



NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2021

Tajikistan

CONSOLIDATED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

2

/100

Democracy Percentage	1.79 /100
Democracy Score	1.11 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

3 /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.

Score changes in 2021

- Electoral Process rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00 due to the official prohibition on filming and photographing at polling stations, the documented violations during the year's elections, pressure on opponents by the authorities, and unequal access to media and resources throughout the election process.
- Independent Media rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00 due to the increased level of censorship, self-censorship, and intimidation of journalists' relatives. The practice of blocking media websites, imprisoning journalists, and refusing to grant accreditations continued, further hindering the work of both international and exile media.

As a result, Tajikistan's Democracy Score declined from 1.18 to 1.07.

Executive Summary

Tajikistan's authoritarian government further consolidated its 30-year grip on power in 2020. The regime used the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen its position while restricting citizen's rights and significantly curtailing the work of independent institutions.

President Emomali Rahmon was reelected for a fifth term in October with almost 91 percent of the vote. His son, Rustam Emomali, was appointed chairman of the parliament, now de facto number two in the country's leadership hierarchy. Tajikistan is governed as a nepotistic kleptocracy. Rahmon and his family members keep a tight rein on the economy, and politics is closed off and dangerous for the majority of citizens. ¹

Legislative changes in 2020 laid the groundwork for increased repression. The authorities may now legally block websites and social media without a court order. ² The vague wording of the new laws means that any political activism may be considered extremist, and journalists and bloggers can now be fined for publishing "false or inaccurate information." ³

There is constant pressure on activists and opposition political figures. ⁴ In the capital Dushanbe, unidentified attackers assaulted Rakhmatillo Zoyirov, chairman of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SDPT). Zoyirov's deputy, Makhmurod Odinaev, was arrested, detained, and is facing a criminal investigation on charges of

hooliganism **5** and extremism. **6** Activists and members of opposition groups based outside Tajikistan have described abductions and forcible extradition. Even the relatives of exiled opposition leaders and journalists are under pressure within the country's borders.

For the first time in recent years, authorities executed a temporary but almost complete shutdown of the internet throughout Tajikistan during a livestreamed event by Muhiddin Kabiri, **7** leader of the banned opposition Islamic Renaissance Party, who is currently residing in Germany.

The Rahmon regime continued to exert pressure on journalists and independent media in 2020. **8** In June, legislative amendments to the criminal and administrative codes toughened the punishment for spreading “false information.” **9** Daler Sharipov, a freelance journalist, was sentenced to more than a year in prison on charges of distributing extremist literature. **10** Abdullo Gurbati, a correspondent with the independent Asia-Plus news agency, was attacked and beaten twice in the first half of 2020. **11** Asia-Plus's website—news.tj, one of the most visited online independent media outlets in the country—remains blocked for the second year in a row due to “technical issues” on the .tj domain, administered by a government agency.

But pressure on independent reporting is not limited to outlets in Tajikistan. The Prague-based news website akhbor.com announced it will be stopping all operations due to strong pressure on its contributing journalists, as well as being blocked in Tajikistan. **12** Additionally, the president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty stated that Tajikistan has reneged on its promise to grant accreditation to its journalists. **13**

In the context of the pandemic, civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists played a leading role in helping the country's most vulnerable and encouraging authorities to respond to the disease. While officials denied the presence of COVID-19 until late April, activists created an alternative online system to monitor the death toll arising from the disease. **14** They also explained necessary precautions to the population and financially supported the most vulnerable groups, for example, by using crowdfunding campaigns to collect donations. The Tajik diaspora also raised money to support nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in Tajikistan in an effort to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Authorities eventually recognized the existence of the virus in the country in late April and introduced measures to protect the population.

However, the state simultaneously blocked a website listing the death toll information and threatened activists with fines.

Tajikistan remains in perpetual economic crisis, which worsened during the year. By the end of September, GDP per capita was \$833, the lowest in nearly a decade. ¹⁵ The current average salary ¹⁶ is lower than it was in 2014. ¹⁷ Due to Russia's closed borders (a consequence of the pandemic), the flow of remittances from labor migrants, which amounted to more than 28 percent of Tajikistan's GDP in 2019, ¹⁸ sharply decreased in 2020, seriously impacting their families, particularly in rural areas. So far, the Rahmon regime has navigated significant economic difficulties and associated social unrest thanks to financial support from Western countries and international financial institutions, which approved the allocation of about \$400 million without transparent mechanisms for public control. ¹⁹

In 2020, Tajikistan witnessed its first serious public protests in many years. The regime has typically used rhetoric to frighten citizens from taking part in public protests, claiming they could lead to civil war. However, following the destruction of a southern village by a flood, residents blocked an important road between Dushanbe and Bokhtar to protest the government's lack of assistance. ²⁰ Workers at a Chinese-owned gold-mining company in the Sughd region also held a protest demanding payment of wages that had been delayed for several months.

The predicted transfer of power from President Emomali Rahmon to his son Rustam Emomali ²¹ did not happen in 2020. This likely indicates an intensification of internal struggles within the Rahmon clan over any potential transition as three competing forces have emerged. ²² The president's preferred route of succession is his son Rustam; as well as enjoying the support of the president, Rustam's candidature is supported by much of the inner circle of close relatives and politicians. However, Rustam faces competition from Ozoda Rahmon, the president's daughter. Ozoda heads the Rahmon administration, and her husband, Jamoliddin Nuraliev, ²³ is first deputy chairman of the National Bank of Tajikistan. Together, they control the country's security services and public finances. The third challenge comes from a joint effort by two of Rahmon's other daughters, Firuza and Rukhshona Rahmon, and their husbands from the Sohibov clan, Mahmadzoi and Shamsullo Sohibov, respectively. Together, they own and operate a number of large enterprises associated with corruption schemes and corporate raiding in the country. ²⁴

It is likely that the transition issue will remain unresolved for the foreseeable future. All of Rahmon's key ministers remained in their positions when the new government was formed in November 2020, with only four new ministers and a new deputy prime minister as noteworthy changes. ²⁵

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

- Although Tajikistan has seven officially registered political parties—with six represented in the *Majlisi Oli* (Supreme Assembly), the bicameral parliament—President Rahmon, along with members of his extended family, de facto dominate the country's governing political and economic institutions. Rahmon has been in power since November 1992, and he is one of the world's longest-serving heads of state. He has held the title "Leader of the Nation" since 2015. ²⁶ This status guarantees him the ability to be reelected as president for an unlimited number of terms and to maintain his power even if he were to leave the position. In October 2020, Rahmon was reelected for a fifth seven-year presidential term, gaining 90.92 percent of the vote in the elections. ²⁷ Rahmon's rivals were four poorly known candidates who together received 1.5–3 percent of votes. The only prominent opposition party, the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT), refused to participate in the presidential elections to protest the pressure exerted on its members after the parliamentary elections in March. ²⁸
- Both election campaigns were held under the full control of the authorities and received little coverage in the media. For the parliamentary elections, political parties did not produce comprehensive manifestos. Instead, they restricted themselves to vague statements about improving people's quality of life. ²⁹ Ahead of the presidential elections, only Rahmon's program contained detailed figures. He promised to double the state budget revenue in seven years and to increase the percentage of the population earning a "middle income" to 45 percent by 2027. ³⁰ Other candidates' statements were mostly populist and lacked specific mechanisms for their implementation. One promised to provide

every family in Tajikistan with its own apartment, whereas another promised a metro system for Dushanbe. And a third promised to eliminate corruption. ³¹

- Rustam Emomali, the president's 33-year-old son, has officially occupied the number two position in the country since April 2020. As chairman of the National Assembly, the parliament's upper chamber, Rustam is understood to be in line for the presidency if Rahmon is unable to fulfill his duties. ³² As well as the likely successor to his father, Rustam is also mayor of the capital Dushanbe and the country's youngest post-Soviet general. Rahmon's daughter Ozoda Emomali runs the presidential administration, which allows her to play a decisive role in selecting and dismissing key government figures. In total, the president has nine children and more than 30 grandchildren, and this extended family forms the country's political and economic elite. ³³
- Parliamentary elections were held in March 2020. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), chaired by Emomali Rahmon, won 47 of the 63 seats in the Assembly of Representatives, the parliament's lower chamber. The majority are former mid-level state or regional officials, loyal to the president's family. The remaining seats were distributed among five political parties loyal to the authorities. ³⁴ The SDPT was the only party not to win any parliamentary seats and is the only officially registered party that criticizes the government. After the elections, SDPT chairman Rakhmatillo Zoyirov reported that a party member had been harassed by the security and secret services. ³⁵ Zoyirov himself, ³⁶ as well as the son of his party deputy, Shaikhmuslihiddin Rizoiev, ³⁷ stated they had been attacked and beaten by unknown assailants. The police refused to investigate either case. ³⁸
- The unofficial policy of detention and pressure on families of political activists and dissidents within and outside the country continued in 2020. ³⁹ Over the years, state television channels have broadcast a documentary series called *Khiyonat* ("Betrayal"), which accuses opposition-minded politicians and journalists abroad of betraying their country. ⁴⁰ Relatives and acquaintances of the accused activists in Tajikistan took part in the filming under duress. ⁴¹ Most also faced questioning from security services.
- The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted Tajikistan's economy, with the country's poorest citizens hardest hit. In early November, the official currency rate of the Tajik Somoni, tightly controlled by authorities, fell by almost 10 percent overnight. ⁴² This negatively affected families' personal finances and ability to buy food as Tajikistan imports more than 75 percent of its food from

abroad. Tajikistan's GDP fell to 1.6 percent. **43** Its closed borders also meant that migrant workers could not leave the country to find work.

- Tajikistan has impeded the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in performing its functions. Together with Turkey and Azerbaijan, Tajikistan has blocked the extension of the terms of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Press and the head of the OSCE/ODIHR. Both officials have actively criticized Tajik authorities in the past and were forced to resign under pressure. **44**

Electoral Proces

- Tajikistan's electoral processes further declined in 2020, as elections lacked any form of free and fair conduct. OSCE observers in the parliamentary elections "did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner," **45** and in the presidential election, they were mandated to carry out only a limited observation mission, which included only seven experts. **46** For the first time, authorities officially announced that they would prohibit filming and photographing at polling stations, and it was forbidden to install video cameras at polling stations. Only state media received permission to photograph and film. **47**
- There were three major elections in 2020. In March, citizens voted in parliamentary and local council elections. **48** Presidential elections were held in October. In all cases, representatives of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), chaired by President Rahmon, won an absolute majority of seats. Opposition politicians, parties, and movements based abroad were barred from participating in the elections, and the opposition and activists based in country complained of pressure from authorities. **49**
- A number of election violations were documented by local observers and journalists. These mostly involved proxy voting or casting ballots for family members. **50** In addition to violations on election day, OSCE/ODIHR observers noted pressure on opponents by authorities and unequal access to media and resources throughout the election process. In a special statement, they described the elections as "tightly controlled" and not reflective of international standards. The opposition SDPT did not recognize the election results. **51**

- The parliamentary and presidential elections took place without representatives of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), a first since the end of the civil war in 1997. Banned by the Supreme Court in 2015, the party remains popular in Tajikistan and has the potential to play a strong oppositional role in the future.
- There are legal limits on the nomination of candidates for the presidency. Only registered political parties, regional councils, the Federation of Trade Unions, or the Youth Union may nominate candidates. All local councils and unions are tightly controlled by authorities. In 2020, the Central Election Commission (CEC) registered only five candidates. ⁵² With the exception of incumbent President Rahmon, candidates could only take part in debates and meetings with voters together as a single group under the supervision of the CEC. Furthermore, the four so-called opposition candidates made all of their regional campaign trips together.
- The Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) refused to participate in the presidential elections in protest of the violations during the March parliamentary elections and pressure on party members. ⁵³ Another candidate, head of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) Saidjafar Usmonzoda, was not registered by the CEC due to unfounded suspicions that some signatures in support of his nomination were fake. Usmonzoda chose not to challenge the decision, stating that the accusations were “senseless.” ⁵⁴
- The incumbent President Rahmon won the presidential elections with an unbelievable 90.92 ⁵⁵ percent of the vote. The remaining candidates received 1.5–3 percent. It should be noted that all other candidates, who registered in the month before the election, managed to cross the electoral threshold to earn signatures of support from at least 5 percent of the population.

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

- Although government pressure on the civic sector appeared to decrease somewhat during the year, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil

society actors still face a tightly controlled environment for activism and public engagement. The new Law on Public Organizations in 2019 significantly tightened the rules for NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSOs). In 2020, however, the authorities let up slightly, ⁵⁶ with NGOs reporting a lack of enforcement of the new law for public organizations mandating that they have a website and publish detailed legal and financial information about their activities. Moreover, in a significant case for Tajik civil society, the Center for Sociological Research “Zerkalo” was allowed to continue its work after a court ruled in its favor in response to a Justice Ministry demand (based on bogus charges) that it suspend its activities. ⁵⁷

- The Tajik government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in a limited manner following a wave of initial closures. In March, authorities closed all mosques (most were still closed at year’s end), ⁵⁸ banned collective prayer, and closed all land borders and airports to the public. In April, all markets and bazaars were closed with exceptions for food. Schools and universities were closed. However, almost all restrictions were lifted in mid-June.
- NGOs and volunteer groups played a significant role in informing the population about the pandemic, providing support to the most vulnerable groups, and pressuring authorities to respond with greater urgency. ⁵⁹ Tajikistan’s health minister, criticized for his slow and ineffective response to the crisis, initially denied the existence of COVID-19 in the country and was fired following calls from civil society activists. In addition, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) representative office in Tajikistan was forced to resign following heavy civic sector criticism for supporting the authorities’ decision not to recognize the existence of coronavirus in the country. ⁶⁰
- Notably, the official stance toward the LGBT+ community softened somewhat during the year. For the first time in years, the General Prosecutor’s Office launched a criminal case against individuals who had attacked and beaten a gay man. ⁶¹ A short documentary film about the LGBT+ community in Tajikistan was filmed and made available online in the country. ⁶² The regime did not try to block access to the film or censor news about it in the media.
- Despite these positive signs, the government nevertheless continued to closely control the work of public organizations. The majority of Tajikistan’s 2,547 registered NGOs ⁶³ are dependent on foreign funding. The Ministry of Justice strictly monitors groups’ adherence to the ten-day rule to report any projects financed from abroad.

- The state also tightly controls large public organizations. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FNPT) remains under strict control and supports any major initiatives of the government. The FNPT, along with the Youth Union of Tajikistan, is one of two NGOs that have the right to nominate candidates for the presidency—and it was the first to endorse Rahmon as presidential candidate in the 2020 campaign. ⁶⁴ In September, Maliksho Nematzoda, a member of the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan, with no experience in trade union work, became the new FNPT chairman. ⁶⁵ He replaced Kodir Kosim, who was elected to the parliament.

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.

1.00
/7.00

- Throughout 2020, the Rahmon regime increased restrictions on freedom of speech and the media in Tajikistan, using legislation to pressure individual journalists and bloggers and to obstruct the work of international media in the country. ⁶⁶ Even media outlets based outside the country’s borders faced new challenges from the Tajik government.
- In April, freelance journalist Daler Sharipov, who contributed to several local independent media outlets, was arrested on charges of extremism. ⁶⁷ Despite appeals from major media organizations, as well as journalists who launched a campaign to support him, ⁶⁸ Sharipov was sentenced to a year in prison for citing works linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious organization banned in Tajikistan. Sharipov was the first journalist to be charged under the newly adopted law on countering extremism, whose vague wording allows authorities to interpret their own definition of extremism. ⁶⁹
- In March, the Supreme Court blocked access to the Prague-based, Tajikistan-focused, independent news outlet akhbor.com. ⁷⁰ Accused of collaborating with extremist organizations, the portal was banned in the country. Later, in November, akhbor.com announced the cessation of its activities, citing danger to its journalists and obstruction by authorities. ⁷¹

- Amendments to the administrative code introduced fines for “disseminating incorrect or inaccurate information” about the COVID-19 pandemic. **72**
However, these changes do not specify how to measure the inaccuracy of such information. Prior to the amendments, a website where civil activists kept an alternative count of coronavirus deaths in Tajikistan was blocked. **73** In addition, the General Prosecutor’s Office threatened liability for those “sowing panic.” **74**
- The COVID-19 pandemic cut revenues to independent media, severely impacting the sustainability of the sector. Advertising revenue for print media decreased by an average of 39 percent, and by 32 percent for radio. **75** Authorities did not provide support for affected media. At the same time, the state committee on television and radio sent a letter to all independent stations insisting they broadcast programs that “promote national identity and patriotism.” **76**
- The Foreign Ministry continued to obstruct reporters working for international media. In January, Jamie Fly, then-president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), stated that Tajik authorities had failed to fulfil their promises to accredit Tajikistan-based correspondents. **77** In August, accreditation for RFE/RL’s *Current Time* correspondent Anushervon Aripov was not renewed following his story about President Rahmon’s hometown. **78**
- Asia-Plus, a leading independent news agency, was forced to move from its office in December after years of working and investing in the premises, a rented space in a state-owned building dedicated for newspapers and other media. In November, the building management notified the agency that it had to vacate the office in 30 days. After Asia-Plus left, the space was provided to Khovar, the official state information agency. **79**

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.

1.50
/ 7.00

- Structurally, Tajikistan has several separations of power, including a separation between national and local forms of governance. In practice, however, the Rahmon regime prefers direct control of all processes and ignores positive examples of international best practice and engagement with local and civic actors. **80** Regional governors, heads of districts, and city mayors are directly

appointed and dismissed by the president without the participation of local communities or local councils. Only in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region must candidates for governor be approved by the local council. In all other regions of the country, the consent of local councils is not required. ⁸¹

- In September, authorities announced the preparation of an action plan for implementing the Concept of Local Development in Tajikistan by 2030. ⁸² The concept should allocate more power to local representatives. ⁸³ Until its implementation, however, existing mechanisms are being ignored. In 2009, the parliament passed a law providing for local self-government of settlements and villages. This allowed councils in local regions (*jamoat*) to nominate local chairmen. In theory, this mechanism significantly empowers the 370 jamoats in the country, but it was never implemented in practice. Jamoats have only a few thousand inhabitants each and are considered the lowest level of political decentralization.
- City and district councils are the next level above jamoats in the power hierarchy. During the local elections in March, without the presence of international observers, representatives from the PDPT won an absolute majority of seats in all city and district councils. Notably, in the two months prior to the local elections, amendments were made to the law on the legal status of council members requiring local deputies to take an oath of allegiance to the country before assuming their council duties, as well as providing annual paid leave. ⁸⁴
- In October, the parliament amended the laws on local self-government and education. Accordingly, local authorities in cities and regions lost the right to appoint the heads of education departments in their local administrations. This power was transferred to the Ministry of Education, ⁸⁵ further centralizing control of educational decisions and oversight.

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.

1.00
/7.00

- Tajikistan's judicial system is tightly controlled by the Rahmon regime. Socially significant cases are often heard behind closed doors, with civil society and independent media barred from monitoring court proceedings. The chance of a successful appeal is highly unlikely. In the first half of 2020, less than 0.2 percent of all decisions were successfully appealed. **86**
- The trend of increasing pressure on lawyers continued in 2020. In July, amendments were made to the law on bars and attorney activity. **87** In accordance with these changes, Tajik attorneys may only defend their clients in court trials if approved by the newly established Legal Aid Center, and must, upon request, "urgently come to the inquiry officer, investigator, prosecutor, or judge." Over the past few years, the regime has significantly limited the ability of lawyers to work independently and, as a result, only members of the government-controlled Union of Lawyers of Tajikistan, created by the Ministry of Justice in 2015, may work as defense attorneys in courts. **88**
- In February, President Rahmon signed 96 decrees at once, affecting almost all judges in the country. Accordingly, 153 judges and court officials were transferred to other positions or fired. **89** Rahmon, at a meeting with judges, said he did this to prevent corruption in the national court system. **90**
- Critics of the regime and dissidents remain the principal targets of Tajikistan's security services, both inside and outside the country. In March, Ilhomjon Yusupov, an Islamic Renaissance Party activist, was beaten in Lithuania where he holds political asylum status. **91** Additionally, the opposition organization Group 24 reported the kidnapping and illegal extradition to Tajikistan of its activist Shobuddin Badalov, then living in Russia. **92** Another activist, Hizbullo Shovalizoda, was extradited from Austria following an unsuccessful asylum application. In June, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The trial took place behind closed doors, and Shovalizoda's relatives learned about the decision by phone from the investigator. **93**
- The son of Said Gozi, an Islamic Renaissance Party leader, was sentenced to 23 years in prison "for treason." **94** Two of his brothers were detained on suspicion of extremism and are awaiting trial. Said Gozi was killed during a prison riot in 2019.
- In 2020, the Rahmon regime increased pressure on members of informal religious groups. The trial of 116 Tajik citizens, accused of membership in the Muslim Brotherhood, began in Dushanbe in July but was postponed due to the pandemic. **95** Another 72 people were wanted on the same charge. The well-

known mullah Khayriddin Abdullo, who advocated for labor migrants in Russia, was arrested in January upon arrival in Dushanbe and spent more than eight months in detention. ⁹⁶ In November, the leader of the Tajik Salafia movement was arrested. ⁹⁷

- The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted prisoners in Tajikistan. In March 2020, authorities introduced a complete ban on all visits and meetings in prisons, which remained in effect at year's end. Additionally, authorities denied rumors of coronavirus infections among prisoners. ⁹⁸
- Tajikistan continued to ignore requests and decisions by the international community to review dissident cases. As part of the 12th Human Rights Dialogue between Tajikistan and the European Union, the EU called for the release of the attorney Buzurgmehr Yorov, whose conviction in 2015 was described by the United Nations as politically motivated. ⁹⁹ Yorov continues to remain in a Tajik prison. In March, he was awarded the prestigious Homo Homini international prize for human rights work. ¹⁰⁰ The government refuses to reevaluate his case.

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.

1.00
/7.00

- Corruption in Tajikistan is evident in all spheres of the economy and society. Several law enforcement agencies and security services, including the specialized agency for state financial control and the fight against corruption, are tasked with tackling corruption. However, their work has not brought significant results.
- According to official statistics, in the first half of 2020, authorities identified more than 1,200 cases of corruption. ¹⁰¹ Most of these were committed by local officials in regions and districts and by employees of Tajik state banks. It is common for authorities to punish low-level corruption in an effort to distract from pervasive high-profile corruption. Usually, this statistic is publicized in a manner that suggests the regime is actively fighting corruption.
- In November, the former mayor of Kulob, Bahrom Inoyatzoda, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for extorting a bribe. ¹⁰² Inoyatzoda is the most-senior official in Tajikistan to be officially accused of corruption in the past decade. Meanwhile, local media pointed to the fact that Inoyatzoda had a promising career and good

track record in state service before accusing Beg Sabur, head of the government Communication Service, of tax evasion and failing to adhere to construction regulations in 2019. ¹⁰³ Additionally, Sabur's son is married to a daughter of President Rahmon.

- In August, in an effort to prevent fraud, amendments were made to the law on banking. Accordingly, close relatives may not work directly under each other's supervision. The National Bank of Tajikistan, which initiated the changes, explained that the amendments were needed to fight corruption and nepotism in the banking system. ¹⁰⁴ Remarkably, the norm prohibiting close relatives from working in direct subordination to each other in state institutions is also enshrined in Article 27 of the Labor Code of Tajikistan, ¹⁰⁵ and Article 9 of the law on anticorruption. ¹⁰⁶ However, no state organization has publicly noted the fact that President Rahmon is the direct supervisor of his daughter Ozoda Rahmon, who manages the presidential administration.
- In April, the Faroz company, owned by Rahmon's daughter Rukhshona and her husband, Shamsullo Sohibov, received five hectares of land in Dushanbe from the state for only \$67,000 to build a market. ¹⁰⁷ The land was allocated a few days before the official liquidation of the company. ¹⁰⁸ The Faroz company had previously been the focus of a number of investigations by independent media, and it is likely that the owners decided to get rid of the name and restructure the company. The Nashriyoti Muosir printing house, previously part of Faroz, later received a government order for the publication of 1,600,000 copies of the book *Tajiks* for more than \$13.5 million. President Rahmon justified the purchase in a call for increased national patriotism and instructed that a copy of the book be donated to every family in Tajikistan. In a tender run by a state procurement agency headed by Sokhibov's brother, another company's offer that was twice as cheap was rejected without explanation. During 2020, the same printing house submitted three more applications to participate in state tenders and won all three. ¹⁰⁹
- The U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, in its statement on investment in the country, noted that despite the existence of anticorruption legislation, application and enforcement of these laws is dependent on political motivation. ¹¹⁰
- Tajik authorities do not provide security guarantees and protection for NGOs focused on fighting corruption. Civil society representatives have very limited access to public procurement materials and may not participate in the public expenditure control process.

Footnotes

- 1 Tajikistan Family Perks, OCCRP Tajikistan and Olga Gein, 27.12.2019 <https://www.occrp.org/en/moneybymarriage/family-perks>
- 2 В Таджикистане вступил в силу закон о противодействии экстремизму [Law on Countering Extremism came into force in Tajikistan], Radio Ozodi, 09.01.2020 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30368862.html>
- 3 COVID-19: New Tajik legislation will heavily penalise anyone sharing inaccurate information, IFEX, 13.06.2020 <https://ifex.org/covid-19-new-tajik-legislation-will-heavily-penalise-a...>
- 4 . Repression and Persecution Under Tajikistan's Authoritarian Regime, Human Rights Foundation, 27.04.2020 https://hrf.org/press_posts/repression-and-persecution-under-tajikistan...
- 5 Суд Гиссара вынес решение об аресте замглавы социал-демократов Таджикистана [Hissar court decreed to arrest the deputy head of the Social Democrats of Tajikistan], Asia-Plus, 08.12.2020 <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20201208/sud-gissar...>

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8/100 Not Free

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