

LIVING CONDITIONS, INTRA-SOCIETAL TRUST, AND PUBLIC CONCERNS IN POST-SOCIALIST TURKMENISTAN

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Introduction

Turkmenistan's important role in the regional and world economy, in its post-independence period, is cemented by its large reserves of oil, gas, and other energy resources.¹ Yet there is little evidence that this economic potential and the enormous revenues materialized in the population's improved well-being. Although Turkmenistan is considered to be a lower middle level income country, little progress, if any, has been recorded from the time of its independence, especially in the areas of political and social reform. Its political development is shadowed by the one-man rule of President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov, who claims to be the father of the nation.² Consequently, no area of social life is beyond the president's reach. A wide range of pres-

idential orders prohibited smoking, closed rural hospitals,³ renamed the months of the year after the President and his relatives, shortened the educational period,⁴ introduced the President's own book into the education curriculum, and prohibited long hair, beards, and car radios.⁵ There is also a prohibition on opera and ballet because the President considered them to be inappropriate for Turkmen culture.

³ When, in 1997, the President had to quit smoking due to a heart operation, all public places were ordered to prohibit smoking. When he was operated on for an eye disease by foreign doctors, he ordered for hospitals to be strengthened by closing those in rural areas and relocating the funds to the capital's hospitals. The President's argument was that rural residents travel to the capital city to receive treatment anyway. For details see: "Turkmenistan Shuts Hospitals," *SBS—The World News*, 2 March, 2005, available at [www9.sbs.com.au], 9 February, 2006; M. Whitlock, "Turkmen Leader Closes Hospitals," *BBC News*, 1 March, 2005, available at [www.news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/4307583.stm], 9 February, 2006.

⁴ See: "OBSE predosteregaet Ashkhabat ot eksperimentov v obrazovanii," *Reuters*, 21 April, 2005, available at [www.centrasia.ru]; for more on the book on the life of President Niyazov's mother, see: "Geroi Turkmenistana Gurbansoltan edzhe i zhenshchiny zolotoi epokhi velikogo Saparmurata Turkmenbashi," *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, No. 22, 25 January, 2006, available at [www.gundogar.org/doc_files/8938488751456289.doc.gz].

⁵ See: M. Whitlock, "Young Turkmen Face Beard Ban," *BBC News*, available at [www.news.bbc.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/3486776.stm].

¹ Local officials claim that the economy is growing in two digit figures of 17-23% per year. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Turkmenistan's growth rates are estimated at 10-11%, while The Economist Intelligence Unit estimated the growth in 2003 as 13% and 11% in the first half of 2004 (see: N. Badykova, "Regional Cooperation for Human Development and Human Security in Central Asia" ("Regional Cooperation"), in: *Country Background Studies, Turkmenistan*, Washington DC, 2005, p. 7.

² See: M. Lelyveld, "Turkmenistan: Niyazov Becomes CIS's First 'President for Life'," *Radio Free Europe*, 30 December, 1999, available at [www.rferl.org/features/1999/12/F.RU.99130165913.html].

Largely due to these features of its governance and development, Turkmenistan remains one of the most closed countries in the world. Little is known about how ordinary citizens regard the changes going on in Turkmenistan over the last decades and even less is known about how they deal with their challenges, concerns, and needs.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens in Turkmenistan, attempting to demonstrate the population's views on their post-Soviet living conditions and how the changes in society have influenced people's value systems and their interrelations with each other. In order to do so, this paper attempts to answer the following sets of questions: what are people's views about their lives and their

present living conditions in post-Soviet Turkmenistan? What are the patterns of inter-personal trust and public confidence in its society? What do people value and appreciate in their private lives? What are their concerns, aspirations, and views on their present and the future? In terms of governance, this paper will only partly touch upon this issue, concentrating on people's concerns and satisfaction with different aspects of their lives and leaving the political aspects for a separate analysis.

Methodologically, this paper is based on a public survey conducted in Turkmenistan for the AsiaBarometer (AB) project (University of Tokyo and University of Chuo) in the fall of 2005 within a larger study of Asian lifestyles and values.

Notes on Methodology

The AB survey in Turkmenistan was conducted by a local polling agency and consisted of face-to-face interviews with 800 randomly selected respondents in age groups between 20 and 60 years and divided into 6 sections in keeping with the country's administrative divisions: the city of Ashgabad and 5 velaiats (oblasts)—the Akhal, Balkhan, Dashogouz, Lebap, and Marhisky velaiats.

The views of the Turkmen population on various aspects of their lives are influenced by a range of factors, including their personal experiences, social status, income, ethnic and religious affiliations, as well as age. However, the poll revealed common features in the answers of the respondents in Turkmenistan, according to which the number of "do not know" replies was incredibly high. The general trend in "do not know" responses increased proportionally to the sensitivity of the issue. For instance, in non-political questions like those on the availability of utilities at home (0%), access to the Internet (0.5%), water pollution (4.5%), air pollution (5.1%), travel abroad (6.4%), and soil pollution (8.4%), the number of those who replied "do not know" was less than one tenth. Such "do not know" responses increased when respondents were asked about their happiness with life (8.9%), marriage satisfaction (11.6%), satisfaction with their standard of living (19.1%), satisfaction with their job (26%), and household income (27%). But the most dramatic increase in "do not know" answers was registered when respondents were asked politically sensitive questions related to their satisfaction with the right to gather and demonstrate (64.4%), to be informed about the work of the government (59.8%), to participate in any kind of organization (53.8%), and freedom of speech (55.1%).

The same answer was frequently chosen by respondents in response to questions on the pride they felt for their country (46.3% replied "do not know"), satisfaction with the democratic system (43.8%) in the country, and with the quality of public services (41.3%). In the same manner, questions requiring an evaluation of personal trust in the central government (36.4%), local government (28.8%), army (28.9%), legal system (30%), parliament (30.5%), and political party (89.4%) registered a very high degree of "do not know" answers. Some of them might indeed reflect the respondents' lack of

knowledge with respect to a particular aspect of their lives, or lack of confidence in their own knowledge to make a judgment about those issues. However, most of these responses can be explained by the closed social, economic, and political environment, which puts additional (and perhaps sometimes self-imposed) pressure on the respondents to choose the safe “do not know” response in order to avoid complications with the authorities. Despite the fact that these biases might have occurred while the respondents’ answers were being gathered, they all reflect the political, economic, and social background of present-day Turkmenistan.

1. Basic Living Conditions of the Post-Socialist Period

1.1. Living Standards

In the post-Soviet period, Turkmenistan had to overcome the same difficulties of the transition period as the other states of the former U.S.S.R. Turkmenistan’s relatively small and young population and its large energy resources enabled its government to control the political, economic, and social spheres of life and maintain its grip over society. The government of Turkmenistan essentially did not alter the old system of governance, under which the government provided for the needs of the people and the people were expected to follow the initiatives of the government. In addition, as in other republics, Turkmenistan inherited the basic social infrastructure built during the Soviet era and managed to provide its people with the basic communal services. In particular, the absolute majority (98.8% and 98.9%, respectively) of those polled indicated that they are provided with electricity and LPG gas. However, because of its unfriendly climatic and geographic conditions, Turkmenistan, even under the Soviet government, experienced problems with drinking water supply. Almost half of its territory is covered with desert, making life in these areas almost impossible. This is perhaps the reason why only two fifths (39.1%) of the respondents said that they have public water supply. The provision of the population with fixed phone lines is also limited, with less than one third (27.4%) of those polled implying that they have fixed phone lines.

It should be noted that the Turkmen population is supplied with public water, gas, electricity, and salt free of charge. This free supply was declared in a decree issued by President Niyazov in 1992 as a part of the “adequate measures of social protection policy in the transition period.”⁶ In August 2003, during the XIV Congress of Peoples (*XIV Halq Maslakhaty*), such free provision of communal services and goods was further extended to the year 2020.⁷ President Niyazov explains this free supply of four products as a way to maintain the population’s standard of living and share the enormous revenues from gas and oil with the people. However, this is largely a populist gesture. Shortages in the provision of these services (electricity, gas, and water cuts) are becoming increasingly frequent due to the aging infrastructure and the government’s overall attempt to limit the domestic consumption (of energy resources) to increase exports.⁸ The same problems and temporary cuts can be observed in the centralized heating system.⁹ Access to these services in rural areas is limited and supply cuts are even more frequent.

⁶ “The Key Priority—the People’s Needs,” *State Information Agency of Turkmenistan*, 1 January, 2006, available at [www.turkmenistan.gov.tm].

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ See: V. Volkov, O. Saryev, “Turkmenbashi ekonomit gaz,” *Deutsche Welle*, 29 January, 2006, available at [www.dw-world.de].

⁹ See: “Nastuplenie kholodov vyyavilo ser’oznyye problemy v otopitel’noi sisteme Turkmenii,” *Nemetskaia Volna*, 24 January, 2005.

As for communication means, those with mobile phones made up less than one tenth (7.5%) of the respondents. This low number of mobile phones among the respondents is difficult to interpret without more detailed information about the situation on the mobile phone market in Turkmenistan. According to some business sources, Barash Communications, which is the mobile phone operator covering all regions of Turkmenistan, there are around 59,100 registered subscribers in the country.¹⁰ The largest number of those respondents using mobile phones in the AB survey is found among people in their fifties (9.2%), followed by respondents in their sixties (8.5%), twenties (7.6%), thirties (7.3%), and forties (6.4%).

Another tool of communication—the Internet—is not widely used in Turkmenistan. Only a very small group of people suggested that they use the Internet almost daily (0.5%), several times a week (1.4%), several times a month (3.3%), and seldom (4.1%). Most of the respondents (90%) suggested that they never use it. Some news sources indicate that there are only 300 private Internet users in Turkmenistan.¹¹ Undoubtedly, there are two reasons for such a low Internet usage rate. The first reason is its high cost, while the more significant and important one is government control and the consequent lack of free access to the Internet. In addition to the grave situation with the Internet, the Ministry of Communications of Turkmenistan refused to accept license applications from international postal services, such as DHL, FedEx, and ASE, further limiting the opportunities of people to link with foreign countries and exchange information.¹²

1.2. Income and Purchasing Power of the Population

The effects of the transition period on people's living conditions can also be traced through an analysis of incomes and personal purchasing power in Turkmenistan. While government revenues from oil and gas exports have been increasing over the years, personal incomes remain at a low level. For instance, the respondents' answers to questions about annual household incomes were divided into several groups. A large group of respondents (17.9%) said that their income was around 16 to 20 million manat. Approximately the same number of respondents (17.3%) indicated a sum of 31-35 million manat. The third (13.8%) and fourth (13.4%) most popular responses were 11-15 million manat and 16-30 million manat, respectively. Defining the real value of these sums or even their U.S. dollar equivalent is a challenging task due to the ambiguity of the exchange rate policy in Turkmenistan. There are two exchange rates in Turkmenistan, and the difference between the official exchange rate defined by the Central Bank (around 5,200 manat per 1 U.S.\$) and the "unofficial" black market rate can be four-fold higher than official rate or even more (one figure is around 21 thousand manat per 1 U.S.\$).

In a related question, where respondents were asked how many people in the household earn money, the most popular answer was two (62.8%), followed by one quarter (24.4%) of respondents in whose family only one person earns money. Only slightly more than one tenth of the respondents indicated that there were more than two breadwinners in their family (9.9%—three breadwinners, and 3%—four breadwinners). At the same time, the number of those who suggested that their family consisted of 5 people constituted one third (31.4%), with another third (30.6%) replying that their household consisted of three members. One fifth of the respondents (20.8%) replied that their household

¹⁰ See: "Sources Says MTS' Mobile License in Turkmenistan Extended," 7 November, 2005, available at www.cellular-news.com/coverage/turkmenistan.php.

¹¹ See: E. Liubarskaia, "1/6 chast' sushi: Mnogaya leta velikomu Turkmenbashi," *Lenta.Ru*, 11 April, 2005.

¹² See: "Minsvyazi Turkmenii otkazalo v litsenzii pochtovym sluzhbam DHL, FedEx, ASE," *Reuters*, 11 April, 2005.

consisted of four members. And only slightly more than one tenth (11.9%) of the respondents answered that their household consists of two members.

From the responses about the number of breadwinners in the household and the number of household members, we can hypothetically assume that for Turkmen society, where the number of household members is traditionally large, this indicator for the number of household breadwinners is relatively low. It also goes without saying that under Turkmenistan conditions, where salaries rarely meet people's real needs, even two breadwinners can hardly provide for the needs of the entire family.

This is partly reflected in the purchasing preferences of the respondents. When the respondents were asked if their choice of purchase is based on the quality of the product or its price, around one third (30%) answered that their choice is "somewhat closer to buying the cheaper product" as opposed to slightly more than one tenth (12%) who said that their choice is in favor of buying "high-quality products even if they are a little more expensive."

Low incomes, the decrease in personal purchasing power, and the generally complicated economic situation certainly affect not only the population's well-being, but also people's attitude toward each other.

2. Intra-Societal Trust and Values

2.1. Intra-Societal Trust

When considering people's attitude toward each other, the first dimension in focus is intra-societal trust. When asked about general trust toward other people, most (55%) respondents in Turkmenistan replied by indicating their belief that one can never be too careful when dealing with people. Only slightly less than one third (32.3%) responded that people can generally be trusted.

In a separate question on whether the respondents think that people generally try to be helpful, most replied that they thought people mostly look out for themselves (54.9%), with slightly more than a third (34.8%) thinking that people try to be helpful.

And when asked if they stop on the street to help when they see someone in need of help, most respondents said that they would help only if no one else did (51.1%), followed by one third who suggested they would always stop to help (33.9%). There was also a limited group of respondents (6.6%) who said they would not stop under any circumstances.

Such responses to the three questions above indicate people's weakening attachment to one another in society. This also contrasts to the situation in Soviet society when altruism and unconditionally helping others was a norm not enforced from above, but followed by the majority. Perhaps the conditionality of helping others indicated in answers of the respondents in Turkmenistan can be linked to a larger sense of insecurity about the declining standard of living described above. At the same time, while intra-societal trust is weak in society, people are still willing to help each other, although such help is strictly conditional upon the particular situation and other factors. To a great extent, the change in trust patterns in Turkmen society is both the result and cause of people's changing value systems. Under the pressure of post-Soviet challenges, they are reconsidering the old beliefs and public norms they used to adhere to. In many instances, the new value system being formed in Turkmenistan is to a certain extent more rational and self-centered than the previous one, which emphasized mutual help and altruist ideals.

2.2. Changing Value System

The post-socialist value system in Turkmenistan has undergone a complex transformation process. In addition to the intra-societal trust mentioned above, this is further reflected in the respondents' answers to questions about the important social aspects in their lives, on how they want to see their children grow, what qualities they expect their children to have, and the role of women in society.

The basis of social life in Turkmenistan is the family, which plays the role of the central institution in society. When respondents were asked a question (with multiple answers) about which social institutions they considered important, the majority replied the family (78.2%) and relatives (62.6%). A small group of respondents replied "the area they grew up" (6.3%), followed by the neighborhood (3.9%) as socially important circles or groups for them. Interestingly, while respondents' choices of important social institutions coincided with the choices of respondents in other Central Asian countries, the ratings of each social circle is relatively low compared with the rating of these institutions in other neighboring countries. In comparison to other Central Asian countries, the importance of the family in Turkmenistan is relatively low (see Table 1).

The same can be said about the choices of respondents with respect to relatives. Other than these two responses, the other responses were chosen by a very limited number of those polled, indicating the role of those institutions in the lives of the Turkmen population.

In a separate, but related question on the most important (single answer) social institution, again we can see that while the number of those respondents who selected the family (55.1%) was more than half of those polled, this figure is incomparably lower than the number of people choosing the same answer in other Central Asian countries. On the contrary, the number of respondents who chose rela-

Table 1

Q. 20-1: Which of the Following Social Circles or Groups are Important to You? (%)

	Total	Family	Relatives	Place of work	Area where you grew up	People whose language is the same	Neighborhood	Agricultural cooperative	Religion	Don't know
Kazakhstan	800	95.1	85.1	42.4	36,5	12.3	28.6	1.0	9.4	0.5
Kyrgyzstan	800	97.9	83.1	35.1	50,3	10.3	41.4	3.6	22.8	—
Tajikistan	800	99.7	87.4	41.2	34,4	13.0	17.2	0.7	23.6	—
Turkmenistan	800	78.9	62.6	3.6	6,3	3.5	3.9	—	1.4	3.6
Uzbekistan	800	98.4	80.0	59.3	41,4	16.8	39.5	1.8	27.8	0.1

Source: AsiaBarometer Survey 2005.

Table 2

Q. 20-2: Which One of the Following Social Circles or Groups is the Most Important to You?

	Total	Family	Relatives	Place of work	Area where you grew up	People whose language is the same	Neighborhood	Religion	Don't know
Kazakhstan	800	85.3	7.8	2.1	1.3	0.1	0.3	1.0	1.4
Kyrgyzstan	800	90.4	4.0	1.3	1.5	0.3	1.0	0.9	0.3
Tajikistan	800	84.6	6.5	4.3	0.1	—	—	4.0	—
Turkmenistan	800	55.1	25.9	1.5	5.8	3.3	3.3	1.4	3.9
Uzbekistan	800	92.6	1.9	1.6	0.9	0.3	—	2.1	0.3

Source: AsiaBarometer Survey 2005.

tives as their most important support group is one fourth (25.9%) of all the respondents and is the highest score for this choice among all the CA countries. It might be that many respondents in Turkmenistan do not draw a very clear line between the notions of small family circle and the larger extended family. This might have led to a free interpretation of these two notions in the survey. Therefore, for some, relatives are a part of the family, increasing the rating of relatives in the general list of possible answers.

At the same time, in many rural settings, the family is not just a form of socialization in Turkmenistan, but also a shock-absorbing institution which consolidates members of the family in their attempt to provide for their physical and moral needs (see Table 2).

The choice of respondents of important social institutions in Turkmenistan indicate that the social life of people in Turkmen society is still centered around the family. With more economic problems in the country, people are increasingly seeing the family as the social unit that helps them to overcome their difficulties. It is often the family (including the extended one) that consolidates people and absorbs the social and economic shocks at times when people need psychological support and financial assistance. Most often cited are funerals, marriages, and other occasions in which one family is incapable of dealing with a particular problem on its own.

Traditionally, the highest priority in Turkmen families is bringing up children. Therefore, it is interesting to see how people in Turkmenistan see their children's future. When asked about their vision of their children's future, parents' views were clearly divided into the future they would prefer for their sons and the one they would prefer for their daughters. In their responses for daughters, most respondents chose "finding a good marriage partner" (54%), which is quite typical not only of Turkmen, but of all post-Soviet Central Asian societies. Traditionally, daughters in Turkmenistan leave their parents' house and go to live with their husband's family after marriage. Therefore, the daugh-

ter's future is largely related to a good marriage partner and his family. Thus, the concern for a daughter's future is rarely expressed by the parents' wish for her to "become a good professional," but more related to "becoming a caring mother for her family" (19.6% of respondents). As a recent feature, we can see that some parents emphasize being wealthy as one of the important wishes for their daughters, mainly due to the economic difficulties in the country. In addition, parents in Turkmenistan tend to think that quarrels between husband and wife in many families are frequently related to family's economic well-being. For them, families that are better off in financial terms have more potential for being happy. Therefore, the wealth of the bride or bridegroom plays an important role for many parents in their choice of partners for their children. Interestingly, in the gender composition of respondents, the number of female respondents (55.5%) is larger than the number of male respondents (52.4%) who

Table 3

Q.9: How Would You Like to See Your Son(s) and Your Daughter(s) Grow Up?

(Of the following accomplishments, please select two that you would wish for a daughter, and two that you would wish for a son.

M stands for mothers' view and F stands for fathers' preferences)

	For Sons	For Sons		For Daughters	For daughters	
		M	F		M	F
Become a great scholar	4.3	4.3	4.2	—	—	—
Powerful political leader	8.4	8.7	8.1	—	—	—
Become very wealthy	55.6	56.2	55	19.3	21.4	17.2
Loving and charitable person	5	4.1	5.9	7.1	6.9	7.4
Person respected by the masses	6.9	7.1	6.6	2.6	2.5	2.7
More skilled in profession	3.1	2.8	3.4	1.6	1.8	1.5
Follow in my footsteps	4	4.6	3.4	1.3	1.5	1.0
Who cares about the family	4.8	4.6	4.9	19.6	19.3	19.9
Find a good marriage partner	27.1	29.3	25.1	54	52.4	55.5
Become fulfilled spiritually	0.1	0.3	0	0.6	0.8	0.5

Source: AsiaBarometer Survey 2005.

hope their daughters will find a good marriage partner. This indicates that although in many cases Turkmen parents might be inclined to think that their daughters need a better education or employment, marriage and their role as prospective mothers comes first.

The wishes of parents for their sons differ significantly from those for their daughters. For instance, more than half of those polled (55.6%) indicated that they would like their sons to become wealthy people, followed by finding a good marriage partner (27.1%). The logic behind the choices for children mentioned above is that sons are attributed different social functions and roles than daughters. Therefore, parents generally expect their sons to become the breadwinners for their families, while daughters are usually expected to care for the family at home. Although this does not imply that parents do not expect their daughters to work, but to stay at home most of the time, sons are attributed public roles, while daughters are usually expected to play less public and more private roles within the family.

While this division between the roles of sons and daughters was always present in Turkmenistan, even during the Soviet years, this trend strengthened after Turkmenistan gained its independence mainly due to the country's economic problems, as well as to the return to traditionalism, which also partly advocates such division.

It should be said however that the level of involvement of women in social life in Turkmenistan is still high. The government makes a certain attempt to promote the employment of women and to no extent does it authorize discrimination based on the gender. In a related question, when asked about gender discrimination, one quarter (25.6%) replied that men and women are treated equally. At the same time, reflecting on the traditionalism of Turkmen society, around one fifth (18.9%) responded that men are treated much more favorably than women, while another quarter (23.4%) replied that men are somewhat more favorably treated than women. Slightly more than one tenth of the respondents replied that women are treated somewhat more favorably (13.8%) and that women are treated much more favorably (13.4%). Naturally, in all these responses, men consider women to be treated more favorably, while women consider men to be more privileged.

In some sense, the answers above indicate that society in Turkmenistan can be considered conservative. This can further be traced through the answers of the respondents to the following questions. When asked about what qualities children should be encouraged to learn at home, the most popular answer was respect for elders (46.9%), followed by independence (37%), honesty (30.3%), diligence (18.9%), sincerity (13.9%), humbleness (13.1%), and patience (13.1%). While the last few answers are probably the same for all societies, overwhelming respect for elders, as well as the emphasis of humbleness and patience are very symbolic of society in Turkmenistan.

When asked to rate whether homosexuality can be justified (from 1 <never justified> to 10 <always justified>), the absolute majority (80.9%) selected <1>, indicating that homosexuality can never be justified, followed by slightly less than one fifth (19%) who gave "do not know" answers. In a similar manner, when asked whether abortion can be justified, the absolute majority (66.8%) selected <1>, indicating that abortion can never be justified, while a small portion selected <10> (5.4%), suggesting that abortion is always justified and a few selected <6> (4.8%), which can be considered closer to justifying abortion. Again, around one quarter (23%) replied with "do not know," possibly revealing the uncertainty among the respondents about their response or reluctance to respond to this question.

3. Public Satisfactions, Frustrations, and Concerns

As indicated above, the main sources of satisfaction of people in Turkmenistan are marriage, personal life, the family, neighbors, and friends, while the material side of life was considered to be

less satisfying. For instance, when asked about satisfaction in their lives, the majority indicated that they are either very satisfied, or somewhat satisfied with their neighbors (55.1% and 28.1%), friends (39.9% and 35.5%), marriage (54.5% and 19.5%), family life (40.9% and 25%), spiritual life (46.1% and 17.8%), and leisure (33.9% and 22.1%, respectively).

In stark contrast to the overall satisfaction about their social life, most of the respondents expressed little satisfaction with those aspects of their lives which involved their views on the democratic system (19.6% very satisfied and 26.3% somewhat satisfied), social welfare (14.1% and 16.1%, respectively), their job (12.5% and 18.1%), health (23.9% and 16.4%), household income (20.9% and 6%), standard of living (33.4% and 6.8%), housing (12.3% and 19.5%), and the condition of environment (13.3% and 32%). The views of people regarding these aspects largely reflect the difficult time people are having during the transition period, both in economic terms and in terms of the political environment in the country. This conclusion is further proven by the fact that the number of those who said they are very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied is the highest with respect to household income (32.3% and 8.3%), housing (14.6% and 24%), standard of living (6.3% and 25.3%), their job (12% and 13.4%), and social welfare (10.9% and 8.8%, respectively). Among the "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" responses, the condition of the environment (32.5%) was followed by housing (23.5%), social welfare (21.8%), and their job (17.3%).

Naturally, the major concerns of people in Turkmenistan emanate from their dissatisfaction regarding their economic well-being. They are also mainly focused on economic hardships and the problems of everyday life to which people are subjected as a consequence of the economic transition. When asked about their worries, given multiple choice answers, the highest ranking concern was health (37.4%), followed by unemployment (22.1%), illegal drugs (20.8%), education (19.3%), poverty (18.5%), the social welfare system (16.6%), corruption (16%), the environment (14.5%), economic problems (14.4%), fair world trade (14%), and economic inequality in society (13.4%).

At the same time, these concerns are closely linked to the issues of governance in the country and public expectations regarding their government. For instance, when asked about the policies on which the government should spend more (spend much more and spend more), the respondents emphasized education (61% and 11.6%), health (53.1% and 17.3%), old-age pensions (28.4% and 21.4%), public transport and telecommunications (30.4% and 12.1%), improvement of the social status of women (33.4% and 12%, respectively), and the environment. Among the expenditures which, according to the respondents, should remain the same, military and defense spending (50.9%) ranked the highest, followed by policing and law enforcement (42.3%). Obviously, people are more concerned about their social and economic status than about security issues. In proof of this conclusion, 49.6% indicated fighting inflation as a primary concern. The respondents suggested maintaining order (47.3%) only as the second most important concern, clearly giving economic development higher priority.

Concluding remarks

The analysis of post-Soviet Turkmenistan in this paper reveals that Turkmenistan, among the other post-Soviet countries, is undergoing a complex transition process. It can be asserted with a great degree of certainty that political and economic reforms in the country are at the initial stage. Consequently, the nature of relations between the government and the people has not changed much. On the one hand, there are strong public expectations of the government in terms of providing for their well-being and economic needs. On the other hand, people's expectations of the government in economic terms far exceed the government's ability and willingness to deal with the challenges of post-Soviet development.

As an alternative to the government welfare programs, many people are increasingly turning to the traditional social institutions, such as the family, which help them to provide for their families and survive the economic difficulties of the transition period. This was clearly indicated in the strong attachment of respondents to their family and relatives and also in their wishes for their children. Stronger ties within the family and among relatives are being established in light of weakening public trust and the higher sense of economic insecurity among the population. This insecurity is clearly demonstrated by people's concerns about their standard of living, health, and other social needs.

Consequently, this symbolizes a change in the value system from the socialist society model in which public interests and the common good were pursued and respected to a value system in which people increasingly favor private interests and the interests of their family and close relatives.