



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2022

Tajikistan

NOT FREE

8
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	0/40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	8/60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

8/100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



TOP

Overview

The authoritarian regime of President Emomali Rahmon, who has ruled since 1992, severely restricts political rights and civil liberties. The political opposition and independent media have been devastated by a sustained campaign of repression, and the government exerts tight control over religious expression and activity. Wealth and authority are concentrated in the hands of Rahmon and his family.

Key Developments in 2021

- Tajikistani authorities attempted to close the border with Afghanistan after its elected government fell in August but allowed refugees to cross in small numbers. Some 15,000 refugees reportedly resided within Tajikistan as of October.
- Tajikistani and Kyrgyzstani forces fought along the border over two days in April before a cease-fire was declared. Tajikistani authorities reported 19 deaths and 87 injuries from the fighting.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

The president is chief of state and is elected for up to two seven-year terms under current rules, but constitutional amendments ratified in 2016 removed term limits for President Rahmon, who holds the official status of “leader of the nation.”

A presidential election due in November 2020 was held in October. Rahmon of the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) won a fifth term with 90.7 percent of the vote according to the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums (CCER). Four candidates from progovernment parties won a combined 7.8 percent, while the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) boycotted the contest.

TOP

The European Council called the election orderly but noted that previous Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) recommendations on the media and political environment remained unfulfilled. While independent media outlets were largely unable to observe polling stations, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported incidents of apparent ballot stuffing and of voters submitting ballots on behalf of family members.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

The bicameral Supreme Assembly is composed of an upper house, the National Assembly, and a lower house, the Assembly of Representatives. The National Assembly comprises 25 members chosen by local assemblies and 8 appointed by the president; former presidents are also entitled to a seat. The 63-member Assembly of Representatives is popularly elected through a mixed system of 41 single-member constituencies and 22 proportional-representation seats. Supreme Assembly members serve five-year terms.

In the March 2020 legislative elections, the PDPT won 47 lower-house seats, while progovernment parties divided the remainder. The SDPT did not exceed the 5 percent threshold for representation according to the CCER. OSCE monitors reported that the elections did not meet democratic standards. Media outlet Asia-Plus reported that officials offered multiple ballots to reporters claiming to represent relatives.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

0 / 4

The CCER is subservient to the government and enforces electoral laws in an inconsistent and nontransparent manner. Despite reforms ahead of the 2015 elections, constituencies vary considerably in population, undermining equal suffrage.

TOP

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

0 / 4

The government consistently marginalizes independent or opposition parties, which are excluded from the political process. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)—which had been the country’s most significant opposition group—lost its legal registration and was declared a terrorist organization in 2015. The 2016 constitutional amendments banned faith-based parties, effectively preventing the IRPT from reforming. The National Alliance of Tajikistan, a Europe-based refugee opposition coalition, was declared a terrorist organization in 2019.

The authorities continued to harass and arrest current and former IRPT members, their families, and other opponents during 2021. In January, SDPT official Mahmurod Odinaev received a 14-year prison term on hooliganism and extremism charges. His son, Shaikhmuslihiddin Rizoiev, was convicted of hooliganism and attempted rape and received a six-year term in February. In June, former IRPT member Mirzo Hojimuhammad was sentenced to five years in prison for his membership, though his family stated he had given up political activism years before.

Tajikistani activists are targeted on a transnational basis; at least 15 have disappeared while living in Russia or have been extradited from there since 2015. Relatives of deceased or imprisoned opposition figures are also targeted at home and abroad. In August 2021, authorities in Russia arrested Barakatullo Ghoziev at Dushanbe’s airport; his father, Said Qyomiddin Ghozi, was a popular imam and opposition figure who was kidnapped from Russia in 2017 and died in a prison riot in 2019. Ghoziev faces **TOP** extradition to Tajikistan and a possible 25-year prison term on charges of high treason and religious hatred.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 / 4

Tajikistan has no record of peaceful transfers of power between rival parties. Rahmon first became chief executive in 1992, during the country's 1992–97 civil war, and has held the presidency since the office's creation in 1994. Under 2016 constitutional revisions, he is entitled to run for reelection indefinitely; can overrule cabinet decisions even after leaving office; and has set up his son, Rustam Emomali, to succeed him. Emomali was named National Assembly chairman that year, placing him second in the presidential line of succession.

Years of unrelenting repression of independent political activity have left opposition parties unable to compete in elections. Many IRPT members and their relatives were beaten, harassed, and imprisoned before the 2015 elections, with some reportedly tortured in custody or killed in prison.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

0 / 4

Political affairs in Tajikistan are controlled almost exclusively by Rahmon and his extended family, leaving citizens with few avenues to participate in the political process. Relatives of Rahmon hold numerous public positions and control key sectors of the private economy.

Dushanbe increasingly relies on the Chinese government for external security. In October 2021, RFE/RL reported on the existence of a Chinese-operated base near the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. Later that month, RFE/RL reported that Dushar offered Beijing full ownership of that base while authorizing the construction of another Chinese-operated border facility.

TOP

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious,

gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

0 / 4

No segment of the population enjoys full political rights or electoral opportunities in practice. The regime, which seeks to suppress any genuine dissent, does not permit women, minorities, or religious groups to organize independently to advance their political interests. Women remain underrepresented as voters and as elected politicians.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

President Rahmon, who is not freely elected, and his inner circle are virtually unopposed in determining and implementing policy and have strengthened their grip on power. The PDPT-controlled legislature does not offer a meaningful check on the executive's expansive constitutional authority. Officials from Rahmon's native Kulob District dominate the government.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

0 / 4

Patronage networks and regional affiliations are central to political life. Corruption is pervasive and anticorruption legislation is routinely ignored. Major irregularities have been reported at the National Bank of Tajikistan and the country's largest industrial firm, the state-owned Tajik Aluminum Company.

C3 0-4 pts

TOP

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0 / 4

Government decision-making and budgetary processes lack transparency, and public officials are not required to disclose financial information. Crackdowns on the media, the opposition, and civil society have further reduced independent scrutiny of state operations. In recent years, the government has concluded extensive infrastructure and resource-extraction agreements with Beijing and Chinese companies, with little consultation or transparency.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	0 / 4
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The government controls most printing presses, newsprint supplies, and broadcasting facilities, and denies independent media access to these resources. The state shuts out independent outlets and encourages self-censorship. Independent journalists face harassment and intimidation. Civil libel charges have been used to cripple outlets that criticize the government. Authorities routinely block critical websites, news portals, and social media platforms, while using periodic wholesale blackouts of internet and messaging services to suppress criticism.

In January 2021, authorities ordered bloggers to register with tax authorities, a demand that observers noted could stifle the few remaining independent voices. In May, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that the Television and Radio Committee (KTR) was imposing “draconian” conditions on broadcast license renewals; the KTR required broadcasters to share their proposed output, increased the cost of licenses, and demanded 1 percent of broadcasters’ profits.

TOP

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief	0 / 4
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in public and private?	
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The government imposes severe restrictions on religious freedom, in part by limiting religious activities to state-approved venues and registered organizations. Authorities continue to prosecute individuals for alleged membership in banned religious organizations, including Christian and Muslim groups. Minors are generally barred from attending religious services in mosques, as are women in most cases.

Laws to discourage religious clothing (like the hijab) as well as an unofficial ban on beards for men are arbitrarily enforced. A government-published “guidebook” details recommended dress for women that excludes the hijab and similar garments in favor of “traditional” or “national” alternatives. The government has pressured students to adhere to these dress codes, establishing roadblocks in some areas to search for violators.

In April 2021, Abdulhaq Obidov, a Dushanbe imam, was arrested on suspicion of adhering to Salafism, which is banned in Tajikistan. Obidov, who had eulogized a fellow cleric as “one of the great leaders of the country” before his arrest, was released in June but was stripped of his duties.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	O / 4
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The government exerts significant political pressure on universities and academic personnel. In recent years, international scholars have noted the self-exile of Tajikistani academics who faced harassment and surveillance from security services, scrutiny of scholars who cooperate with foreign colleagues, and pressures to self-censor. Opportunities to study abroad, especially for religious education, are tightly restricted.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	TOP 1 / 4
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Restrictive laws and government surveillance serve as deterrents to open discussion of sensitive topics, including criticism of the country's leadership. A 2017 law allows authorities to monitor citizens' online behavior and prescribes fines and prison sentences for those who visit "undesirable websites," among other provisions. An antiextremism law amended in 2020 allows the government to block websites without a court order. The dissemination of COVID-19-related news deemed false was also criminalized in 2020.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0/4

The government strictly limits freedom of assembly. Local government approval is required to hold demonstrations but is rarely granted.

In November 2021, protesters nevertheless rallied in Khorog, the capital of the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan, after police killed local resident Gulbidin Ziyobekov; officials claimed that Ziyobekov fired on police before he was killed. Two protesters died when security officers fired into a crowd of demonstrators. The protests ended after several days, with officials vowing to investigate Ziyobekov's death. In December, however, a state television program portrayed Ziyobekov as a vigilante. An internet blackout in the region persisted for weeks.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

1/4

TOP

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Justice Ministry and are vulnerable to closure for minor technical violations. NGOs must disclose funding from foreign sources. Foreign funds must be logged in a state registry before organizations can access them, and the government oversees operations supported

by those funds. Under legislation implemented in 2019, NGOs must maintain their own websites and publish reports that comply with vaguely worded financial reporting to prove they have no “terrorist financing” or “money laundering” links.

In March 2021, human rights defender Izzat Amon was stripped of his Russian citizenship and deported to Tajikistan at Dushanbe’s request. In October, Amon was convicted of fraud and received a nine-year prison term.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

1/4

Citizens have the legal right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively, but these rights and the right to strike are effectively undermined by restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association. There are no laws against antiunion discrimination by employers, and the country’s trade union federation is government-controlled.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

0/4

The judiciary lacks independence. Many judges are poorly trained and inexperienced, and bribery is widespread. The 2016 constitutional amendments abolished the Council of Justice, transferring the authority for most judicial nomination and oversight functions to the Supreme Court. However, these powers remain under executive control in practice. The courts’ opaque and biased adjudication of cases against opposition figures and other dissidents, particularly since 2015, has demonstrated their subordination to the regime.

TOP

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

0/4

Arbitrary arrests and detentions are common, as is corruption among law enforcement agencies. Defendants are often denied timely access to an attorney, and politically fraught trials are frequently closed to the public. Nearly all defendants are found guilty.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0 / 4

Civilians are subject to physical abuse by security forces and have no meaningful recourse against such abuse. Detainees are reportedly beaten in custody to extract confessions. In June 2021, three police officers were convicted of torturing an individual who confessed to murder in 2017 and was later released after the actual offender was found.

Tajikistani and Kyrgyzstani forces engaged in fighting during 2021. Forces from both countries clashed along the border over two days in April before a cease-fire was declared; Tajikistani authorities reported 19 deaths and 87 injuries from the fighting. Other officers and soldiers were killed along the border in the following months.

Overcrowding and disease contribute to life-threatening conditions in prisons.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

1 / 4

Women face bias and disparate treatment in the workplace. LGBT+ people face discrimination and abuse by security forces. There is no legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Dushanbe attempted to seal the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border after the elected Afghan government fell in August 2021, though women and children entered in small numbers. In mid-October, a government official reported that 15,000 refugees were present in Tajikistan.

TOP

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1 / 4

Most citizens can travel domestically but must register their permanent residence with local authorities. Students interested in studying Islamic theology are forbidden from seeking education abroad. Some areas, particularly Gorno-Badakhshan and other areas bordering Afghanistan, feature a heavier security presence, which hampers travel and provides opportunities for extortion and other abuses.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1 / 4

By law, all land belongs to the state. Corruption and regulatory dysfunction affect enterprises of varying sizes. The president's extended family and others from Kulob District maintain extensive business interests and dominate key economic sectors, impeding business activity by those without such connections.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1 / 4

Although forced marriage and polygamy are legally prohibited, marriages arranged by parents and religious marriages that allow polygamy are both common in practice. Because of local interpretations of Sharia (Islamic law), women are often unable to

exercise their rights to divorce. Domestic violence is widespread, but cases are underreported and seldom investigated adequately.

Women reportedly face societal pressure to wear headscarves. Meanwhile, in addition to restricting hijabs for women and beards for men, the government interferes more broadly in matters of personal appearance. A 2018 guidebook outlined acceptable and unacceptable styles of dress for women, barring clothing that could be deemed immodest or “foreign” in origin.

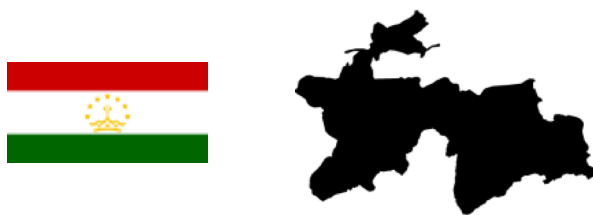
G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

1 / 4

Safeguards against forms of labor exploitation and hazardous working conditions are poorly enforced. Economic conditions have compelled citizens to seek work abroad in large numbers; these migrant workers are at risk of exploitation by human traffickers.

According to the US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons 2021* report, authorities work to combat human trafficking by prosecuting traffickers and supporting survivors via a state-run shelter, among other activities. However, government officials suspected of involvement in trafficking are not investigated.



On Tajikistan

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

8/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

2021

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ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-5101

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info@freedomhouse.org

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press@freedomhouse.org

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