

Abstract

Since its independence after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Turkmenistan has evidently demonstrated a high tendency toward autocracy. It established a national development model, recycling old Soviet systems of authoritarian control. On the other hand, its autocratic evolution runs deep also into the local history and cultural and societal customs. In this connection, it is essential to consider Turkmenistan's historical conditions and look at the evolution of Turkmen's political culture from *serdars* and *khans* (tribal leaders) up to presidents. This approach may be justified by the fact that the political culture of "one-man rule" in contemporary Turkmenistan takes its roots from the tribal traditions of the Turkmen people's ancestors. In the process of consolidating autocracy, the media has a central position and plays a crucial role in building the cult of personality of the state leaders. In this context, Turkmenistan appears to be extremely repressive and exceptional when it comes to controlling the media. Therefore, this dissertation looks at the development and critical tendencies in the formation of the media system that emerged under the authoritarian political power of the late president-for-life Saparmurat Niyazov who called himself "Türkmenbaşy" (head of the Turkmen), and his successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, known as "Arkadag" (father protector). The analysis is primarily based on case studies through monitoring the content and style of Turkmen official media channels, as well as selected social media supported by formal interviews and informal dialogues with journalists/bloggers working for alternative Turkmen media outlets, politicians, educators, civic activists, and ordinary people in Turkmenistan.