



Title Freedom of the Press 2010 - Uzbekistan

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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Uzbekistan

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 29

Political Environment: 37

Economic Environment: 26

Total Score: 92

Survey Edition 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

Total Score, Status 85,NF 90,NF 91,NF 92,NF 93,NF

- The government of President Islam Karimov showed no respect for nominal constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press in 2009. Criticism of the president is a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.
- Libel is also criminal offense, but very few journalists have been prosecuted under this law, as most independent reporters have either fled the country or censor themselves. In February 2009, independent journalist Kushodbek Usmon was sentenced to six months in prison for defamation in an article criticizing local police forces. Usmon was released in July and told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) that he had been tortured in prison. In December, the Uzbek Communication and Information Agency initiated a defamation case against photographer Umida Akhmedova for allegedly damaging the country's image through a photo album and documentaries depicting Uzbek villages for a project supported by the Swiss embassy in Tashkent. The case was pending at year's end.
- The government used aggressive harassment and intimidation to influence the media. In February 2009, two journalists – editor Khamza Dzhumayev of the science magazine *Irmok* and reporter Shavkat Alimov of the newspaper *Etti Iklim* – who were accused of belonging to the banned Nur religious movement received long prison sentences for "producing and distributing material whose content threatened public order and security" and "participating in a banned religious, extremist, separatist and fundamentalist organization." In June, independent journalist Dilmurod Sayid received a 12.5-year prison term for extortion and bribery after he published articles on local corruption.
- According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, seven journalists were behind bars in Uzbekistan for political reasons in 2009, including Dzhamsheed Karimov, who has been held in a psychiatric hospital since 2006. The country remained the most notorious in the region for detaining journalists in connection with their work. Another of the seven was Salijon Abdurahmanov, who had reported on the region of Karakalpakstan. The Karakalpak people relied heavily on the Aral Sea, which has been mismanaged and largely depleted in an

unprecedented environmental disaster that the Uzbek government actively seeks to downplay.

- Widespread self-censorship is a serious problem, as journalists fear reprisal in the form of harassment, loss of employment, or jail time.
- The 2007 murder of ethnic Uzbek journalist Alisher Saipov in Kyrgyzstan remained a taboo subject. Saipov had been critical of the Uzbek government and its human rights abuses. In 2009, a Kyrgyz investigation concluded that Uzbek agents were not involved in the reporter's death, though the details of the probe were not released.
- An estimated 1,100 media outlets operate in Uzbekistan. The government controlled most national dailies and television stations, as well as the publishing houses and printing presses that handle the majority of the country's print media. A few private printing presses produced independent publications that avoided politically sensitive topics and had a very limited circulation. Virtually all local media were linked either directly or indirectly to the state, and the National Security Service actively manipulated reports to present a carefully constructed image of the country, with occasional forays into limited criticism.
- The government does not permit the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), RFE/RL, or Voice of America to broadcast from within Uzbekistan. However, a small number of Russian tabloids and other foreign publications were available in the capital. Foreign media employees must obtain accreditation from the Foreign Ministry, and these accreditations have been revoked in recent years, forcing the journalists to leave Uzbekistan.
- The authorities muzzled the internet. Although an estimated 17 percent of the Uzbek population uses the internet, many users access the medium in institutional and public settings where state controls and the possibility of surveillance cripple their ability to obtain independent perspectives on events inside the country. Exiled Uzbek journalists were able to operate critical news sites from abroad, but the Uzbek authorities blocked access to these sites, especially if they reported on the 2005 Andijon massacre, in which government troops opened fire on a peaceful demonstration and reportedly killed hundreds of people. Online discussion of Saipov's murder was also restricted. The websites of RFE/RL, the BBC's Uzbek service, and regional news outlets like Ferghana.ru and EurasiaNet were actively blocked by the government during the year.

Topics: Freedom of information, Freedom of expression,

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