freedom of assembly and paragraphs 42-43 on access to freedom of expression.

Equal rights between men and women are provided for in the Constitution and law.<sup>11</sup> The government has committed itself to promoting greater gender equality in all spheres, but the number of women in public and political life remains low.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The 125-members of the unicameral *Mejlis* are directly elected for a five-year term in single-mandate constituencies. To be elected, a candidate must receive more than 50 per cent of the votes cast. Otherwise, a second round is held within two weeks between the two contestants who received the highest number of votes.

Constituencies are established for electoral purposes only and do not correspond to the country's administrative structure. The Electoral Code provides that the boundaries and names of the 125 constituencies be defined by the election administration and communicated to the public through mass media no later than 70 days before election day, not in line with international good practice which requires that key elements of the legal framework should not be amended within a year of the election.<sup>13</sup> In line with the international good practice, the law prescribes that the number of voters per constituency be similar and not exceed 10 per cent of the average, or 15 per cent in remote areas. The CEC informed the ODIHR EAM that for these elections the constituencies were re-drafted to reflect internal migration.<sup>14</sup>

*In line with international good practice, constituency boundaries should be delimited no less than one year before the elections.*

The legal framework consists primarily of the 2016 Constitution, last amended in 2023, and the 2013 Electoral Code, last amended in 2023. The law is further elaborated through CEC decisions. Turkmenistan is party to international instruments related to electoral standards, whose direct application is explicitly recognized in both the Constitution and Electoral Code.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In December 2020, the government adopted the 2021-2025 National Action Plan for Gender Equality, which established national goals, objectives, and priorities to further facilitate and promote gender equality in all spheres of life. Turkmenistan was elected a member of the Executive Board of UN-Women in April 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Women held 31 of the 125 seats (25 per cent) in the outgoing legislature. The Speaker of the outgoing *Mejlis* was a woman, but did not stand for re-election. Only 1 of the 22 ministerial posts was occupied by a woman (Minister of Education). A woman also held 1 of the 10 Deputy Chairperson of the Cabinet of Ministers positions (for Media and Culture). All women candidates standing in these elections were members of the Women's Union, a leading state-endorsed public association that enjoyed parliamentary representation until the 2018 elections.

<sup>13</sup> Section II.2.b of the 2002 Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) (Code of Good Practice).

<sup>14</sup> According to data published after the elections, each constituency included between 26,085 and 31,602 voters. Compared to the 2018 parliamentary elections, 1 additional constituency was created in Ashgabat city and Ahal *velayat*, where the number of constituencies increased to 17 and 16 respectively. In Lebap, the number decreased from 28 to 26.

<sup>15</sup> Including the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) and its optional protocol, the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), the [Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#), the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) and its optional protocol.

At a 21 January 2023 joint session of the hitherto bicameral legislature, the *Milliy Gengesh*, a unanimous vote abolished the upper house and returned the country to a unicameral parliament.<sup>16</sup> The *Halk Maslahaty* was re-established as a “supreme organ of government authority” thereby creating an additional layer of executive and legislative power that further limits the role of parliament.<sup>17</sup> The new legislation appointed the former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to the newly constituted office of National Leader of the Turkmen People and the Chairperson of the *Halk Maslahaty*.<sup>18</sup> The combined effect of these changes has further impacted on democratic checks and balances, resulting in a lack of separation of powers between the branches government.

Changes to the legislation to accommodate the recent constitutional amendments came into force during the week before election day, including a new Law on the Parliament published on 19 March and amendments to the Electoral Code published on 22 March.<sup>19</sup> The changes do not address previous ODIHR EAM recommendations and further reform is needed, including on provisions related to suffrage rights, the formation of election commissions, delimitation of constituencies, compilation of voter lists, campaign and campaign finance regulations, as well as complaints and appeals.

*The electoral legal framework should be revised sufficiently in advance of the next elections, through a genuine participatory and consultative process, to bring it in line with international standards and obligations, guarantee constitutionally protected rights and freedoms, eliminate gaps and ambiguities, and address previous ODIHR recommendations.*

The Constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms and the right to elect and to be elected on the basis of universal, equal, direct suffrage through secret ballot. The Electoral Code outlines many provisions necessary to organize elections at all levels of governance, including those concerning election administration, voter and candidate registration, campaign and complaints. However, the legal framework is insufficient overall. Laws are not gazetted, but enter into force upon publication in two national newspapers, one in Turkmen and another in Russian.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, CEC decisions and regulations are not available electronically and are instead communicated to the public through newspapers. This practice requires stakeholders, including lower-level election administration, to rely

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<sup>16</sup> The 56-seat upper chamber was established in September 2020, with the last (indirect) elections held in March 2021. Based on amendments introduced in 2017, the previous People’s Council (*Halk Maslahaty*) was constitutionally defined as the highest representative body with the authority to issue binding decisions that must be implemented by, *inter alia*, the President, who chairs it. A similarly constituted *Halk Maslahaty* was earlier abolished in 2008. Section II.3.b of the 2002 Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice, provides that “the fundamental elements of electoral law [...] should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election”.

<sup>17</sup> While previously the *Halk Maslahaty* was effectively an upper house of the legislature, the new body, which can include up to 2,000 individuals, is an independent representative structure empowered with supreme constitutional authority. Its stated key mandate is “solving issues of national importance” and “representing the interest of the people in Turkmenistan”. Some provisions of the 2023 law on *Halk Maslahaty* are vague and may be interpreted as granting the new body prerogatives that further undermine the role of parliament. For instance, the law does not define what are “issues of national importance” or “interest of the people in Turkmenistan” and does not specify which amendments to the Constitution or laws the *Halk Maslahaty* may consider and adopt.

<sup>18</sup> The Chairperson of the *Halk Maslahaty* is the National Leader that the law explicitly names as the former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The body’s members include the President, speaker of parliament (*Mejlis*), Cabinet of Ministers, Prosecutor General, Ombudsperson, members of provincial, district, town and city councils, heads of political parties and public organisations, as well as societal representatives, including elders. The amendments resulted in a hierarchical executive duopoly of the National Leader and the President exercising wide constitutional powers relative to the parliament, further diluting the *Mejlis*’ role.

<sup>19</sup> Section VI, which addressed the indirect elections to the upper house of parliament was deleted. In several instances, a requirement to publish information in national newspapers was introduced.

<sup>20</sup> All legal acts must be published in the Turkmen language newspaper *Turkmenistan* and the country’s only Russian language broadsheet, *Neutralny Turkmenistan*.



on media to access relevant legal texts, thus diminishing access to information and legal certainty. Legislative clarity is also diminished by the absence of consolidated laws and regulations in the public domain. For instance, consolidated versions of laws are not available on the CEC or parliament websites.

*To enhance transparency, legal clarity and the right of access to information of public interest, applicable legislation, both, statutory and regulatory, should be made available to all stakeholders in an accessible format online.*

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections are administered by the CEC, with subordinate structures including 6 Regional Election Commissions (REC), 49 District Election Commissions (DECs), 125 Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs), 572 Local Election Commissions (LECs) and some 2,644 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), including 42 in diplomatic representations of Turkmenistan abroad.<sup>21</sup> Commissions at all levels are appointed at different intervals for five-year terms.<sup>22</sup> *Mejlis* elections are administered by the CEC, ConECs and PECs, with a limited role for the RECs and DECs.

The CEC is a permanent body with 15 members nominated and appointed by the President in consultation with political parties and public associations. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations and contrary to international standards and good practice, the appointment procedure and lack of parliamentary debate and public consultation on the selection of members affects the CEC's independence and impartiality.<sup>23</sup> The independence of the CEC is further compromised by the lack of safeguards against interference in its work or requirements for transparency.<sup>24</sup>

Each subordinate tier of the election administration is appointed by higher-level commissions, based on nominations by political parties, public associations and groups of citizens.<sup>25</sup> Most ConEC and PEC members met by the ODIHR EAM were employees of institutions where the ConECs and PECs were located, with leadership structures mirroring their professional hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> These arrangements do not safeguard the independence of the election administration overall or of its individual members.

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<sup>21</sup> Out-of-country votes are tabulated in constituency No. 7 in Ashgabat, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is located. The law allows the CEC to decide which city or *etrap* votes from abroad are assigned to. The total number of voters in constituency No. 7 was 18,483, which contrary to international good practice deviated from the average by more than 15 per cent.

<sup>22</sup> The terms of the CEC, ConECs and LECs commenced in 2022, the RECs and DECs in 2021, and PECs in 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Paragraph 20 of the [1996 UN HRC General Comment No. 25](#) to Article 25 of the ICCPR requires that “[a]n independent electoral authority should be established to supervise the electoral process and to ensure that it is conducted fairly, impartially and in accordance with established laws which are compatible with the Covenant”. Section II.3.1.a, II.3.1.b and II.3.1.c of the 2002 Venice Commission’s [Code of Good Practice](#), provide that the “organisation of elections [must be] by an impartial body” and that “an impartial body must be in charge of applying electoral law” and that “where there is no longstanding tradition of administrative authorities’ independence from those holding political power, independent, impartial electoral commissions must be set up at all levels, from the national level to polling station level.”

<sup>24</sup> For instance, there are no statutory measures in place to guarantee the transparency of election administration or its decision-making. Also, it is understood that the President can interfere with the organization of voting without a legislative process or regulation by the CEC – for instance, the practice of installing webcams in some polling stations is not based on the law or regulation, but a suggestion by the then President in 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Some of the lower-level commissioners met by the ODIHR EAM were not able to demonstrate awareness of the nomination process. In some instances, the commissions included multiple members nominated by the same entity. While the law states that only one member can be nominated at an entity’s meeting, it does not specify how many meetings may be held.

<sup>26</sup> In most cases, PECs operating inside schools or universities were chaired by their respective rectors or directors.

Women are underrepresented in the election administration, especially in the roles of commission chairperson, deputy and secretary. There are five women members of the CEC, none of whom holds a leadership position. Among the 66 members of the six RECs, there are 13 women (12.7 per cent), with only two in leadership positions. Women constitute 32.3 per cent of DEC members, 41.8 per cent of ConEC members, 40 per cent of LEC and 43.4 per cent of PEC members, with no publicly available data disaggregating their number in leadership positions.<sup>27</sup>

*Safeguards should be introduced to ensure that election commissions are independent from the government at all levels. To protect the independence of the election commissions, their compositions should not reflect professional hierarchies of their members positions in the institutions they are drawn from. Mechanisms to improve gender balance of election administration at all levels, should be considered.*

According to the law, the RECs perform a limited administrative and logistical role in support of the ConECs and the DECs establish the PECs. The ConECs play the key role in administering the *Mejlis* elections, including registering candidates, organizing their campaign events and establishing their results. The PECs are responsible for drawing up the voter lists and conducting voting and counting, as well as the transfer of results to the ConECs. Some ODIHR EAM's observations raised doubts about the level of actual engagement of respective commissions with some of their statutory responsibilities.

The overall administration of elections lacked transparency.<sup>28</sup> The CEC held three sessions, which all took place before the arrival of the ODIHR EAM two weeks ahead of election day. Despite repeated requests, the ODIHR EAM was not permitted to attend the final CEC session on the publication of results on 29 March. No agendas or minutes of meetings were made public or could be viewed by the ODIHR EAM. The CEC website included information on the delimitation of constituencies and updates such as the share of women members of election commissions, candidates and observers but it lacked data such as the list of candidates or election commission addresses.<sup>29</sup> Such information is communicated to the public through national and/or regional print media. In response to a request for a list of candidates standing for the *Mejlis* elections, the CEC invited the EAM to search back issues of newspapers.<sup>30</sup>

The CEC published a calendar of activities and manuals with excerpts from the law, which although prominently displayed at some ConECs and PECs, did not appear to have been used and some commissions lacked understanding of procedures outlined in them. Most of the ConEC and PEC members met by the ODIHR EAM before election day claimed to have received training from local executive authorities – on election day, most PEC members met by the ODIHR EAM reported being trained by the DECs.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Among others, Paragraph 40.13 of the [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#) commits participating States to “ensure the collection and analysis of data to assess adequately, monitor and improve the situation of women”. See also the [1989 General Recommendation No. 9](#) adopted by the CEDAW Committee (A/44/38) and Goal 17.18 of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) adopted in 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Paragraph 19 of the [2011 UN HRC General Comment No. 34](#) to Article 19 of the ICCPR states: “[t]o give effect to the right of access to information, States parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest. States parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective, and practical access to such information”.

<sup>29</sup> The CEC website is in Turkmen, Russian and English, with the Turkmen version being the most resourced.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, the list of candidates was published in print media in mid-February. Of note, some of the printed information was inconsistent with data provided to the ODIHR EAM by the CEC and the three political parties.

<sup>31</sup> The law tasks the CEC with responsibility for training members of the election administration.

*To foster the transparency of election administration, the meetings of all commissions should be accessible to all stakeholders, including observers. Calendars, agendas, minutes of CEC sessions and other relevant information should be placed in the public domain in a timely manner.*

The ODIHR EAM observed three voter education videos produced jointly by the CEC and the national broadcaster. They focused on the structure of the election administration and delimitation of boundaries; early voting; and out-of-country voting. The content of the three spots, which appeared on television but were not available online, was of limited use for voters.

As in two previous elections, some 240 polling stations were equipped with webcams with their feed broadcast live on the CEC website on election day. Their installation is not foreseen in the law and the practice is not communicated to the public. While the CEC told the ODIHR EAM that technical feasibility determined their placement, their purposes should be clarified.

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens above the age of 18 have the right to vote, except those serving a prison sentence or declared incompetent by a court.<sup>32</sup> Restrictions on the right to vote for persons with disabilities are excessive and run counter to the CRPD.<sup>33</sup> The disenfranchisement of all prisoners, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, contravenes OSCE commitments, other international obligations, and recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee.<sup>34</sup>

*The restriction of suffrage rights for citizens serving prison terms and persons with mental disabilities should be reviewed in line with international obligations.*

While by law, voters must have resided in the given precinct for at least three months in order to be eligible to be included in its voter list, according to the CEC, those who do not meet this minimum requirement can be added to the supplementary list.

Voter registration is passive. Contrary to good practice, voter lists are drawn up by the PECs anew for each election process.<sup>35</sup> According to the law, commissions rely on local executive authorities for population data. The PECs are required to update the incoming information door to door, and all precincts visited by the ODIHR EAM claimed to have carried out the necessary verification, though

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<sup>32</sup> There are no statutory restrictions in place for eligible citizens in pretrial detention. Directors of detention facilities should compile voter lists in these institutions. The CEC informed the ODIHR EAM that eligible citizens may take advantage of mobile voting – it could not be established whether they may cast a ballot in their home constituency.

<sup>33</sup> According to Article 29 of the [CRPD](#), “State Parties shall [...] ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected”. The [UN CRPD Committee in its Concluding Observations on Turkmenistan](#) (May 2015) recommended that Turkmenistan “make sure that all restrictions on the right to vote of persons with disabilities are removed, by immediately restoring the right to vote for persons deprived of legal capacity and by providing full accessibility and information in relation to their right to vote”.

<sup>34</sup> Paragraph 7.3 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that participating States will “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens”, while Paragraph 24 provides that restrictions on rights and freedoms must be “strictly proportionate to the aim of the law”. Paragraph 14 of the [1996 UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) to Article 25 of the ICCPR states that grounds for the deprivation of voting rights should be “objective and reasonable”. See also 2017 [UN HRC Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Turkmenistan](#).

<sup>35</sup> According to paragraph I.1.2.i of the 2002 Venice Commission’s [Code of Good Practice](#), “there must be permanent electoral registers”.

they reported very different timeframes, which raises questions about the consistency of application of this procedure.<sup>36</sup> The PECs distribute invitations to voters, which contain information about the location of the voter's polling station.<sup>37</sup>

Additional lists are compiled in military units, hospitals and care homes by the commanders or directors of these institutions. Voters residing abroad can request to be included on the list of their respective embassy or consulate.<sup>38</sup>

*To ensure its accuracy and compliance with international good practice, authorities should consider the introduction of a permanent and centralized voter register which should be regularly updated.*

The law does not specify when the process of voter list compilation starts, but requires that lists be displayed at polling stations at least 15 days before election day. The information includes the voter's home address, compromising their privacy. Lists were displayed in over half the polling stations observed by the ODIHR EAM during early voting. None of the visited PECs received requests from voters to be included or to amend or correct their data.

According to the CEC, 3,496,368 voters were registered to participate in the elections countrywide and 12,971 abroad.<sup>39</sup> The number of voters registered per constituency was not made publicly available before election day and despite requests, the ODIHR EAM was only able to obtain the data for one of the six *velayats*.<sup>40</sup> Although a census was carried out in December 2022, the absence of information about the population, including a subnational breakdown of figures, does not facilitate an assessment of the accuracy and/or inclusiveness of voter registration.<sup>41</sup>

Contrary to international good practice, additional voters could be included in supplementary voter lists on election day.<sup>42</sup> Some PECs told the ODIHR EAM that only voters whose identity documents showed an address within the precinct could be registered or added to the supplementary list. In the absence of a centralized voter register, there are no adequate safeguards in place against multiple voting.

*To safeguard against multiple voting, consideration could be given to removing the possibility for voters to register at the polling stations on election day. A legal deadline for closing voter lists could be introduced, with additional entries permitted only in accordance with clearly defined legal requirements, subject to judicial control.*

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<sup>36</sup> The duration of the process, as recollected by different PECs, ranged from one day to two months.

<sup>37</sup> Voters are not required to present the invitation at voting, but in polling stations observed by the ODIHR EAM, some did.

<sup>38</sup> The CEC told the ODIHR EAM that embassies reach out to Turkmen citizens abroad to include them in their voter lists.

<sup>39</sup> For a total of 3,509,339 registered voters.

<sup>40</sup> The REC for Ashgabat city provided the ODIHR EAM with the number of voters registered in each of its 17 constituencies. According to the figures, the principle of equality of the vote was respected. Paragraph 19 of the [UN HRC General Comment No. 34](#) to the ICCPR calls the states to "proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest" and to "make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information". The number of registered voters in each constituency was published together with the results in print media on 1 April.

<sup>41</sup> Information from the 2012 census was never made public. The ODIHR EAM heard some voters' concerns about perceived ongoing outward migration of their fellow citizens.

<sup>42</sup> According to paragraph I.1.2.iv of the 2002 Venice Commission's [Code of Good Practice](#), "[...] polling stations should not be permitted to register voters on election day itself".

## VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Citizens over the age of 25 and permanently residing in the country for no less than 10 years are eligible to stand as candidates for the *Mejlis* elections. They must not have an unexpired or unexpunged criminal record. These residency-based restrictions are excessive and the exclusion of citizens with a criminal record irrespective of the gravity of the crime is disproportionate.<sup>43</sup>

*Restriction on the right to stand by citizens with an unexpired or unexpunged criminal record and those resident in the country for less than 10 years should be reviewed and brought in line with international standards.*

By law, the nomination and registration processes are conducted at the level of the constituency. Political parties and groups of citizens may nominate candidates between 60 and 30 days before election day. Political parties must nominate candidates during conventions, which may be held jointly with other parties.<sup>44</sup> Nominations by groups of citizens can be made at meetings of no fewer than 200 voters registered in the respective constituency, with a simple majority in favor.<sup>45</sup>

The decision of the nominating entity and a statement from the nominee must be submitted to the corresponding ConEC between 50 and 25 days before election day. The groups of citizens are required to submit protocols that include a signature of each meeting participant. Each voter can sign in support of only one candidate, and each meeting nominates only one candidate.<sup>46</sup> Although the law required the ConECs to retain the records of the registration process, none of the ConECs with whom the ODIHR EAM met were able to present the records.<sup>47</sup> Some of the ConEC members, including those in leadership positions, could not correctly identify the nominating entities of the candidates standing in their constituency, thus casting doubt on the genuineness of the nomination and registration processes by the ConECs.

According to the CEC, all 258 nominated candidates were registered, including 97 nominated by DP, 51 by AP and 27 by PIE, as well as 83 by groups of citizens.<sup>48</sup> Of the 125 constituencies, 117 saw two candidates compete for office and only 8 constituencies had three candidates running. Basic biographic information about the candidates was published in print media in both Turkmen and Russian between 6 and 18 March.

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<sup>43</sup> See paragraphs 7.3 and 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) and paragraph 15 of the [1996 UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) to Article 25 of the ICCPR, which says that “any restrictions on the right to stand [...] must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation”. See also the 2002 Venice Commission’s [Code of Good Practice](#), paragraphs I.1.1.c and I.1.1.d.

<sup>44</sup> The ODIHR EAM was informed that no nomination meetings were held jointly by more than one party. There were no coalitions formed ahead of the elections.

<sup>45</sup> In both cases the decision to nominate a candidate may be made through an open or secret ballot.

<sup>46</sup> Paragraph 77 of the [2010 OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that “in order to enhance pluralism and freedom of association, legislation should not limit a citizen to signing a supporting list for only one party”.

<sup>47</sup> In one case, the ConEC presented incomplete copies of signature lists from another ConEC.

<sup>48</sup> These figures, provided to the ODIHR EAM by the CEC and confirmed by the three political parties, did not correspond with data included in the lists of candidates published in print media, where DP is reflected to have nominated 108; Agrarian Party 48, Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs 27, and groups of citizens 79 candidates.

A total of 41 women (15.9 per cent) competed in the elections, a marked decrease compared to the 2018 elections.<sup>49</sup> There are no special measures in place requiring political parties to ensure women's participation and none of the parties implemented any measures in this regards.<sup>50</sup> The CEC did not have information whether any persons with disabilities stood for election.

*To further the principle of equal participation, measures should be introduced to promote women candidates. Political parties could strengthen their efforts to foster inclusivity, including by adopting binding policies to nominate women candidates.*

## VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Candidates can begin campaigning once they are registered and the campaign period ends one day before election day. The Election Code provides for political parties, public associations, candidates and their proxies, as well as citizens to campaign freely. The law also prescribes equal opportunities for contestants. However, rigid interpretation of provisions on equal opportunities to campaign effectively stifles access to the freedoms of assembly and expression outside of events organized by the CEC, contrary to international obligations and standards and OSCE commitments.

There were no election materials displayed in cities or alongside thoroughfares, in a marked contrast to the ubiquitous billboards and posters of the President and his National Leader father. No outdoor campaign events or publicly accessible indoor rallies were observed or could be confirmed by the ODIHR EAM. Political parties were absent from the process, with no logos or slogans featuring on printed or televised information about the contestants.<sup>51</sup>

The election administration produced uniform candidate posters that were displayed at the polling stations.<sup>52</sup> The CEC organized standardized candidate meetings with voters, for which it selected the venues together with local executive authorities. Most candidates met by the ODIHR EAM stated that the CEC arranged at least three such meetings. Senior representatives of two political parties, who were also candidates, informed the ODIHR EAM that they or their proxies had organized additional meetings.

Campaign events observed by the ODIHR EAM all had the character of closed meetings hosted by a representative of the ConEC, where a candidate and proxy addressed the audience. They were all held in educational institutions or civic halls. They were not announced beforehand and there was no publicized schedule to help guide the electorate.<sup>53</sup> They attracted limited audiences, with students and

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<sup>49</sup> There were 71 women among the 284 candidates (25 per cent) in the 2018 elections.

<sup>50</sup> In paragraph 23 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#) participating States committed to “making equality between men and women an integral part of our policies”. See also article 7(b) of the [CEDAW](#) and Paragraph 26 of the [1997 Committee’s General Recommendation 23](#) on CEDAW.

<sup>51</sup> Some political parties told the ODIHR EAM that they provide logistical support and drafted the candidates’ biographies that are then forwarded to the ConECs.

<sup>52</sup> At polling stations, candidate information posters were displayed side by side on bulletin boards that came in two formats. In constituencies where three candidates stood for election, the smaller format accommodated only two posters, thus leaving off the biographic information about the third candidate. PECs could not explain this omission.

<sup>53</sup> The CEC provided the ODIHR EAM with a schedule of events for some candidates. This information did not appear to have been made available to voters.

teachers merely filling the seating capacity.<sup>54</sup> The attendees did not engage with the candidates and appeared generally reluctant to pose questions. With access blocked, social media played no role in the campaign (see the *Media* section).<sup>55</sup>

Youth was a prominent topic of the campaign, and was the focus on many of the campaign meetings observed by the ODIHR EAM. Many candidates, regardless of nominating entity, made references to the National Leader's "Happy Youth" theme for the year. General mentions of 'public welfare' featured widely, but contestants did not elaborate substantive policy proposals.

Although a third of the contestants were nominated by groups of citizens, the ODIHR EAM was not able to obtain information about their composition. The campaign did not demonstrate genuine political alternatives.<sup>56</sup> In their speeches, most candidates aligned themselves with the policies of the President and National Leader, thus blurring the line between party and State and running counter to paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>57</sup>

The use of standardized visuals and limited biographic information in newspaper blurbs, as well as the homogenous 10-minute TV addresses, further underscored the absence of choice. The lack of any debate or interaction among the candidates did not facilitate meaningful policy dialogue and did not allow voters to make informed decisions.

*In order to provide voters with genuine political alternatives and align the election process with democratic standards and commitments, political parties and candidates should be free to organize their own campaign events and political advertising should be permitted more widely. The campaign should be pluralistic and reflect a clear separation between the State and electoral contestants, as required by paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.*

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The 2012 Law on Political Parties and the Electoral Code regulate campaign finance. The former stipulates that the election-related expenses of political parties shall be reimbursed. The latter provides for campaigning that is cost-free for the candidates, as well as equal conditions and public subsidies for both contestants and their nominating entities. The CEC is responsible for ensuring that candidates and their nominating entities enjoy equal opportunities to campaign. While the legislation does not prohibit private campaign funding, the legislation does not foresee caps on the amount of donations contestants may collect or on their expenditure. Also, there are no disclosure or reporting requirements, nor monitoring before or after the elections.

All three parties and candidates met by the ODIHR EAM confirmed that they did not directly finance any campaign related activity. Campaign events and related expenditure were managed directly by the

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<sup>54</sup> Political parties boast significant membership, that was not reflected in the levels of participation at the events observed by the EAM. For instance, the DP claims to have 230,000 members (up from 210,000 in 2018), the AP some 80,000 (up from 40,000 in 2018) and the PIE some 30,000 members (up from 10,000 in 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Access to all major social media platforms is blocked in Turkmenistan.

<sup>56</sup> In paragraph 3 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#), the participating States recognized "the importance of pluralism with regard to political organizations."

<sup>57</sup> None of the contestants met by the ODIHR EAM were able to articulate what differentiated them from their competitors. Several could not name their opponent or their nominating entity. Paragraph 5.4 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) mandates "a clear separation between the State and political parties; in particular, political parties will not be merged with the State".

election administration. In-kind state contributions included the organization of the candidates' meetings with voters, the publishing of their biographies in print media, and airtime on national TV.

The framework regulating campaign finance is insufficient to ensure the effective implementation of the principles of equality, independence and pluralism outlined in the legislation.

*To promote accountability and transparency, the framework regulating campaign finance should be reviewed and revised. Consideration should be given to providing campaign funding directly to the candidates and encouraging political parties to finance their campaigns. In line with international good practice, regulations should be put in place for campaign donations, including third-party and in-kind contributions from private and state sources, expenditures, disclosure, reporting and oversight.*

## X. MEDIA

### A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Television and print media are the main source of information in Turkmenistan. The media landscape is characterized by state monopoly, with all 11 broadcast outlets owned by the state, and all newspapers printed by the State Publishing Service and all their directors and editors-in-chief appointed by the president. Information about the President and state authorities is distributed exclusively through the State News Agency, and all three main TV channels that carry political information share a single news programme.<sup>58</sup> News content is personality driven and consistently features uncritical endorsements of the President and the National Leader.<sup>59</sup>

The widespread use of satellite dishes throughout the country provides access to a more diverse array of opinions and information through foreign TV channels. However, no international news agency accredited by the MFA is represented by a foreign correspondent in country. Online media outlets that provide critical information operate mostly from abroad. The media made no effort to facilitate access to election or campaign information for people with visual or hearing impairments. The absence of media pluralism and independence, and the ensuing information vacuum, severely limit the ability for voters to make informed choices and runs counter to OSCE commitments and other international standards.<sup>60</sup>

*To facilitate citizens' access to impartial, critical and analytical information, media outlets should be free to pursue their own editorial policies. Efforts should be made to encourage the establishment of a more vibrant media landscape with outlets presenting a wider range of viewpoints.*

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<sup>58</sup> The news program "Watan" appears at the same time on *Altyn Asyr*, *Miras* and *Yaslik* TV channels.

<sup>59</sup> Every day in the county, the front page of every issue of every [newspaper](#), including specialized outlets for agriculture, sports, youth or teachers, featured a photograph of and a news item concerning the President. Also, some commercial advertisements appear in the form of congratulatory letters to the President.

<sup>60</sup> Paragraph 11 of the [1996 OSCE Lisbon Document](#) states that "Freedom of the press and media are among the basic prerequisites for truly democratic and civil societies". The OSCE participating States, in [1997 OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 193](#), further reaffirmed that "freedom of expression is a fundamental and internationally recognized human right and a basic component of a democratic society and that free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government".



Access to the internet is strictly controlled, with many websites blocked. Internet access is also expensive and its overall use remains low.<sup>61</sup> Apart from additional cost considerations, the 2014 Law on the Internet prohibits uncertified means of cryptographic data protection, thus potentially barring the use of VPN services. In 2022, the President decreed a concept study of an autonomous national digital network. Previous ODIHR recommendations to lift restrictions on accessing the right to information and expression online remain unaddressed.

## B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

The Constitution provides for freedom of expression and the right to freely seek, receive and impart information. The Electoral Code and the 2012 Law on Mass Media expressly refer to freedom of expression and prohibit censorship and interference and the 2018 Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting reiterates these principles. However, defamation is criminalized and punishable by imprisonment of up to three years, or five years for insult or defamation of the President and the law does not provide for balanced or neutral reporting.<sup>62</sup>

*In line with international standards, criminalization of defamation and insult of the President and state officials should be repealed in favor of proportionate civil sanctions, designed to restore any reputational harm.*

The Electoral Code provides for equal access to the media during the campaign for all contestants.<sup>63</sup> The CEC working group on media matters did not hold regular meetings. The absence of oversight of the campaign in the media or publicly available reports on media coverage of the campaign negatively affected the candidates and voters' right to impart and receive information. No media-related complaints were lodged to the election administration or courts.

Although the ODIHR EAM did not systematically monitor the media, it noted that the TV news programs rarely reported on election events. While the Electoral Code provides for free airtime devoted to contestant debates, the Committee for Television and Radiobroadcasting told the ODIHR EAM that no candidate expressed interest in additional coverage. Televised messages from candidates filmed against a neutral background and without graphics or script to facilitate their recognition were aired nationally during the first two weeks of the campaign.<sup>64</sup> Despite the absence of regulations or

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<sup>61</sup> According to [Internet World Stats](#), as of July 2022, Internet penetration in Turkmenistan stood at 25.3 per cent (against a global average of 67.9 percent).

<sup>62</sup> Paragraph 47 of the 2011 UNHRC [General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR](#) states that “States parties should consider the decriminalization of defamation and, in any case, the application of the criminal law should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty.” According to Paragraph 38 “the mere fact that forms of expression are considered to be insulting to a public figure is not sufficient to justify the imposition of penalties, albeit public figures may also benefit from the provisions of the [ICCPR]. Moreover, all public figures, including those exercising the highest political authority such as heads of state and government, are legitimately subject to criticism and political opposition. ...[L]aws should not provide for more severe penalties solely on the basis of the identity of the person that may have been impugned. States parties should not prohibit criticism of institutions, such as the army or the administration”. See also [Decision No. 3/18 of the OSCE Ministerial Council](#) that calls on participating States to “[e]nsure that defamation laws do not carry excessive sanctions or penalties that could undermine the safety of journalists and/or effectively censor journalists and interfere with their mission of informing the public and, where necessary, to revise and repeal such laws”.

<sup>63</sup> Candidates have the right to an equal share of a minimum of one hour of cost-free airtime between 19.00 and 23.00 on three public TV channels – *Altyn Asyr*, *Miras* and *Yaslyk*. Contestants were also provided cost-free space to print their biographies in two national newspapers, one in Turkmen and another in Russian.

<sup>64</sup> In the absence of publicly available schedule of appearances, any viewer who tuned in and missed the introduction would not necessarily be able to identify the candidates standing in their constituency. The spots were aired only once.

instructions to the candidates, as confirmed by the CEC and media outlets, all contestant TV addresses followed identical format. All candidate messages observed by the ODIHR EAM included endorsements of the President and his policy programme, thus providing no meaningful alternatives for voters to choose from. No schedule of appearances was published to help guide voters searching for information about contestants in their respective constituencies.

Print media coverage of the campaign was limited to scarce information about the candidates distributed by the State News Agency.<sup>65</sup>

*An independent media regulator should be established and tasked with the oversight of media conduct during elections.*

## **XI. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

The law provides for a system of complaints and appeals that is generally in line with international principles of judicial review. No complaints were filed in these or any previous elections, thus making it impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures. The right to redress is clearly established in the law for all electoral participants, who can lodge a complaint with the election administration and the courts. The role of the judiciary in the electoral process is limited to guaranteeing the protection of electoral rights in electoral disputes. The number of judges of all the courts is determined by the President. As for CEC members, judges are appointed by the president for five-year terms. As a result, the absence of safeguards of independence of all adjudicating instances may hamper access to effective remedy.

The law stipulates that commissions and courts must review complaints within three days or immediately if they are filed one day before or on election day. Decisions taken by lower election commissions can be challenged before a higher commission or a court. CEC decisions can be appealed to the Supreme Court, which is also the second instance body for lower regional (*velayat*) courts. In addition, complaints can be lodged directly with the CEC or the Supreme Court, as they both have jurisdiction over election related complaints. The law gives primacy to the court when a complaint is submitted to both a commission and court.<sup>66</sup> However, election commissions and courts at all levels (district, regional and the Supreme Court) have the authority to consider first instance claims, making it possible to bring the same complaint before several fora. The overlapping authority detracts from legal clarity and could potentially hinder access to effective remedy.

The Electoral Code enumerates a set of electoral violations that include the use of violence, forgery, abuse of position and other campaign infringements. The Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code provide for sanctions for proxy and multiple voting, vote-buying, manipulation of election results, interference in the work of election commissions, and secrecy of the vote violations. Fines include correctional labor, administrative detention and imprisonment of up to two years. District courts (first level courts of general jurisdiction in Turkmenistan) exercise jurisdiction over allegations of electoral offences. The General Prosecutor's Office informed the ODIHR EAM that no cases were recorded during this or previous election processes.

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<sup>65</sup> A newspaper specializing in fossil fuels included excerpts from the programmes of the candidates who are employed by its parent company.

<sup>66</sup> The court must inform the relevant election commission when a complaint is filed.

*To provide legal clarity, the legal framework should be amended to eliminate overlapping jurisdictions of bodies responsible for election-related complaints and appeals, including the courts and election administration. Areas of responsibility and institutional hierarchy should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.*

## **XII. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION**

The Election Code provides for citizen and international observation of elections, in line with OSCE commitments.<sup>67</sup> Citizen observers can be nominated by the three political parties, candidates, any of the 135 registered public associations and groups of citizens. According to the CEC, 2,855 citizen observers were accredited, just over 50 per cent of whom were women.

All citizen observers represented organizations endorsed by the state and supportive of the President as per their statutes. The organizations met with by the ODIHR EAM did not follow a meaningful methodology or collect data that would permit them to assess the integrity of key elements of the process.<sup>68</sup> Some of the observers encountered by the ODIHR EAM on election day could not identify the organization they represented and no reports were published by any of the accredited groups.

According to the CEC, some 85 international observers were accredited, including 37 from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 15 from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and 3 each from the Organization of Turkic States and Islamic Cooperation Organization. The presence of international observers was treated by national media as a sign of the international community's confidence in the integrity of the process.

While the law guarantees the independence of observers, the ODIHR EAM had to rely on the MFA to organize some of its meetings, especially with representatives of state institutions.<sup>69</sup> Despite requests, the ODIHR EAM was not always able to obtain information from the CEC and was accompanied by a representative of the CEC to some of its meetings with interlocutors in the election administration. The CEC representative sometimes actively engaged in these exchanges, in particular when interlocutors from lower-lever commissions were unable to provide or provided erroneous responses to questions.<sup>70</sup> Such instances did not always facilitate the EAM's assessment of their preparedness.

*In line with the commitment undertaken under paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, authorities should ensure that international observers are granted independent access to all election stakeholders and all parts of the election process.*

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<sup>67</sup> Paragraph 8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states: “The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law. They will also endeavour to facilitate similar access for election proceedings held below the national level. Such observers will undertake not to interfere in the electoral proceedings”.

<sup>68</sup> Paragraph II.3.2.b. of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice](#) advises that “observation must not be confined to the election day itself, but must include the registration period of candidates and, if necessary, of electors, as well as the electoral campaign. It must make it possible to determine whether irregularities occurred before, during or after the elections. It must always be possible during vote counting”.

<sup>69</sup> Article 6.5 of the Electoral Code provides that “international observers shall carry out their activities on their own and independently”.

<sup>70</sup> Paragraphs 89 and 90 of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice](#), Explanatory Report, state that “international observers play a primordial role in states which have no established tradition of impartial verification of the lawfulness of elections” and “generally, international as well as national observers must be in a position to interview anyone present, take notes and report to their organization”.

### XIII. ELECTION DAY

In accordance with the ODIHR methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not conduct a comprehensive and systematic observation of election day proceedings. However, mission members visited a limited number of polling stations in Ashgabat and the Ahal *velayat* during early voting and on election day.

#### A. EARLY VOTING AND VOTING

Voters could cast their ballots early, starting 10 days before election day.<sup>71</sup> Although not a formal requirement, some PECs told the ODIHR EAM that they asked voters to justify early participation. According to the CEC, some 5.1 per cent of voters voted early. In some instances, polling stations visited by the ODIHR EAM during early voting could not show voter lists marked with voter signatures, despite the presence of ballots inside the early voting ballot box. The overnight storage of sensitive materials is unregulated.

Mobile voting is available to homebound voters upon a justified request. The limited number of polling stations visited by the ODIHR EAM in Ashgabat were well equipped, had ample layout, and mostly displayed the voter list and biographic candidate posters.<sup>72</sup> No large groups of voters were observed anywhere, except at institutions of higher learning, where students in uniform queued outside before the opening of polling stations.

Positively, ballot papers included some security features such as a tamper-evident pattern, stamp and signature of the PEC chairperson, as previously recommended by ODIHR.<sup>73</sup> While the regular and early voting ballot boxes were transparent, the mobile ballot box was not. In most cases observed, all boxes were sealed with stamped paper seals that were not tamper-proof and plastic seals without security numbers. In some instances, managers of the institutions which hosted the polling stations, who were not members of the PECs, were engaged in the process of supervising their subordinates or administering voting.

Most of the polling stations visited by the ODIHR EAM were not accessible to voters with restricted mobility.<sup>74</sup> The possibility to vote at home does not represent adequate accommodation and greater efforts should be made to facilitate regular full participation of voters with disabilities. No braille templates were available for visually challenged voters. While the CEC claimed to have had past experience with them, it was not familiar with other forms of reasonable accommodation, such as the use of sign language for voter education.

*To ensure equal and universal participation by all voters, the authorities and election administration should make a concerted effort in close co-operation with disabled persons organizations to ensure that persons with disabilities, including voters with mobility restrictions, visual and hearing impairments, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities are able to fully partake in all parts of the process.*

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<sup>71</sup> Early voting is available daily for ten days between the hours of 8:00 and 18:00, with no fewer than two PEC members administering the poll.

<sup>72</sup> In all instances, the polling stations visited did not display the posters for the district level elections.

<sup>73</sup> These aspects, observed in practice, are not codified in the law or CEC regulations and/or decisions.

<sup>74</sup> Article 9 of the 2006 [CRPD](#) stipulates that States take appropriate measures to ensure access to persons with disabilities “on an equal basis with others”, while Article 29 calls on ensuring that “voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use”.

In the limited polling stations observed, the ODIHR EAM noted multiple indications of ballot box stuffing and discrepancies with reported turnout figures. Such indications included the incidence of voter lists containing series of identical signatures, the overall number of voter signatures on voter lists being notably lower than the cumulative turnout declared by the observed PECs, and in some cases the quantity of ballots inside the ballot boxes indicated a significantly lower level of participation. Family and proxy voting appeared to be an endemic practice, with a number of cases of voters carrying multiple voter invitations and/or identity documents observed in the visited polling stations.

*To enhance the integrity of the electoral process, the authorities and election administration should adopt measures to eliminate the widespread practices of family and proxy voting, as well as introduce safeguards and training to prevent ballot box stuffing and the manipulation of voter turnout. All those violating election legislation and election commissioners complicit in violations should be held accountable.*

## **B. COUNTING, TABULATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS**

While the legal framework grants observers access to all stages of the election day process, in some polling stations the ODIHR EAM faced obstacles accessing the vote counting venues. In one instance, observers were initially asked to leave the counting location, and found evidence of ballot box tampering when they were invited to return. In another instance, entry was also ultimately granted but attempts were made to obstruct the view of the process.

In the limited number of polling stations observed during the count the ODIHR EAM noted numerous irregularities during the process. PEC members opened the ballot boxes and started the count without carrying out the tasks prescribed in the law, such as counting and cancelling all unused ballots. In several instances, many blank and marked ballots were added to the piles emptied from the ballot boxes. In one polling station observed by the ODIHR EAM, the mobile ballot box contained more than twice the number of ballots than voters who were listed as having requested homebound voting. The determination of ballot validity and counting were carried out simultaneously by individual PEC members, without announcement or display of the contents of the ballots. Figures were not reconciled in accordance with procedures, with mistakes entered onto the protocols. Protocols were completed in silence and no copies were provided to ODIHR EAM observers. In the absence of procedures, the packing of materials was hasty, improvised and intransparent.

The ODIHR EAM did not observe the tabulation process. In one instance the PEC protocol and materials from the *Mejlis* election were transferred to the DEC rather than the ConEC. In another, the ConEC was closed, thus rendering the process of tabulation unobservable. The lack of established tabulation procedures did not allow for an assessment by the ODIHR EAM. Tabulation protocols were not displayed at the ConEC locations visited after election day.

*To establish genuine results, all PEC members should undergo extensive training in closing and counting procedures. Procedures for the tabulation of results should be developed and implemented, with appropriate training in place for all lower-level election commissioners. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that the process is transparent and orderly and that the results accurately reflect the will of the voters.*

The CEC held a meeting at which it validated the final results within the legal deadline on 29 March. Despite requests, the ODIHR EAM was not permitted to observe the session. Contrary to good

practice and previous ODIHR recommendations, results were not disaggregated by polling stations. The CEC declared a turnout of 91.12 per cent, with winners emerging in the first round in all 125 constituencies. The results were published on the CEC website after they appeared in print media.<sup>75</sup>

#### **XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in Turkmenistan and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past ODIHR recommendations that have not yet been addressed. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Turkmenistan to further improve the electoral process and address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.<sup>76</sup>

##### **A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To enhance the integrity of the electoral process, the authorities and election administration should adopt measures to eliminate the widespread practices of family and proxy voting, as well as introduce safeguards and training to prevent ballot box stuffing and the manipulation of voter turnout. All those violating election legislation and election commissioners complicit in violations should be held accountable.
2. To establish genuine results, all PEC members should undergo extensive training in closing and counting procedures. Procedures for the tabulation of results should be developed and implemented, with appropriate training in place for all lower-level election commissioners. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that the process is transparent and orderly and that the results accurately reflect the will of the voters.
3. In order to provide voters with genuine political alternatives and align the election process with democratic standards and commitments, political parties and candidates should be free to organize their own campaign events and political advertising should be permitted more widely. The campaign should be pluralistic and reflect a clear separation between the State and electoral contestants, as required by paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.
4. To facilitate citizens' access to impartial, critical and analytical information, media outlets should be free to pursue their own editorial policies. Efforts should be made to encourage the establishment of a more vibrant media landscape with outlets presenting a wider range of viewpoints.
5. Safeguards should be introduced to ensure that election commissions are independent from the government at all levels. To protect the independence of the election commissions, their compositions should not reflect professional hierarchies of their members drawn from other

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<sup>75</sup> In neither case did the information reflect the candidates' nominating entity (or membership in a political party).

<sup>76</sup> In Paragraph 25 of the 1999 [OSCE Istanbul Document](#), OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations". The follow-up of prior recommendations is assessed by the ODIHR EET within its mandate as follows: recommendations number 6, 7, 9 and 15 from the [ODIHR Final Report on the 2018 parliamentary elections](#) and 4, 12, 13, 15, 24, 25 and 26 from the [ODIHR Final Report on the 2017 presidential election](#) are partially implemented. Recommendation 22 from the 2017 ODIHR Final Report is fully implemented. See also the ODIHR [electoral recommendations database](#).

institutions. Mechanisms to improve gender balance of election administration at all levels, should be considered.

6. To ensure its accuracy and compliance with international good practice, authorities should consider the introduction of a permanent and centralized voter register. It should be regularly updated before elections.

## **B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Electoral System and Legal Framework**

7. In line with international good practice, constituency boundaries should be delimited no less than one year before the elections.
8. The electoral legal framework should be revised sufficiently in advance of the next elections, through a genuine participatory and consultative process, to bring it in line with international standards and obligations, guarantee constitutionally protected rights and freedoms, eliminate gaps and ambiguities, and address previous ODIHR recommendations.
9. To enhance transparency, and the right of access to information of public interest, applicable legislation, both, statutory and regulatory, should be made available to all stakeholders in an accessible format online.

### **Election Administration**

10. To foster the transparency of election administration, the meetings of all commissions should be accessible to all stakeholders, including observers. Calendars, agendas, minutes of CEC sessions and other relevant information should be placed in the public domain in a timely manner.

### **Voter Registration**

11. The restriction of suffrage rights for citizens serving prison terms and persons with mental disabilities should be reviewed in line with international obligations.
12. To safeguard against multiple voting, consideration could be given to removing the possibility for voters to register at the polling stations on election day. A legal deadline for closing voter lists could be introduced, with additional entries permitted only in accordance with clearly defined legal requirements, subject to judicial control.

### **Candidate Registration**

13. Restriction on the right to stand by citizens with an unexpired or unexpunged criminal record and those resident in the country for less than 10 years should be reviewed and brought in line with international standards.
14. To further the principle of equal participation, measures should be introduced to promote women candidates. Political parties could strengthen their efforts to foster inclusivity, including by adopting binding policies to nominate women candidates.

### **Campaign Finance**

15. To promote accountability and transparency, the framework regulating campaign finance should be reviewed and revised. Consideration should be given to providing campaign funding directly

to the candidates and encouraging political parties to finance their campaigns. In line with international good practice, regulations should be put in place for campaign donations, including third-party and in-kind contributions from private and state sources, expenditures, disclosure, reporting and oversight.

## **Media**

16. In line with international standards, criminalization of defamation and insult of the President and state officials should be repealed in favor of proportionate civil sanctions, designed to restore any reputational harm.
17. An independent media regulator should be established and tasked with the oversight of media conduct during elections.

## **Complaints and Appeals**

18. To provide legal clarity, the legal framework should be amended to eliminate overlapping jurisdictions of bodies responsible for election-related complaints and appeals, including the courts and election administration. Areas of responsibility and institutional hierarchy should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

## **Citizen and International Observers**

19. In line with the commitment undertaken under paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, authorities should ensure that international observers are granted independent access to all election stakeholders and all parts of the election process.

## **Election Day**

20. To ensure equal and universal participation by all voters, the authorities and election administration should make a concerted effort in close co-operation with disabled persons organizations to ensure that persons with disabilities, including voters with mobility restrictions, visual and hearing impairments, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities are able to partake in all parts of the process.



**ANNEXE : FINAL RESULTS**

Constituency (no. and name)	Elected candidate	Total number of votes	Votes for the candidate	Percentage
1 Garassyzlyk	Kasymguly Babaev	27,668	24,503	88.56
2 Bitaraplyk	Begmurat Mukhamedov	27,580	17,480	63.38
3 Azatlyk	Janet Ovekova	27,599	16,759	60.75
4 Berkararlyk	Saparmyrat Ovganov	27,016	20,024	74.12
5 Parahatcylyk	Dunyagozel Kulmanova	24,474	15,158	62.04
6 Kopetdag	Charygeldy Babanyyazov	25,956	15,585	60.07
7 Gunes	Guvanchmyrat Agaev	16,968	11,728	69.47
8 Dostluk	Gurbanmyrat Gormekov	23,886	13,374	56.06
9 Alem	Batyr Bailyev	25,103	14,409	57.40
10 Arcabil	Serdar Durdyev	25,849	17,854	69.07
11 Bagtyarlyk	Bairamgozel Myradova	25,288	15,435	61.05
12 Ashgabat	Jeren Geldyeva	25,174	13,307	52.86
13 Koshi	Azat Seidibaev	24,609	15,489	63.17
14 Ruhabat	Dovranguly Mammedov	25,343	13,692	54.06
15 Buzmein	Akmammet Annamanov	23,572	13,680	58.17
16 Gokje	Sakhyberdi Jafarov	25,328	12,923	51.16
17 Galkynysh	Chemen Rejebova	26,262	15,519	59.28
18 Baherden	Maksatberdi Gurbanov	23,880	14,376	60.23
19 Gokdepe	Resul Ishanguliyev	25,710	14,397	56.18
20 Yzgant	Kerimguly Geldiev	24,702	14,578	59.03
21 Derveze	Begenchgeldy Bayrammyradov	25,003	13,005	52.16
22 Anew	Annamukammed Sarjaev	24,231	13,276	54.90
23 Akbugda	Movlam Oraev	25,617	17,987	70.30
24 Kaka	Maya Khojieva	27,087	13,910	51.50
25 Dushak	Gurbangozel Mukhammedova	26,416	14,233	53.91
26 Tejen	Enejan Atayeva	26,605	14,429	54.33
27 Agalan	Serdar Begmyradov	26,516	14,164	53.47
28 Goniamasha	Gayypgeldy Sahedov	26,114	13,336	51.11
29 Babadayhan	Orazgeldy Akgaev	24,458	12,670	51.82
30 Altyn Asyr	Aisoltan Shamyradova	27,810	14,613	52.58
31 Sarahs	Gurbangeldy Ashirov	27,745	14,734	53.30
32 Archman	Ogulmaral Hojaeva	28,006	15,482	55.44
33 Ahal	Ata Serdarov	25,510	20,261	79.42
34 Dasharbat	Mengli Divanova	26,787	16,125	60.27
35 Avaza	Eziz Matdyev	28,108	14,426	51.43
36 Turkmenbasy	Annabagt Mayeva	27,461	153,74	56.00
37 Bereket	Tuvakgylych Veliyev	23,788	12,419	52.27
38 Esenguly	Muhammetberdi Geldimammedov	26,077	13,974	53.85
39 Gyzylyrbat	Vezirgeldy Ashyrov	25,891	14,512	56.19
40 Magtymguly	Shemshat Mamieva	26,377	13,848	52.79
41 Gumdag	Bayrammyrat Hajymammedov	28,746	17,711	61.66
42 Balkan	Guvanch Chendirov	24,906	14,745	59.27
43 Balkanabat	Yazpolat Keriev	26,103	17,544	67.46
44 Altyn Yol	Jeren Kylychmyradova	24,930	13,262	53.38
45 Diyar	Serdar Arazov	25,009	14,008	56.18
46 Akdepe	Yakup Atabaev	25,411	13,315	52.43
47 Nowruz	Magsat Otuzov	25,061	13,359	53.38
48 Rovachlyk	Atamyrat Kanjanov	24,746	13,857	56.29
49 Boldumsaz	Ashir Toilyev	24,642	13,331	54.25
50 Gorogly	Merdan Tuvakov	26,352	18,628	70.83
51 Yzmykir	Atageldy Musaeov	25,177	15,360	61.28
52 Aksaray	Bayly Seyilov	24,990	17,093	68.82

53 Kubadag	Gurbangylych Durdyev	25,248	14,416	57.31
54 Baidak	Aygozel Kutlyeva	25,437	13,995	55.42
55 Dessan	Ainabat Toylieva	23,892	13,850	58.09
56 Taze zaman	Myakhriban Kurambaeva	25,249	13,864	55.19
57 Agzybirlik	Shatlyk Gurbandurdyev	24,691	13,164	53.33
58 Koneurgench	Jumamyrat Gherov	25,505	15,140	59.43
59 Deryalik	Maisa Jumaeva	25,071	15,092	60.59
60 Gurgench	Baimyrat Babaev	25,370	17,835	70.54
61 Bossan	Enejan Amanyazova	24,300	15,066	62.00
62 S. Rozmetov	Kakamammet Nepesov	24,447	12,700	52.10
63 Nowbahar	Enish Khayitjanov	24,889	13,700	55.22
64 S. A. Niyazov	Ogulshad Durdymetova	25,525	14,574	57.19
65 S. Turkmenbasy	Amanmyrat Mashalaev	25,611	14,857	58.06
66 Aybowur	Nurgeldy Meredov	25,030	14,819	59.41
67 Sarygamysh	Dovran Artykov	26,103	13,592	52.08
68 Ruhubelent	Rasul Sadullaev	24,404	13,275	54.56
69 Dashoguz	Serdar Gayipov	25,701	15,214	59.38
70 Shabat	Arazmyrat Khangeldiyev	25,347	15,727	62.42
71 Danew	Lachin Khaidarova	25,310	14,452	57.49
72 Asuda	Allayar Omarov	25,866	13,269	51.51
73 Hojagala	Merdan Dosmedov	26,234	16,269	62.16
74 Amyderya	Serdar Yumitov	26,323	14,730	56.21
75 Zergar	Jahan Yarova	24,699	13,338	54.48
76 Charjew	Babamurat Jumaev	26,820	15,581	58.21
77 Farap	Gakhryman Roziev	26,185	15,317	58.72
78 Jeyhun	Zahid Hasanov	25,357	13,504	53.54
79 Darganata	Bahar Seyidova	26,071	14,605	56.19
80 Turkmenabat	Atajan Jumadurdiyev	25,495	13,203	52.25
81 Lebap	Bossan Akyeva	24,856	12,913	51.98
82 Amul	Zyuleykha Zoraeva	25,036	14,061	56.26
83 Sakar	Bahadur Shadyev	26,334	13,494	51.49
84 Sayat	Chemen Akiyeva	25,956	15,486	59.71
85 Kaarabekevul	Bayram Ovlyagulyev	26,359	13,717	52.22
86 Pelvert	Bairam Ilov	24,669	13,343	54.17
87 Khalach	Ogelnur Hayidova	25,492	14,356	56.56
88 Seydi	Nepes Charyev	25,168	12,976	51.71
89 Astanababa	Durdyguly Meredov	25,566	15,616	61.49
90 Kerki	Gadam Khemraev	25,372	16,319	64.48
91 Yalkym	Toily Berkeliev	25,707	14,758	57.48
92 Khojambaz	Intizar Avlyakulyev	25,657	15,694	61.19
93 Dowletli	Amangeldy Hezziev	24,272	12,927	53.40
94 Koytendag	Nepes Roziev	25,323	14,983	59.48
95 Garlyk	Erkin Allakulyev	25,524	16,623	65.37
96 Magdanly	Hatycha Mustakova	24,805	16,572	67.36
97 Mary	Merdan Omeredov	26,348	14,552	55.40
98 Shapak	Yusup Annaev	26,511	13,822	52.36
99 Kemine	Chary Gurbanmyradov	26,538	14,081	53.19
100 Bayramaly	Orazurdy Abdyevev	27,022	15,205	56.31
101 Oguzhan	Maksat Janmyradov	26,176	14,967	57.25
102 Jemgiyet	Artyk Byashimov	23,996	14,186	59.29
103 Zarpchy	Byashim Annagurbanov	24,785	15,882	64.40
104 Pesanaly	Yusupguly Eshshaev	25,428	18,323	72.30
105 Turkmenistan	Akmuhammet Bekmyradov	23,902	13,394	56.11
106 Vekil	Dovran Khapbaev	25,847	13,347	51.66
107 Rysgally	Jumamuhammet Shirmammedov	26,087	15,185	58.40

108 Vekilbazar	Atamyrat Kossekov	25,505	13,538	53.53
109 Sakarchage	Tirkishmyrat Yomudov	25,908	13,418	51.94
110 Karayap	Suleiman Nurymov	25,485	13,043	51.22
111 Chashgyn	Atamyrat Amandurdiev	24,075	13,780	57.37
112 Merw	Maral Garagulova	25,409	14,287	56.41
113 Soltan Sanjar	Kerven Zyrryev	24,635	12,859	52.25
114 Mekan	Saparmyrat Charshakov	24,730	13,646	55.25
115 Karagum	Shirin Baymyradova	26,682	15,547	58.38
116 Turkmengala	Senem Berdieva	23,639	12,594	53.29
117 Rehnet	Orazgeldi Saparov	23,708	13,610	57.57
118 Yoloten	Ali Rakhmedov	26,300	15,545	59.17
119 Soltanbent	Begench Gurbangeldiev	25,882	13,978	54.25
120 Murgap	Aijemal Allanova	25,674	15,409	60.20
121 Ylham	Maksat Babanyyazov	26,049	13,821	53.34
122 Miras	Gurbanmyrat Ashirov	26,372	17,946	68.42
123 Tagtabazar	Arslan Khayidov	24,499	14,280	58.54
124 Pendi	Arslan Charyev	24,633	12,841	52.48
125 Serhetabat	Allamyrat Gurbanmyradov	24,187	14,804	61.35

## ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it coordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights and fundamental freedoms** consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas, including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked people, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance and non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website ([www.osce.org/odihr](http://www.osce.org/odihr)).