

Nations in Transit 2012 - Tajikistan

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Capital: Dushanbe

Population: 6.9 million

GNI/capita, PPP: US\$2,140

Source: The data above were drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2010*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores										
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Electoral Process	5.25	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Civil Society	5.00	5.00	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00
Independent Media	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00
Governance *	6.00	5.75	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Corruption	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Democracy Score	5.63	5.71	5.79	5.93	5.96	6.07	6.14	6.14	6.14	6.18

** Starting with the 2005 edition, Freedom House introduced separate analysis and ratings for national democratic governance and local democratic governance, to provide readers with more detailed and nuanced analysis of these two important subjects.*

2012 Scores

Democracy Score:	6.18
Regime Classification:	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
National Democratic Governance:	6.25
Electoral Process:	6.50
Civil Society:	6.00
Independent Media:	6.00
Local Democratic Governance:	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence:	6.25
Corruption:	6.25

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

Executive Summary:

Tajikistan's two decades of independence have been characterized by violence, poverty, autocratic leadership, and complex geostrategic relationships. The 1992-97 civil war between the communist-remnant government and the Islamist-led United Tajik Opposition resulted in roughly 50,000 deaths – more than any other conflict in the post-Soviet space, excluding Chechnya. Despite consistent annual economic growth since 1997 and signs of poverty subsiding (from a reported 72 percent of the population in 2003 to roughly 50 percent by end-2011)^[1] income inequality continues to widen, approaching pre-Soviet levels. President Emomali Rahmon and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) have dominated Tajikistan's politics since 1992 and manage increasingly to sideline the opposition. Tajikistan's leaders preside over a deeply corrupt system, characterized by cronyism and patronage.

Geography, too, plays a major role in Tajikistan's developmental and political trajectory. Geologically active, with frequent earthquakes, Tajikistan has been disproportionately affected by global warming as well, resulting in long periods of drought, increasingly hot summers, rapidly melting glaciers, and periodic floods and mudslides (also induced by man-made deforestation). Meanwhile, a shared 1,400 km border with Afghanistan has put Tajikistan in an assailable position, vulnerable to the influence of extremist views across the border and treated by Russia and the West as a strategic buffer against the flow of drugs, extremism, and terrorism.^[2] A sign of its geostrategic importance is Tajikistan's role as a key component of the Northern Distribution Network of states, which aid in delivery of supplies for the ongoing U.S.-and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led war in Afghanistan.^[3]

National Democratic Governance. Apart from Islamists and some intellectuals, most Tajiks appear to support President Emomali Rahmon, once a leading Communist Party member, who favors secularism and a strong executive branch. Popular support of Rahmon and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) is based on pragmatism, but also an acknowledgement that despite ongoing socioeconomic problems, today's Tajikistan enjoys a level of peace and security that seemed impossible during the civil war era. The government has successfully harnessed both ethnic Tajik nationalism and Islamic symbolism in its favor. However, evidence pointed to the use of extrajudicial execution when security forces were sent to neutralize antigovernmental insurgents. Though the economy grew at an average annual rate of 6.5 percent during 2007-11, much of the growth can be attributed to remittances sent by Tajik migrant workers in Russia. *Given the heavy-handed rule of the executive branch, the rating for national democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.25.*

Electoral Process. Observers had foretold that the 2010 parliamentary elections were "unlikely to be free and fair." For similar reasons, the Social Democratic Party leader called for a boycott of the December 2011 parliamentary by-election. The government-engineered results of the 2010 elections gave only a semblance of pluralism to the lower house of parliament: of the 63 total seats, 55 went to outwardly progovernment candidates, with four other parties each winning two seats. The opposition parties included the Islamists and Communists, plus two parties (Agrarian and Economic Reform) suspected of having been created to serve the regime. *Since the 2010 elections, the government has neither introduced electoral reforms nor taken steps to open up the political spectrum. Tajikistan's rating for electoral process remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Civil Society. Formal nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have mushroomed since the mid-1990s but remain mostly funds- rather than issue-driven. The government has been wary of foreign religious groups – especially the Islamic varieties, but also Christian missionaries – attempting to gain influence and converts. Among other restrictions, a 2011 law "On the responsibility of parents for upbringing and education of children" prohibits those younger than 18 from attending places of worship. Critics have warned of potential backlash due to excessive government control and coercion over both moderate and extremist Muslims. *The rating for civil society remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Independent Media. Tajikistan's media are considered more open than those of most Central Asian states. However, events in 2011 indicate that the gap is narrowing. In January, the government filed a slander and insult suit against the country's largest private paper, *Asia Plus*, for publishing an investigative story on cases of alleged torture by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). A northern court imprisoned a reporter from *Nuri Zindagi*, a small district paper, for 11 months for having reported on credible allegations of corruption. In June, the authorities arrested a local BBC journalist for alleged ties to the extremist Hizb ut-Tahrir, employing torture to extract a confession. *Tajikistan's rating for independent media worsens to 6.00.*

Local Democratic Governance. As local leaders are in effect appointed, their main allegiance remains to the central government. Illegal land grabs and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources are rife. Over two-thirds of the population lives in agrarian regions, but skewed access to land, an unwritten edict to cultivate cotton, poverty, and lack of access to fair credit have driven an estimated 1.5 million people to seek work abroad. In 2011, just below US\$3 billion were received by families from outside the country, making Tajikistan number one in the world in remittances as a share of gross domestic product (40 percent of GDP). Migration has also had negative effects,

including low economic productivity, gender imbalance, and a resurgence of archaic traditions, with an estimated 10 percent of men engaging in polygamy. *Tajikistan's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. The courts remain overloaded, pressured by the executive branch, susceptible to corruption, and largely run by unqualified judges. Torture is endemic, especially in cases of suspected drug trafficking and membership in banned Islamist organizations. Confessions and self-incrimination obtained through torture are routinely used as evidence in court. There were a number of deaths in detention in 2011. Of the 4,000 prisoners who received amnesty under a special presidential decree in 2011, it is believed that a number received it by paying bribes. The government continued to deny access to detention centers by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and made no movement towards ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. *Due to the lack of improvements in justice and human rights, the rating for judicial framework and independence remained unchanged at 6.25.*

Corruption. Poverty, weak rule of law, lack of coordinated public and civil society activism, and poorly regulated foreign aid all contribute to Tajikistan's high levels of corruption. Most activities – from dealing with the traffic police to settling a case in court to ensuring entry into university to seeking a military draft waiver – require illegal payments. Proximity to Afghanistan and collusion between organized criminal entities, the security services, and the ruling elite have led to a lucrative drug trade (mostly heroin). Insufficient transparency and the practice of registering companies off-shore gave way to corruption allegations in the aluminum and cotton export industries, which together generated over US\$1 billion in 2011. *The rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.25.*

Outlook for 2012. Ongoing skirmishes with a small number of armed Islamists in the east are a reminder of potential threats to Tajikistan's security. A lack of economic and educational opportunities, combined with repressive behavior by the state's security services, make Tajikistan's youth highly susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. This threat will increase as the deadline for the departure of NATO forces from Afghanistan approaches. Relations with Russia – critical for maintaining a steady exchange of migrant workers and inflow of remittances – will likely be cautiously stable in 2011. Threats to Tajikistan's environment may increase as deforestation of mountainsides accelerates due to energy shortages, mismanagement of resources, and population growth. International investment in hydropower, natural gas; oil, gold, and silver exploration; and mining have the potential to eventually bring significant revenues to government coffers. Having been selected as among the "top 10 best-value destinations"^[4] for 2012 by the world's largest travel guidebook company, Tajikistan will likely see a rise in tourism during the year.

Notes:

[1] "Country Brief 2011," World Bank, August 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TAJIKISTANEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20630697~menuPK:287255~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:258744,00.html>.

[2] Struan Stevenson, "Tajikistan Visit – Address to Majilis," 30 May 2011, http://www.struanstevenson.com/media/speech/struan_stevenson_-_tajikistan_visit_-_address_to_majilis_30_may_2011.

[3] Dov S. Zakheim and Paul J. Saunders, "Can Russia Help Us Withdraw from Afghanistan?" *New York Times*, 1 December 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/02/opinion/can-russia-help-us-withdraw-from-afghanistan.html?_r=2.

[4] "Top 10 Best Value Destinations for 2012," Lonely Planet, <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tajikistan/travel-tips-and-articles/76857>.

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