

## TURKMENISTAN: THE COUNTRY OF CRAZY LAWS

**Mavluda Berdimurodovna Qurtova**  
**Uzbekistan State World Languages University**

**Annotation:** This article explores the unique and often perplexing legal landscape of Turkmenistan, highlighting some of the most unusual laws and regulations that define this Central Asian nation. Through an examination of the political, social, and cultural factors that contribute to these legal eccentricities, the piece provides insight into how such laws shape the lives of Turkmenistan's citizens and its international relations.

**Keywords:** Turkmenistan, Crazy Laws, Legal System, Central Asia, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, Authoritarian Regime, Cultural Policies, Freedom of Expression, Personal Liberties, International Relations

Turkmenistan, a nation nestled in Central Asia and bordered by the Caspian Sea, is known for its rich history and cultural heritage. However, in recent years, it has also gained notoriety for its unusual and often bizarre laws. Governed by an authoritarian regime, Turkmenistan enforces a legal framework that reflects the eccentricities and absolute power of its leadership. This article delves into some of the most peculiar laws in Turkmenistan, exploring the underlying reasons for their existence and their impact on the populace.

### The Cult of Personality

One of the most striking features of Turkmenistan's legal system is its reinforcement of the cult of personality surrounding its leaders. Saparmurat Niyazov, the first president after the country gained independence from the Soviet Union, established an almost divine status for himself. Known as "Turkmenbashi" or "Leader of the Turkmen," Niyazov implemented numerous laws to immortalize his image. For example, he renamed months of the year after himself and his family members. January became "Turkmenbashi" and April "Gurbansoltan," after his mother. He also erected golden statues of himself throughout the country, with the most famous being a revolving statue in the capital, Ashgabat, that always faced the sun.

After Niyazov's death in 2006, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow succeeded him, continuing the tradition of bizarre legal mandates. Berdimuhamedow, a former dentist turned politician, has maintained the cult of personality by promoting his own image through laws that often defy common sense. For instance, he banned the use

of lip-syncing at public events, a move purportedly to preserve cultural authenticity but largely seen as a means to control and suppress artistic expression.

#### Bans on Personal Liberties

Turkmenistan's government exerts tight control over personal liberties, leading to a range of prohibitive laws that affect daily life. In 2018, the government banned black cars in the capital, Ashgabat. The rationale behind this law was never officially explained, but it is widely believed that President Berdimuhamedow considers white to be a color of good luck and prefers the aesthetic of white vehicles. As a result, owners of black cars were forced to repaint their vehicles white, often at significant personal expense.

Another law that raises eyebrows is the ban on satellite dishes. In a bid to control information and limit foreign influence, the government mandated the removal of satellite dishes from private homes, directing citizens to use state-approved cable services instead. This move effectively restricted access to international news and programming, reinforcing the regime's control over the flow of information.

#### Draconian Control Over Media and Internet

Turkmenistan's media landscape is one of the most controlled and censored in the world. The government owns and tightly regulates all television, radio, and print media outlets. In addition, internet access is severely restricted, with only a small percentage of the population having access to the web. Even those who do have access face stringent monitoring and censorship.

A law that exemplifies this control is the prohibition of the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and other anonymizing tools. This legislation is part of a broader strategy to prevent citizens from accessing information that could be deemed subversive or critical of the government. Websites that criticize the regime or provide independent news are routinely blocked, and those caught trying to circumvent these restrictions can face severe penalties.

#### Cultural and Religious Regulations

The Turkmen government also imposes strict regulations on cultural and religious practices. In an effort to construct a uniform national identity, laws have been enacted that suppress ethnic and religious diversity. For instance, there are severe restrictions on religious practices not sanctioned by the state, including the requirement that all religious groups register with the government. Unregistered religious activities are considered illegal, and participants can face harassment, fines, or imprisonment.

Moreover, traditional cultural practices are sometimes manipulated or banned outright. A peculiar example is the regulation concerning weddings and other celebrations. The government has issued decrees limiting the number of guests at weddings and the amount of money that can be spent on such events, ostensibly to promote modesty and reduce economic strain. However, these laws are also a means to control social gatherings and prevent any form of collective dissent.

#### The Impact on Daily Life

The legal idiosyncrasies of Turkmenistan have profound impacts on the daily lives of its citizens. These laws not only reflect the authoritarian nature of the regime but also serve to maintain its grip on power by restricting freedoms and controlling various aspects of life. The prohibition of certain hairstyles and the mandatory participation in state-organized mass exercises are further examples of how the government seeks to regulate personal behavior and public appearance.

For the international community, these laws present significant challenges in engaging with Turkmenistan. Human rights organizations frequently criticize the country for its repressive legal framework, which stifles freedom of expression, assembly, and religion. Despite these concerns, Turkmenistan's vast natural gas reserves make it an important player on the global stage, leading some nations to cautiously navigate their diplomatic and economic relations with the country.

#### Conclusion

Turkmenistan's legal landscape is a testament to the extremes of authoritarian governance, where laws are often arbitrary and serve the dual purpose of bolstering the leader's image and suppressing dissent. From banning black cars to mandating participation in state rituals, these laws highlight the peculiarities and challenges of life in one of the world's most isolated and controlled nations. Understanding these laws provides crucial insight into the broader political and social dynamics at play in Turkmenistan, offering a window into the complexities of maintaining power in an authoritarian regime.

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