

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST[About Us](#) | [DONATE](#) | [Blog](#) | [Mobile App](#) | [Contact Us](#)[REGIONS](#)[ISSUES](#)[Reports](#)[Programs](#)[Initiatives](#)[News](#)[Experts](#)[Events](#)[Donate](#)

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

[- View another year -](#)

# Turkmenistan

[Turkmenistan](#)[Freedom of the Press 2013](#)

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov's autocratic government continued to maintain near-total control over the media in 2012, despite his pledges to take steps such as providing increased internet access. The constitution's nominal protections for press freedom and freedom of expression are not observed in practice. Libel is a criminal offense, but it is rarely invoked due to the intensity of official media control and self-censorship and the extreme scarcity of independent and critical reporting. A new media regulation law was enacted in December 2012. Drafted in consultation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the legislation defined procedures for gathering and disseminating news and was the first of its kind to be approved in Turkmenistan since independence in 1991. However, in light of the country's dismal record on media freedom to date, the law was not expected to result in a significant relaxation of current restrictions. In March, the UN Human Rights Committee had reported for the first time on the government's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. With regard to the media in particular, the committee noted repression of free speech, harassment and intimidation of journalists, and monitoring and

ensorship of the internet.

The government retained a monopoly on the national media in 2012. Berdymukhammedov appoints the editors of authorized outlets, and independent news websites are blocked. Journalists who are critical of the government are blacklisted and prevented from traveling within the country or abroad. A journalist from the state newspaper *Neutralny Turkmenistan*, the only Russian-language newspaper in the country, told the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in March that multiple agencies impose censorship on media outlets, and everything journalists write must comply with requirements set by the president's office. In February, just before a tightly controlled presidential election in which the incumbent supposedly took more than 97 percent of the vote, human rights defender Nataliya Shabunts criticized the government in a radio interview. The next day, a bloody sheep's head was found at her door in what some observers interpreted as a warning from the state security services.

The government closely supervises television content. In June 2012, for the first time since Turkmenistan became independent, state television aired a live broadcast of a major sporting event—the European football championships. Previously, state-run television outlets had only shown prerecorded programs. During all aired matches, Ashgabat-based commentators repeatedly thanked the president for making the live broadcast possible.

The government controls the dominant internet service provider, Turkmen Telecom, and restricts access to critical sites, including regional news sources based outside Turkmenistan and opposition websites run by Turkmen living abroad. Leading independent news site *Chronicles of Turkmenistan* ([Chrono-tm.org](http://Chrono-tm.org)), run by human rights activists in exile, was subjected to several cyberattacks in 2012, including three instances of hacking that rendered the site temporarily inaccessible. Other foreign-based news sites that cover Turkmenistan, [Gundogar.org](http://Gundogar.org) and [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru), were blocked. Popular youth site [Ertir.com](http://Ertir.com) was blocked for most of June. Online social-media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LiveJournal, and YouTube are often unavailable, and the authorities interfere with electronic correspondence such as Gmail. Continued government restrictions and high costs kept the internet penetration rate extremely low in 2012, with only 7 percent of the population using the medium.

Two journalists, Sapardurdy Khadjiyev and Annakurban Amanklychev, have been imprisoned since 2006. The two men were originally arrested with a colleague,

Ogulsapar Muradova, after helping a French television station with a report on Turkmenistan; Muradova died several months after her arrest as a result of severe beatings in prison. Switzerland's public television broadcaster was permitted to make a documentary about the country in September 2012, but the film was to avoid controversial topics.

A privately published magazine, *Rysgal*, opened with great presidential fanfare in 2010, but it became clear that the magazine was produced by the government-controlled Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and did not stray from the official line. In 2012, *Rysgal* owner Aleksander Dadayev, who is close to Berdymukhammedov, helped to establish the new Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, nominally ending the political monopoly of the ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan. Berdymukhammedov had approved its establishment, and in practice the new party is loyal to the regime. Months before the party's first congress in August, *Rysgal* began publishing announcements encouraging entrepreneurs to join it.

State-run newspapers are used to disseminate government propaganda and ignore issues relevant to Turkmen citizens. The paper with the largest circulation is *Turkmen Dili*, with 117,500 subscribers. Employees of state institutions are required to pay high subscription fees out of their own pockets to state newspapers that focus on their field of work, often imposing a considerable financial burden on employees with low salaries. The authorities maintained a ban on almost all foreign newspapers and periodical subscriptions—notably including Russian newspapers—and confiscate books and periodicals from travelers. Despite an absence of independent domestic media, many citizens have some access to international media through satellite dishes. Repeated government attempts to crack down on such receivers have been largely unsuccessful, but cost barriers continue to limit access. Turkmenistan's government in recent years has indicated that it plans to launch its own satellite to control broadcasting more comprehensively, but there was little progress on the project by the end of 2012.

One positive event in 2012 was the return of Russian mobile-telephone service provider Mobile TeleSystems (MTS). The Turkmen government reissued MTS's license in July, having expelled the provider in 2010 and cut off service to 2.4 million people—or 80 percent of the country's mobile users. MTS provides a faster connection speed than the government-owned carrier and allows users to access banned social media. On the first day it became operational again, MTS reactivated

over 500,000 subscribers.

## 2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

**Not Free**

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

**96**

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

**30**

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

**37**

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

**29**

[About us](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Credits](#)

[Subscribe](#)