



NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2024

Uzbekistan

CONSOLIDATED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

3
/100

Democracy Percentage	2.98 /100
Democracy Score	1.18 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

4 /100 Consolidated Authoritarian Regime

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic. See the methodology.

Author

- Anonymous

Score changes in 2024

- **Electoral Process rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00** due to snap elections after the constitutional referendum that zeroed out term limits for the president and allowed him to stay in office until 2040, while independent political parties and candidates were still barred from seeking office.
- **As a result, Uzbekistan's Democracy Score declined from 1.21 to 1.18.**

Executive Summary

In 2023, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who has portrayed himself as a reformer since his election in 2016, successfully extended his rule by zeroing out his previous two presidential terms through a constitutional referendum, which could allow him to remain in office until 2040. Former president Islam Karimov similarly used a constitutional referendum to extend his first term and solidify his grip on power. Mirziyoyev's power grab raises questions about whether his reforms and the "Uzbek thaw" will result in the much-promised "New Uzbekistan." Critics argued that the referendum, which observers said was marred by a lack of genuine debate and competition, was conducted to sustain Mirziyoyev's authoritarian rule. For instance, one leading expert on the regime said President Mirziyoyev was more interested in "authoritarian modernization" than advancing genuine multiparty democracy. ¹

The snap presidential elections held in July, after voters overwhelmingly approved the constitutional referendum, were marked by an absence of genuine political competition. Only progovernment parties could field candidates and no genuine opposition candidates were allowed to seek office. The independent Truth, Progress and Unity party was denied registration for the third time due to burdensome administrative requirements. Although Uzbekistan technically has a multiparty electoral system, all five registered political parties are progovernment and no genuine opposition party is recognized by the government. In his inaugural speech in July, President Mirziyoyev guaranteed "the activity of constructive opposition, freedom of speech and press, the rights of citizens to receive, use and disseminate information." However, the president's understanding of

“constructive opposition” and how new political parties could meet such ambiguous criteria remains unclear.

After Mirziyoyev’s inauguration, he drew accusations of nepotism when he appointed family members to high-level roles in the government. Mirziyoyev appointed his eldest daughter Saida Mirziyoyeva as his first assistant, replacing Sardor Umurzakov, who had been widely viewed as Mirziyoyev’s potential successor. The appointment of a close family member to a key role could be another tactic to consolidate Mirziyoyev’s power, following the examples of other authoritarian regimes in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Mirziyoyev also appointed his youngest daughter Shakhnoza Mirziyoyeva as deputy director of the newly established Agency for Social Protection. The reforms Mirziyoyev proposed in late 2022 were expected to shrink the large bureaucracy and make the government more efficient, but the effectiveness of these reforms has not yet been evaluated.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) still face major restrictions, such as difficulties attaining government registration, that hamper their operations. The government has retained burdensome registration procedures for NGOs dating from the Karimov regime. In 2019, the government published a draft law on rallies, meetings and demonstrations for public discussion and contained restrictive measures which would further constrain the right to peaceful assembly. Although the law has not yet been adopted, the government still punishes civil society activists who fail to follow the current onerous regulations for demonstrations. In 2023, the Uzbek government adopted new regulations on foreign funding for NGOs. Thanks to the advocacy efforts of independent Uzbek NGOs, it is now considered as an improvement compared to the previous regulations and draft versions proposed by the justice authorities. The new regulation establishes a procedure for the registration of foreign grants received by Uzbek NGOs and outlines the process for the implementation of activities funded under these foreign grants in partnership with government bodies.

In February, President Mirziyoyev publicly reasserted his support for the media but said that press freedom made the government’s work “more difficult.” **2** He said he was once asked to “shut down the media” but that he replied: “I won’t shut it down. . . . Let them speak, but they speak fairly. Let them criticize but criticize correctly.” Despite Mirziyoyev’s repeated promises to support press freedom, authorities stifled freedom of expression in 2023 through an ongoing crackdown

on independent journalists and bloggers. Bloggers faced the most repression due to the lack of regulations that specifically address bloggers. Many bloggers are convicted of “insulting,” “slandering,” or “extorting” public officials and for other dubious financial offenses. Officials exploit the legal vacuum to persecute critical voices who report on issues such as corruption. The government disregarded the public outcry from prominent journalists in response to censorship, which a government-organized union of journalists attempted to downplay. Many journalists and bloggers were jailed for their work, while others announced that they would quit due to the hostility they faced. **3**

A new report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief assessed Uzbekistan’s progress in implementing 16 recommendations on press freedom and found that the government made some progress in addressing 11 of them, while noting persistent gaps in five areas. **4** One of the main concerns is the ambiguous legal definitions of terms like “extremism” or “religious extremism,” which can be applied broadly to violate freedom of religion, expression, association, and assembly. The increase in extremism cases signalled backsliding in the government’s promises to respect freedom of religion. **5** Despite some legislative progress, such as the criminalization of domestic violence and new anticorruption regulations, the government often violates the rule of law and impedes the independence of the judiciary.

The ongoing war in Ukraine highlighted Uzbekistan’s subordinate relationship to Russia. Uzbek authorities suppressed expressions of solidarity with Ukraine and condemnations of Russia’s invasion. At the same time, the authorities overlooked companies registered in Uzbekistan that violated sanctions against Russia, which allowed Russia to use Uzbek territory as a transition zone to import goods that were barred under US and EU sanctions. However, on the other hand the Ukrainian conflict has accelerated changes in Uzbekistan’s perspective, leading to a growing awareness of its national identity. This shift challenges Russia’s ideological supremacy and signifies a diminishing influence due to growing awareness of Uzbek national identity, an increase in anti-Russian content in the local media and civil society landscape and opening perspectives for greater cooperation with the EU and other global actors.

At-A-Glance

Uzbekistan has an authoritarian government that does not allow real political competition, while all power is concentrated in the executive branch. The snap presidential election was held in a restrictive environment in which progovernment political parties dominated and no genuine opposition candidate obtained the registration required to appear on the ballot. The government tightly controls civil society through newly adopted regulations that require foreign funding for NGOs to be funnelled through local government bodies. Independent journalists and bloggers are persecuted and imprisoned for critical reporting about the government and the president. The government remains highly centralized. Local governments (khokimiyats) are more accountable to the president than local populations. The independence of the judiciary has been further compromised by the approved constitutional reform and court cases against participants at the Karakalpakstan protests in 2022. Despite the government's anticorruption initiatives, the problem remains pervasive.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.

1.00
/ 7.00

- In April, more than 90 percent of voters approved a constitutional referendum that extended presidential terms from five to seven years and zeroed out President Mirziyoyev's previous terms, which allowed him to potentially remain in power until 2040. **6** ' **7** ' **8** The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported that although the referendum was well organized, it lacked genuine political competition and pluralism and there was no formal campaign to vote "no". **9** ODIHR's preliminary report pointed out "the need to further encourage alternative views, provide opportunities for independent civil society and respect for fundamental freedoms, which continue to be restricted." **10**
- Under the new constitution, the parliament lost the power to approve candidates for key governmental positions, although the parliament previously held this power in name only and has had little influence over presidential appointments. Now, according to Articles 94 and 95 of the new

constitution, the president “only consults” with the parliament on appointments. These amendments further undermine separation of powers.

- In President Mirziyoyev’s annual parliamentary address in 2022, he discussed his administrative reform plans. ¹¹ He said he would reduce the number of government bodies, including ministries and agencies, from 61 to 28, and that he would cut the civil servant workforce by one third. ¹² Some observers believed that these measures would allow the government to sharply reduce the budget. ¹³ The president has also announced that 500 redundant functions would be eliminated and that a competitive hiring process for 2,000 civil servants would be introduced. ¹⁴ The executive branch staff will be reduced by up to 30 percent with the introduction of a “fair wage system.” The funds that will become available from this reorganization will be used to address social problems. Despite the ongoing administrative reform, the maintenance costs of government bodies increased by 24.5% at the end of 2023. ¹⁵
- In June, the government created the National Agency for Social Protection to eliminate fragmentation and gaps in the social welfare system, and to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of social programs. Mansurbek Olloyorov, who previously served as deputy head of the Department of Legal Expertise and Comprehensive Analysis of the Presidential Administration, was appointed director of the new agency. ¹⁶ President Mirziyoyev’s youngest daughter Shakhnoza Mirziyoyeva was later appointed deputy director of the agency.
- In August, after Mirziyoyev’s re-election, he appointed his eldest daughter Saida Mirziyoyeva as his first assistant, a move widely seen as an effort to consolidate his power. ¹⁷ Before this unexpected appointment, Mirziyoyeva headed the Communications and Information Policy Sector of the Executive Office of the President. The post of the chief of the presidential administration was abolished and Sardor Umurzakov, who had held the top position in Mirziyoyev’s administration from 2022 until Mirziyoyeva’s appointment, was appointed as an advisor to the president.

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.

1.00
/ 7.00

- In March, the Senate approved the resolution to hold a referendum on extending presidential term limits, among other constitutional amendments. Of the 83 senators, 80 supported the resolution, one abstained, and two did not vote. The ODIHR limited observation mission concluded that while the government has made some improvements to the electoral framework, more must be done for Uzbekistan to meet international standards, including improvements to “the rules covering campaigning, campaign finance, impartial information for voters, the involvement by public authorities in the campaign, and the need for balanced media coverage.” ¹⁸ Although the amendments changed 65 percent of the constitution, all of the proposed amendments were bundled into one question on the ballot: “Do you accept the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan ‘On the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan?’” ¹⁹ Voters were therefore deprived of the right to express their opinions on each proposed amendment. The international observers said that while the referendum was technically well-prepared it lacked genuine political pluralism. ²⁰
- In July, Uzbekistan held a snap presidential election that President Mirziyoyev won in a landslide, capturing 87 percent of the vote. Three candidates from government-controlled parties each captured around 4 percent of the vote. ODIHR found that the campaign proceeded “restrainedly” and that some long-term OSCE recommendations were not fulfilled. ²¹ The observation mission pointed to shortcomings in “the exercise of fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, as well as citizen observation of elections and registration of political parties.” ODIHR found that the election “lacked genuine political competition despite some efforts to reform.” ²² The report mentioned “indications of ballot box stuffing as well as numerous observations of seemingly identical signatures on the voter lists,” noting that “none of the registered candidates publicly criticized the current president or presented alternative political views and the campaign remained low key throughout, with observers noting that events often appeared orchestrated.” ²³ ODIHR found that procedures for political party registration were burdensome and arbitrarily applied. The observation mission also noted that the law does not provide for the registration of independent self-nominated candidates.
- The government denied registration for opposition leader Khidirnazar Allakulov’s Truth, Progress and Unity party for the third time, making him

ineligible to run for president in 2023. The former rector of Termez State University and Mirziyoyev critic collected 10,000 signatures out of the required 20,000, but the Ministry of Justice declared most of them invalid.

24 In 2021, Allakulov attempted and failed to register the Truth and Development party because he did not obtain enough signatures. **25** In May, Allakulov said he was beaten in Andijan while collecting signatures to register his party. **26** The incident highlights the challenges faced by independent political activists in Uzbekistan and raises concerns about the safety and security of those involved in the democratic process. With no opposition parties registered by the government, electoral competition is nonexistent and only registered progovernment parties stand for election.

- The law requires a political party to obtain at least 20,000 signatures from citizens living in at least eight provinces, including the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the city of Tashkent, to obtain registration. In March, Justice Minister Akbar Tashkulov said the 20,000-signature requirement was not burdensome. **27** Political scientist Kamoliddin Rabbimov criticized Tashkulov for this assertion and said the requirement was “completely authoritarian.” Rabbimov stressed that multiple political parties genuinely competing gives citizens indirect power to oversee the government. According to Rabbimov, if the process to form a new political party is complicated and burdensome, then “the elementary democratic mechanism is not working.” **28**

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.

1.25
/7.00

- On November 24th, representatives from the Ministry of Justice and an initiative group of NGOs convened a meeting to discuss Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 328, issued on June 13th. This order pertains to the cooperation between NGOs and state bodies during the implementation of international grant projects. The meeting was prompted by an open appeal from a coalition of NGOs and civic activists, urging the cancellation of this

document. In their appeal, the representatives of NGOs and activists highlighted the challenges they face in accessing funding through international grants due to the decree. They argue that it places independent civil society institutions in a subordinate position compared to national partners when executing projects. During the meeting, Deputy Minister Muzraf Ikramov provided an explanation of the decree's content. Members of the initiative group shared specific instances of difficulties encountered by NGOs in implementing international grant projects. They emphasized that certain state bodies misapply the decree, leading to artificial barriers in the collaborative framework between NGOs and government entities.

- In 2022, a coalition of CSOs met with Ministry of Justice officials to push for the repeal of a new regulation requiring any foreign grant money for NGOs to be funnelled through the government. ²⁹ Civil society leaders noted that the regulation made it difficult for them to access the foreign funds that they rely on, threatening their financial sustainability. The coalition said the regulation makes CSOs subordinate to the government in implementing foreign-funded projects and made their work more difficult. They stressed that the government often incorrectly applied the regulation and created artificial barriers for NGOs to execute projects, while also claiming the government's involvement was in the spirit of cooperation. Following the meeting, the Ministry of Justice agreed to revise the regulation and said it would consider proposals from CSOs. In August, CSOs participated in a discussion with the Ministry of Justice on revising the regulation. ³⁰
- In October, the government adopted a revised regulation which is considered as an improvement compared to the 2022 regulation ³¹ For instance, it now provides Uzbek NGOs the opportunity to decide for itself whether it needs a "government partner organization" or not if the value of funds received from foreign sources does not exceed the equivalent of 28,000 US dollars. Moreover, the new regulation significantly limits the power of the "state partner organization", which are now expressed only in assistance to NGOs in the following cases: organizing meetings, negotiations and other events within the framework of the project. However, new procedures may still oblige NGOs to work with the government to implement foreign-funded projects. This could lead to government

interference in NGOs' projects, which is prohibited by law and may limit the freedom of association.

- In March, a Ministry of Justice Official said the Mirziyoyev administration was reviewing a draft law on rallies. **32** Although the law prohibits “violation of the procedure for organizing meetings, rallies, street walks or demonstrations,” no procedure is prescribed in the legislation, as former minister of justice Ruslanbek Davletov admitted in 2021. **33** Member of parliament Rasul Kusherbaev asked the judiciary to publicize the procedure for organizing rallies. **34** In February, a 19-year-old man was accused of violating the law on organizing rallies and demonstrations after he gathered more than 130 children in Tashkent. While the context of this incident remains unclear, it highlights the power of collective voices and the impact they can have on social and political discourse.
- In its report on Uzbekistan’s 2022 cotton harvest, the Uzbek Forum for Human Rights said there was no longer widespread, systemic forced labor in the cotton industry. **35** However, the report highlighted obstacles to freedom of association and urged the government to empower workers and civil society groups. The forum demanded the government to respect freedom of association, freedom of speech, and civil society activism. The report said, “With only a tiny handful of independent rights groups that are formally registered by the Uzbek Ministry of Justice, the capacity of Uzbek civil society to monitor and report on rights violations is seriously curtailed.” **36** Despite the commitments the government has made to provide freedom of association, it has restricted CSOs from operating freely by retaining burdensome registration procedures and strict government oversight requirements for independent NGOs. **37**
- In May, the Committee of Religious Affairs published an updated list of publications containing ideas of extremism and terrorism. Such materials are prohibited for import, production, distribution, and demonstration in Uzbekistan. The list is approved by the Supreme Court. The committee urged citizens not to download and distribute audio, video, and other media products of “dubious religious content” from websites and social media platforms. **38**
- In May 2023, the Jizzak City Criminal Court sentenced a 19-year-old man to three years of noncustodial restricted freedom for distributing prohibited religious materials. **39** In early February, 22-year-old student Sardor

Rakhmonkulov was sentenced to five years in prison for distributing a religious song (nasheed). After a public outcry, the Court of Appeals reduced his sentence to two years of probation before his sentence was eventually commuted. ⁴⁰ In May, 21-year-old student Jahongir Ulugmurodov was sentenced to three years in prison for distributing a nasheed that promoted fanaticism. Ulugmurodov's family said he had sent a YouTube link to the nasheed to his classmates. His mother appealed to the president and the Supreme Court to give her son another chance. The Supreme Court then reduced his sentence to restriction of freedom and released him from prison, while rejecting his lawyer's motion to acquit the defendant. ⁴¹

- In early August 2023, Islamic website Azon.uz and its corresponding social media pages stopped working, according to its founder Mubashshir Akhmad. ⁴² Religious videos have also have been removed from Azon TV's YouTube pages. Azon.uz, which has operated since 2017, was created to "to satisfy the information needs of the population, to contribute to changes in the field of religion and education, and to analyze events in the country and abroad," according to its website. The website and social media pages remained inaccessible at the end of the year. The Azon YouTube page (with more than 1.2 million subscribers) was renamed Fikrat and videos with religious content were deleted. ⁴³ In 2021, a court fined four of the website's managers for publishing materials with religious content without state approval. Azon's former editor-in-chief, Abdulaziz Muborak, called the fines an attempt to "silence the site." To protest the government's actions aimed at censoring the Islamic website, Azon.uz temporarily stopped posting news, which Kun.uz, a website that had also been fined for religious content, had previously done. As of 2023, Azon.uz was included in the Top 15 popular online media websites in Uzbekistan visited by an average of 502,000 people per month. ⁴⁴

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.

1.25
/7.00

- In January, authorities arrested seven journalists from the Human.uz news site for extortion, including director Khurshid Daliyev and editor-in-chief Muslim Mirzazhanov. The State Security Service (SSS) provided little detail on the charges. Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction spokesperson Mavjuda Mirzaeva, Uzbekneftegaz (Uzbekistan's state oil and gas company) spokesperson Siyavush Hoshimov, and private citizen Ahmadullo Akhmadjonov were also arrested. **45** Although the investigation was shrouded in secrecy, all of the suspects appeared to be arrested over their alleged involvement with the Telegram channel Kompromatuzb. **46** The investigation apparently stemmed from complaints that were filed with the state prosecutor. Although the SSS said the defendants were provided with lawyers and that their rights were being respected, Human.uz condemned the charges as spurious and press freedom groups demanded the government to respect the rights of journalists.
- In December 2022, blogger Olimjon Khaidarov was fined 21 million soms (\$1,800) for participating in an unauthorized rally and disseminating false information. **47** The fine stemmed from a video that Khaidarov had posted of a protest by factory workers in Fergana, which had led to seven arrests. Khaidarov maintained his innocence and filed an appeal against the court decision soon after imposition of the fine. **48** Later on 1 December, 2023, the court found Khaidarov guilty of libel, insult and extortion and sentenced him to 8 years in prison. **49**
- At the end of December 2022, popular blogger and YouTube influencer Abdukodir Muminov said unknown persons broke the windows of his car with a bat and beat him. **50** In August, a court sentenced Muminov, who had been arrested in February, to more than seven years in prison after he was convicted of fraud and extortion over incidents dating to 2021. **51** The court also banned Muminov from journalism for three years. **52**
- In March, a group of independent journalists and activists signed a public letter to President Mirziyoyev that decried "hidden but strict censorship" and urged him to "provide historic assistance in ensuring the true independence of the press." **53** Despite some improvements in press freedom since Mirziyoyev came into power in 2016, the authors said, "Editorial offices, journalists, bloggers, people expressing any opinion in society continue to face serious obstacles, pressure and intimidation." **54**

- The government shut down the television show “Minbar,” which was broadcast on the Mahalla network and openly criticized the authorities. Former member of parliament Rasul Kuserbayev said of the cancellation: “As a result, there are no critical programs left on state television, which are far from praise and ‘ordered’ work; one might even say: everything is beautiful and clean.” ⁵⁵ According to Kuserbayev, authorities ordered the show cancelled after a May episode criticized the government for mismanaging funds allocated for social services.
- Several bloggers announced that they would no longer post due to the hostile media environment, including Umid Karimov (the head of Nasafnews in the Kashkadarya region, which also announced that it would shut down), Otabek Artikov, and Maksud Muzaffarov. Two of these bloggers were also arrested after an incident with police officers, as Gazeta.uz reported. ⁵⁶ There were arrested in Shakhrisabz for five days for “petty hooliganism”, “failure to comply with the legal demands of police officers” and other violations. This happened after a conflict with the leadership of the city’s internal affairs department. The situation has raised a number of questions. Lawyers and a former deputy pointed out that the arrest of bloggers looks like pressure on freedom of speech. The Ministry of Internal Affairs put bloggers Sanjar Ikramov (Sanjar Xo’ja) and Sherali Komilov (Detektiv Uz) on its wanted list after it charged them in absentia with fraud. Komilov was also accused of insult. These incidents reveal the continued repression of journalists, despite Mirziyoyev’s promises to respect freedom of the press.

57

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.

1.25
/ 7.00

- According to the constitution, unelected local governors known as khokims are appointed by the president and simultaneously serve as chairs of local councils (Kengashes). Starting in 2024, these local governors will no longer serve as chairs of the local councils. ⁵⁸ However, the constitution allows them to serve as members of parliament and senators. Local governors will be elected in and around Tashkent beginning in 2024 and elsewhere in the

country starting in 2026. The chairperson of local councils will be elected by other members of the council for no more than two consecutive terms. Local governors will also have a two-term limit. Local governors can be elected as deputies in the local councils and subsequently as senators. Today, local governors of almost all regions are senators. In theory, these changes help decentralize governance by giving more power to the locally elected chairpersons, thus constraining the power of the local governors that the president appoints. Former minister of justice Ruslanbek Davletov also advocated for these reforms because the current system limits local autonomy by enabling local governors to act on behalf of the president to pressure elected deputies in the local councils.

- In August, a viral video showed a confrontation between the local governor of the Surkhandarya region, Ulugbek Kosimov, and the director of a local school, Umida Tursunova, in which Tursunova protested Kosimov firing her.
59 The scandal revealed the extent of local governors' power and their freedom to abuse it without accountability, as evidenced by Kosimov's ability to fire Tursunova in defiance of the constitution. Human rights activist Abdurakhmon Tashanov pointed out that the law only permits the Department of Preschool and School Education to hire and fire school directors, and that the governor illegally abused his power by firing Tursunova. **60** According to media reports, Tursunova was arrested and detained for 10 days for violating the Code of Administrative Responsibility, and then detained again following her release. **61** Umida Tursunova was reportedly apprehended following a controversy that erupted during a videoconference attended by the regional governor. Additionally, her tenure as the school's director came under scrutiny. The Minister of Preschool and Public Education then announced that Tursunova had been released and would continue as school director. **62** After this incident, the husband of one of the teachers at the school brutally beat Tursunova. **63** The Supreme Court and the Prosecutor General's Office did not comment on the situation.

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.

1.25
/7.00

- In March, the Constitutional Court ruled that the referendum to amend the constitution could be held. **64** The passage of the referendum altered 65 percent of the constitution and increased the number of articles from 128 to 155.
- In January, a court found 22 defendants guilty for their alleged participation in the 2022 protests in Nukus, Karakalpakstan that led to at least 21 deaths and more than 500 arrests. **65** The protests erupted in response to the government's plans to eliminate Karakalpakstan's constitutional right to secede, quickly became violent, and provoked a brutal crackdown by the police. Dauletmurat Tajimuratov, the former editor-in-chief and lawyer of the newspaper *El Khyzmetinde* (*Serving the People*), was sentenced to 16 years in prison for his alleged role in organizing the protests. Lolagul Kallikhanova, a journalist and founder of the Makan.uz website, was sentenced to eight years of probation and released from the courtroom together with the blogger Azamat Nuratdinov, former youth sports coach Ahmet Smetullaev, and Azamat Turdanov, former director of the Nukus College of Olympic Reserve. The rest received prison or restriction of freedom sentences ranging from three to eight years. In March, 39 defendants in a second trial were found guilty for their role in the Nukus protests and 28 people received prison sentences of 5 to 11 years, while the other 11 were sentenced to 5 years of restricted freedom. The court also ordered the defendants to collectively pay 6.5 billion soms (\$560,000) in damages, and directed authorities to seize the defendants' property to pay the damages. One of the defendants convicted in January, 45-year-old Polat Shamshetov, died in February while waiting to be transferred to prison. Shamshetov, who was a policeman when the 2022 protests broke out, was the son of a former Karakalpakstan leader.
- Police brutality and misconduct, including torture, is a persistent problem in Uzbekistan. In June, a man died in custody after officers with the Internal Affairs Department (IAD) in Tashkent tortured him. **66**

- In April, the government adopted a law that criminalized domestic violence, harassment, and stalking. The law also increased prison sentences for rape, statutory rape, and child pornography, among other provisions. According to the law, perpetrators of sexual violence are not eligible for parole and mitigating circumstances will not be considered by courts. A working group that included representatives of ministries and agencies, international NGOs, and civil society activists contributed to the legislation.

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.

1.25
/ 7.00

- Corruption persisted in 2023. Uzbekistan ranked 126th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 31. ⁶⁷ A year earlier, Uzbekistan's score was 14 points lower. Recent improvements to Uzbekistan's corruption score could be related to the efforts of the Anti-Corruption Agency. For instance, in July 2023, the agency published its "List of Officials Combining Business with Public Service" for the first time. ⁶⁸ The list revealed conflicts of interest among a number of high-level officials. The agency found that six officials, including three district khokims, the head of the Anticorruption agency, the head of the Central Bank State Unitary Enterprise, and another government official are founders of companies and farms. Some of these officials had already transferred their shares to others. According to the law, ⁶⁹ a civil servant may not establish business entities, be their founder, or perform organizational, managerial and administrative functions within a company. The agency reported that the law is frequently violated.
- In June, the Senate approved a law "On anticorruption assessment of normative-legal acts and their projects." ⁷⁰ Before the law's enactment, a Ministry of Justice regulation served as the foundation for assessing legislation for corruption. During a meeting, it was observed that this framework resulted in corruption vulnerabilities within laws. Senate Chairperson Tanzila Narbayeva reported that an anticorruption review of over 800 laws in 2021 revealed that 224 of them (28 percent) contained more than 650 corruption-related elements. The law mandates that

anticorruption expertise be integrated into the justice system, the Anticorruption agency, legal services of state entities, and bodies responsible for enforcing normative legal acts. Additionally, civil society organizations (CSOs) and media outlets have the authority to conduct public assessments of legislation. ⁷¹ According to a 2021 presidential decree, civil servants would be required to declare their income starting in 2022. ⁷² However, the parliament has not yet approved the law on mandatory declarations. In June, the parliament passed a new conflict of interest law, which has not yet been publicized. The delays in adopting anticorruption legislation suggest resistance from certain segments of the government.

- In September, the Swiss government indicted Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of former president Islam Karimov, for widescale corruption and fraud that occurred between 2005 and 2013. ⁷³ The charges were largely related to foreign companies that paid bribes to gain entrée into Uzbekistan’s telecommunications industry. ⁷⁴

Footnotes

- ¹ Written evidence submitted by Prof Luca Anceschi (University of Glasgow) to the Foreign Affairs Committee (ECA0008), <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/119589/html/>
- ² Telegram channel of the Press-secretary of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, February 24, 2023, https://t.me/Press_Secretary_Uz/2940
- ³ “President’s broken promises put journalists and bloggers at risk,” Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, 20 June 2023, <https://www.uzbekforum.org/presidents-broken-promises-puts-journalists-...>
- ⁴ “New report on the situation of freedom of religion or belief in Uzbekistan released”, March 29, 2023, <https://srforb.org/uzbekistan-report/>
- ⁵ “Uzbekistan: Backsliding on Religious Freedom Promises,” Human Rights Watch, May 24, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/24/uzbekistan-backsliding-religious-fr...>

More footnotes



On Uzbekistan

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Country Facts

Population

35,650,000

Global Freedom Score

12/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

27/100 **Not Free**

In Other Reports

Freedom in the World 2024

Freedom on the Net 2024

Other Years

2023

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1850 M St. NW Floor 11
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