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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Tajikistan

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 25

Political Environment: 28

Economic Environment: 25

Total Score: 78

Survey Edition	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Score, Status	74,NF	76,NF	76,NF	77,NF	78,NF

- Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution, but the media situation remained poor in 2009 amid the continuing marginalization of independent journalism under President Emomali Rahmon. Libel and criticism of the president are criminal offenses that carry prison terms of up to five years. Government authorities selectively implement laws meant to protect journalists, such as a ban on censorship.
- In October 2009, a Dushanbe court imposed a judgment of nearly US\$40,000 on the *Paikon* weekly newspaper after it published an open letter from businesspeople criticizing an import-export policy. *Paikon* lost an appeal of the ruling in December.
- There is no freedom of information legislation, and steps have been taken to restrict journalists' access to official information. In November 2009, the government began charging reporters 25 somoni (US\$4.50) for each page of printed text they received from state institutions.
- In a positive development, the Community Council for Mass Media, comprised of independent and state representatives, was established in November. The council's goal is to improve journalism and media ethics, but some journalists expressed doubts about the body's efficacy.
- Violence against journalists has declined in recent years, but journalists who criticized authorities or exposed government corruption continued to report threats and intimidation. In January 2009, the editor in chief of the newspaper *Pazhvok* was assaulted in southern Tajikistan by two men, one of whom identified himself as an Interior Ministry officer.
- Widespread poverty and the concentration of wealth in the hands of political leaders and their associates hamper the emergence of genuinely independent media. Although there were over 200 registered newspapers, many of them privately owned, none published daily, and the broadcast sector was dominated

by state-controlled national television stations that praised Rahmon and denied coverage to independent or opposition points of view. The cause of independent journalism lacks support from the public, which generally seems unconcerned with freedom of the press or expression.

- Internet penetration is low in Tajikistan – probably under 10 percent – and the authorities have imposed restrictions on access. The government began blocking critical websites in 2006, and in 2007 it extended criminal libel and defamation laws to internet publications. In April 2009, Rahmon accused the "enemies" of Tajikistan of seeking to undermine his rule via the internet and called on citizens to unite in the face of this danger. Nonetheless, a number of blogs and opinion sites became more active during the year.

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