

Turkmenistan Adopts New Presidential Election Law

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Turkmenistan has adopted a new law regulating presidential elections in what appears to be an attempt to provide a democratic facade for this authoritarian ex-Soviet nation.

The law, published in a government newspaper Wednesday, says a presidential candidate must be either backed by a political party or collect at least 50,000 signatures to qualify. The current law envisages that a contender only needs approval from a now-defunct advisory body established by the previous president, Saparmurat Niyazov.

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, elected in 2007 with 89 percent of the vote, has moved to dispel the bizarre personality cult of Niyazov, who died in 2006.

But he has maintained tight control over political life and is not expected to face any real challengers when he runs for re-election next year.

The country has only one party, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan led

by Berdymukhammedov, and no independent nongovernmental organizations that could put forward a genuinely opposition candidate.

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