

# Uzbekistan

by Bruce Pannier

*Capital:* Tashkent  
*Population:* 27.3 million  
*GNI/capita:* US\$2,660

Source: The data above was provided by The World Bank, *World Bank Indicators 2010*.

## Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

|                                     | 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Electoral Process                   | 6.50      | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Civil Society                       | 6.50      | 6.50 | 6.75 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Independent Media                   | 6.50      | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Governance*                         | 6.25      | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.25 | 6.25 | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  |
| National Democratic Governance      | n/a       | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | 6.50 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Local Democratic Governance         | n/a       | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | 6.25 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 |
| Judicial Framework and Independence | 6.50      | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.25 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Corruption                          | 6.00      | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.75 |
| Democracy Score                     | 6.38      | 6.42 | 6.46 | 6.46 | 6.46 | 6.43 | 6.82 | 6.82 | 6.86 | 6.89 | 6.93 |

\* Starting with the 2005 edition, Freedom House introduced separate analysis and ratings for national democratic governance and local democratic governance to provide readers with more detailed and nuanced analysis of these two important subjects.

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In marking Uzbekistan's 18 years of independence on September 1, 2009, Uzbek President Islam Karimov stated that the country would not turn from its path toward democracy. However, during this period, Uzbekistan's democratic growth has been difficult for many to discern, and despite President Karimov's words, there was little to indicate any progress toward democratic or human rights reform in 2009. As he has done since Uzbekistan became independent, President Karimov maintained his tight grip on the country through state control over domestic media and by neutralizing potential threats to the regime with efficient security services.

Opposition parties remain locked out of Uzbekistan's political arena, and Islamic-based opposition groups, some violent, continue to be the targets of security operations. At least one of the latter staged a small attack in the restive eastern part of the country in May 2009. Members of banned Islamic groups, journalists, and rights activists also continued to appear in Uzbekistan's courts to receive the obligatory punishment meted out to dissidents. As these individuals underwent jail sentences or fines, they were joined by fallen officials apprehended for corrupt practices. Meanwhile, those considered to be the primary beneficiaries of corruption continued to prosper.

Many Western nations that previously condemned Uzbekistan for these practices were mute in their criticism in 2009. Uzbekistan took on a new importance as a transit route for supplies to United States-led coalition operations in Afghanistan after militants targeted supply routes through Pakistan. Also, some European nations seeking energy resources in the Caspian region were hopeful that Uzbekistan might join natural gas projects that could break Russia's near monopoly on energy exports from Central Asia.

Symbolic of this new arrangement was a European Union decision in October not to renew sanctions on the sale of weapons to Uzbekistan. These were imposed after the Uzbek government ordered use of deadly force to restore order in the eastern city of Andijan in May 2005. Uzbek authorities called the event a coup attempt, but local and international rights groups said it was a massacre of mainly peaceful protesters, perhaps as many as a thousand.

This new, tacit understanding between the Uzbek government and the West, coupled with strong Chinese investment in Uzbek energy and mining projects, gave President Karimov and his government augmented freedom to run Uzbekistan as they wished. The Uzbek government lauded its economic policies during 2009, claiming that the wisdom of the country's leadership protected Uzbekistan from the economic crisis that encompassed so much of the world. The obedient domestic media consistently reminded the Uzbek public how fortunate they were to have such leadership in difficult economic times and with an increasing number of security threats emerging in Central Asia. President Karimov, who turned 71 in January 2009, seemed well poised to stay in power until his death.

**National Democratic Governance.** Not only does President Karimov rule Uzbekistan as he wishes, but the current reluctance of Western nations to raise rights issues with the Uzbek government takes away a key lever in moderating the Uzbek regime's behavior. Without any incentive to make effective democratic changes, it is unsurprising that Uzbek authorities have not altered policies on governing the country. *The executive branch continued to dominate the Uzbek government in 2009 with no movement to give citizens any say in how the country was governed. Uzbekistan's national democratic governance rating remains at 7.00.*

**Electoral Process.** Uzbekistan's December parliamentary elections further demonstrated the government's disinterest in reforming the electoral system or introducing the most basic features of a competitive election, such as a legitimate opposition party. Only the four, registered, pro-presidential parties participated in the poll, which explicitly excluded the participation of independent candidates or individuals sponsored by social or "initiative" groups. *Given the history of elections in Uzbekistan, expectations for the parliamentary poll in December were low and again confirmed by the authorities thus Uzbekistan's electoral process rating remains at 7.00.*

**Civil Society.** Uzbek authorities have continued harassing rights activists, members of suspect Islamic groups, and nontraditional (neither state-approved Islam nor Russian Orthodox) religions. As has been true throughout the country's 18 years of independence, there are no groups of any size that can publicly call for changes to the system or even offer alternative points of view to government policy without risking government reprisals. *Since it is only possible for state-supported or sanctioned groups—be they political, social, or religious—to exist in Uzbekistan, the country's civil society rating remains at 7.00.*

**Independent Media.** There are no longer any media outlets that could be considered independent in Uzbekistan, though a small number of journalists continue to work with foreign-based media agencies, reporting on events not covered by state media. Uzbek authorities, while boasting of increased Internet use in the country, worked to block access to Web sites that carried critical views of the government or covered stories the state considered too sensitive to disseminate to the population. *Independent media does not exist in Uzbekistan and in 2009 authorities ensured that only sanctioned information with flattering views of the state reach the public. The country's independent media rating remains at 7.00.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** Provincial, district, city, and village officials are appointed based on perceptions of loyalty to the state and are therefore expected to carry out the wishes of President Karimov on local levels. But there is evidence in recent years that these local officials govern their territory as their own personal fiefdoms while doing all possible to publicly exhibit loyalty to the regime and faithful execution of the tasks assigned by the central authorities. *Local officials serve the state, not their constituencies, and too often some of these officials take advantage of*

*their positions to promote their personal interests, often breaking the laws of the country and preying on local residents. Thus, Uzbekistan's local democratic governance rating remains at 6.75.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** Uzbekistan's judicial branch is set up to punish perceived enemies of the state. These range from independent journalists and rights activists to members of nontraditional religions and suspect Islamic groups. Courts ignored claims of torture being used to extract confessions and witnesses recanting testimonies that were influential in establishing guilt, with no effort in 2009 to alter this situation. Virtually everyone arrested and charged was found guilty and received a fine or jail sentence when in the state's interest. *The judiciary continues to be a tool of the executive branch of government, thus, Uzbekistan's judicial framework and independence rating remains at 7.00.*

**Corruption.** In international surveys on corruption, Uzbekistan ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Uzbek state media rarely report the misdeeds of top officials, but there is increasing information about officials from the governor-level down being arrested for illegal activities. In 2009, orders from authorities to greatly curtail checks on businesses in Uzbekistan opened the door to further corrupt practices. *Mounting evidence of abuses and excesses by provincial officials and police show the country is headed in the wrong direction in the fight against corruption; thus Uzbekistan's corruption rating drops from 6.50 to 6.75.*

**Outlook for 2010.** Given the status of international energy projects and United States-led operations in Afghanistan, the United States and Europe—for the moment—need Uzbekistan more than Uzbekistan needs them. Additionally, Uzbekistan retains its strong economic ties with China as a hedge against another sudden disruption of ties with Western partners as occurred over the Andijan violence. The economy will be Uzbekistan's biggest test as more of the country's migrant laborers return from Russia and other places where there is no longer work. The government promised to create one million jobs in 2009, with little demonstrable success. How much the system can bear as hundreds of thousands of migrant laborers return is a looming question. Uzbek security forces will continue hunting perceived enemies of the state, and international and local rights groups say these activities flout due process of law. Uzbekistan's banned Islamic groups can count on support from the Taliban and al-Qaeda in neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan. As always there is the issue of the president's health, whose technically unconstitutional third term in office ends in 2014. President Karimov is the force that binds Uzbekistan together, and his departure from the political scene could spark serious instability in the country that could spread throughout Central Asia. Some speculate President Karimov's eldest daughter, Gulnara, could replace him, but it would be a risky decision in Uzbekistan's highly patriarchal society.

# MAIN REPORT

## National Democratic Governance

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| n/a       | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | 6.50 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |

President Islam Karimov maintains an unchallengeable grip on power in Uzbekistan; the executive branch dominates the political system, with the legislative and judicial branches simply formalizing the policies of the executive. The ability of President Karimov to run in 2007 for an unconstitutional third term without any state body or political organization even mentioning this violation indicates the extent of his control over the system.

Uzbek authorities claim that the country has weathered the global economic crisis better than most, which they credit to President Karimov's policies, a point that was greatly publicized by state media during 2009. International financial organizations at least partially agreed with this assessment. How much this raised his credibility in the eyes of the Uzbek public is debatable, but media portrayals of the president's successful economic and social programs reinforced President Karimov's power and authority. Outside sources of information are difficult to come by, and the information that state media provided Uzbek citizens in 2009 aimed at promoting the president's wisdom in governing. In an August report by the government-funded agency *Izhtimoi Fikr* (Social Opinion), "the overwhelming majority of those surveyed (90.8 percent) said that they were satisfied with economic growth rates...and 87.7 percent said they were happy with the social security for the population."<sup>1</sup>

Though international organizations have criticized the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, the same *Izhtimoi Fikr* survey claimed that "86.4 percent of respondents were satisfied with the observance of human rights and freedoms in the country." Meanwhile, state media continued to report on the fate of enemies of the state, a reminder that visible expressions of dissatisfaction with the government bring severe consequences. The government also enlisted aid from popular culture figures, including actors and singers who have entered the state service and participate in state propaganda campaigns.

In 2005, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan after the violent crackdown in Andijan with the understanding that lifting the sanctions depended on Uzbekistan allowing an independent investigation of the events and the Uzbek government demonstrating greater respect for human rights. Uzbek authorities did release some independent journalists and rights activists from jail and in November 2009, under a government amnesty, released the founder of the opposition Sunshine Coalition, Sanjar Umarov. The EU called these releases progress and eased sanctions, though many rights groups pointed out that the

individuals being released should never have been incarcerated and that other independent journalists and rights activists were later arrested to fill the recently vacated jail cells.

At the September EU-Uzbek meeting in Brussels, the EU released a statement urging Uzbek authorities to take further steps in improving the situation concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. In response, Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov reportedly turned the tables on the committee and questioned the treatment of minority groups in Europe while deflecting questions about torture in Uzbekistan.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Khan predicted during a visit in June that Uzbekistan would have a high rate of expansion (7 percent economic growth), especially in comparison to many other countries that are facing economic contraction or sluggish growth during the global economic crisis. The Uzbek government used such comments in local media as evidence of the prudence of state policies. Uzbekistan has opened the door somewhat to companies from Western nations to participate in large projects, including the development of oil and gas fields. This move aims at filling gaps left by the departure of Russian companies that rushed into Uzbekistan following Western criticism of the Andijan crackdown.

Electoral Process

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50      | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |

Uzbekistan held elections to the Oliy Majlis, the lower house of parliament, on December 27, 2009. Though 508 candidates participated, all were from the country’s four registered political parties. Legislation passed in late 2008 excludes candidates from “initiative” groups or individual/independent candidates from running in elections. Mavjuda Rajabova, head of the Senate Committee for Legislation, commented on an Uzbek television program that there was no longer a need for independent groups of voters since there are political parties and “because the majority of the population has been involved in the parties’ activities.”<sup>2</sup>

Uzbekistan’s four registered political parties are Adolat, Milli Tiklanish, People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU—formerly the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU). There is also the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, created in August 2008, for which 15 seats in the lower house of parliament are allotted. The policies of the four parties and the movement are all pro-presidential. President Karimov himself has criticized the political parties on occasion for being so similar as to be nearly indistinguishable. This lack of true competition has lead to apathy and passivity, certainly on the part of voters.

Perhaps in response to this growing attitude, the four parties mildly criticized each other ahead of the December election. The PDPU, in its newspaper *Uzbekistan*

*Ovozi*, wrote, “paying closer attention to claims of the LDPU’s representatives, one finds out that cases of overestimating themselves, as well as cases saying groundless and illogical words about others are becoming habitual.”<sup>3</sup> Muhammadilhom Yoldashev from the LDPU’s political council fired back on television that the PDPU was “raising the issue of citizens’ social protection” as a priority, but in fact “we don’t see this party is acting to implement any specific social projects.”<sup>4</sup>

Before the December election, Uzbek authorities aired television programs aimed at spreading propaganda to the country’s electorate. *Saylov–Demokratiya Kozgusi* (Elections—a Reflection of Democracy), airing on the country’s first channel, concerned the basic mechanics of an election: setting up polling stations, the independence of election commissions, and explaining that “one deputy from each electoral district is elected to the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan.”<sup>5</sup> The program carried the interesting comment by Kochkor Togayev, Deputy Head of the Central Election Commission (CEC), that Uzbekistan’s electoral legislation was better than some countries because, “If a person does not take part in the election, he will not be prosecuted.”

According to Uzbek electoral officials, concerns about voter apathy were unfounded. Uzbekistan’s CEC reported an official voter turnout at 87.8 percent, but in a departure from the norm, runoff elections were needed. Komila Sodikova, a member of the LDPU from Andijan province, expressed a desire to run as one of the party’s candidates but the regional LDPU chairman rejected her candidacy. The Uzbek population has no say in selecting their local officials as all governors, district chiefs, mayors, and village heads are appointed.

#### Civil Society

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50      | 6.50 | 6.75 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |

Uzbekistan’s constitution guarantees citizens the right to form and register social and religious groups and conduct their activities. Authorities interpret this to mean that groups and organizations conform to state policies or represent no challenge to the regime. In fact, groups that promote a message different from that of the state have been denied registration.

The U.S. State Department’s annual report on human rights released in February 2009 noted that “Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state” where “citizens did not have the right in practice to change their government through peaceful and democratic means.”<sup>6</sup> The report further stated that “human rights activists and journalists who criticized the government were subject to harassment, arbitrary arrest, politically motivated prosecution, forced psychiatric treatment, and physical attack.” The report did, however, credit Uzbekistan’s government with starting efforts to solve human rights problems, including the rights of defendants and use of child labor in the cotton industry.

On October 27, when the EU officially lifted the last of the sanctions it placed on Uzbekistan for the Andijan violence in 2005, EU ministers said they were “seriously concerned about the human rights situation” but were removing the sanctions on Uzbekistan “to encourage the government to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and human rights.”

The EU decision drew sharp criticism from international rights groups, including the Russian organization Memorial. Human Rights Watch called the EU decision “an unconscionable abdication of responsibility toward Uzbek victims of abuse.”<sup>77</sup> The London newspaper the *Guardian* wrote, “Never mind that any Uzbek with the audacity to oppose Karimov is liable to be tortured. Never mind that the poet Yusuf Juma is one of many human rights activists to have been jailed for daring to criticize the president. Never mind that Evangelical Christians and Muslims belonging to mosques outside state control are denied the freedom to worship. Uzbekistan is an ally in the war on terror and so our gutless governments in the EU regard Karimov as ‘our kind of guy.’”<sup>8</sup>

In February 2009, Amnesty International (AI) highlighted the case of Alisher Karamatov, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan who, until his April 2006 arrest, had conducted rights activities in Gulistan (Syrdarya Province). Convicted of extortion in June 2006, a charge AI called “politically motivated,” Karamatov was sentenced to nine years in jail. According to AI, prison officials “tried to force Karamatov to sign a statement confessing to a disciplinary violation that he says he did not commit.” Upon his refusal to sign, “officials ordered Karamatov, 40, to remove his hat and outer clothing and stand outside wearing only his prison uniform, a coverall made of thin fabric. The temperature was below freezing and it was snowing. After enduring the cold for three hours, Karamatov agreed to sign.”<sup>9</sup>

In another case, Farhod Muhtarov, an activist with the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, went to a Tashkent police station in July to report violations by the police but was instead arrested. Police said they had received complaints from three people who had allegedly loaned Muhtarov large sums of money and not been repaid. Two of those persons later said they were forced to file the claims under pressure from police. There were reports that Muhtarov’s wife attempted to repay the money allegedly owed to the one person who had not recanted their testimony but that the money was seized by a justice official. Meanwhile, Muhtarov was sentenced to five years in jail in October.

The government continued targeting religious groups that were either not part of the state-approved Islam or the Russian Orthodox Church. The most visible example during 2009 was the campaign against what the government claimed to be a religious movement, the Nurchilar (Nursi/Nurchu). The campaign focused on members of the Nurchi group who served as editors or writers for two periodicals, *Irmoq* (Spring) and *Yetti Iqlim* (Seven Climates). But arrests and convictions of the Nurchilar continued after the journalists were jailed and these involved supporters of the sect. At the end of August, the religious freedom monitoring organization, Forum 18, reported that separate trials in Samarkand and Khorezm had “brought to 47 the number of followers of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi

known...to have been sentenced to long prison terms under various articles of the criminal code.”<sup>10</sup>

There were fewer reports about arrests and imprisonment of Hezb-ut Tahrir members during 2009. The Islamic group, which seeks the creation of an Islamic state in Central Asia and publicly disavows the use of violence, has been a regular target of Uzbek security forces and law enforcement agencies for a decade. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people in Uzbek jails have been convicted on the basis of their membership in the group.

In 2009, the Uzbek government employed new methods to keep the country’s Muslims in line with state policy. Forum 18 stated in August that “many mosques are reportedly either being closed or stripped of their registration in rural areas.” The NGO cited a human rights defender, speaking under condition of anonymity, as saying, “The government is against establishing mosques in kishlaks (villages).”<sup>11</sup>

Uzbek newspapers and television have warned the country’s women about the influence of foreign cultures. One television program, *Tahdid* (Warning), focused on Muslim women wearing the hijab, saying, “some women wore hijab as a mask to achieve their evil intentions.”<sup>12</sup> The Imam of Tashkent, Anvar qori Tursunov, appeared regularly on the program also warning women about wearing Western fashion. Tursunov was stabbed several times in an attack in July.

The state newspaper, *Uzbekistan Ovozi*, wrote in January, “Mass culture is more dangerous than terrorism because terrorism physically kills certain people living in a certain area but mass culture is aimed at carrying out disgusting acts of completely eliminating the identities, images, and values of all nationalities and peoples of the world.”<sup>13</sup> The state newspaper *Halq So’zi* also warned of the dangers of mass culture, writing, “Movies, books, music and other ‘types’ of art, which are filled with the shameful and immoral ideas of ‘mass culture,’ are the most dangerous ideological threats.”<sup>14</sup>

Uzbek authorities pay little attention to the Russian Orthodox Church, but members of various Christian sects were fined for conducting religious studies in their homes or houses of worship, and some were detained for several days. Police also raided a Hare Krishna festival in the Samarkand area and deported a Baha’i missionary.

#### Independent Media

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50      | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |

There are more than 1,100 media outlets in Uzbekistan, but none of these could be called independent. The government has worked for more than a decade to purge the country of media that offer points of view alternative to the state media or that challenge state policies. Control over the media was relaxed briefly in the mid 1990s, and again while United States troops were based in Uzbekistan (2001–05). The result both times was the appearance of information and reports that discomfited officials. Following the Andijan violence in 2005, the government

worked to deprive foreign-based media organizations of their offices and bureaus in Uzbekistan, among them the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Deutsche Welle. Local employees were encouraged to cut their ties with such organizations, and those who did not were often detained, though always on unrelated charges.

Reporters Without Borders’ 2009 Press Freedom Index ranked Uzbekistan 160 out of 175 countries surveyed. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), there are few people in Uzbekistan who could be called “independent” journalists. Among them, Dilmurod Sayid reported on corruption in the regional government and agriculture industry, while also working with a civil society group called Ezgulik (Virtue) to defend farmers’ rights. In July, in a closed court and without an attorney, Sayid was found guilty of extortion and forgery and sentenced to over 12 years in jail. Both Reporters Without Borders and CPJ denounced the verdict as politically motivated.

In the campaign against the Nurchilar, contributors to two Islamic religious periodicals received stiff prison sentences for allegedly distributing information on the Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. Reporters Without Borders issued a statement in March saying the “religious beliefs of these five journalists are just a pretext for preventing an independent press from existing in Uzbekistan.”<sup>15</sup> In another case, Uzbek border guards took Tajik independent journalist Shuhrat Shodiyev off a train bound for his homeland in August. The Asia Plus News Agency reported that Shodiyev, one of its writers, was detained on suspicion of smuggling a gun and banned religious literature into Uzbekistan. Though neither tried nor convicted, Shodiyev was freed by mid-September under a presidential amnesty marking Uzbekistan’s anniversary of independence.<sup>16</sup>

Uzbek authorities also continued screening access to Web sites from outside Uzbekistan. Authorities claim there are more than two million Internet users in the country, though some experts question that figure. Russian information agencies, like Ferghana.ru, claim that the Internet in Uzbekistan is under almost full control by the country’s security services, which allegedly censor and filter mass media and other Web content. Over the last few years, Uzbek Internet users were reportedly denied access to numerous Web sites of the opposition and independent mass media.

Meanwhile, President Karimov urged journalists to “cast off the remnants of the past” and “get rid of self-censorship.” He was further quoted as saying, “The most important duty of the press is to report on the foreign and domestic politics being carried out by a country taking into account a plurality of opinions and various views on events.”<sup>17</sup>

Local Democratic Governance

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| n/a       | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | 6.25 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 |

All officials in Uzbekistan—whether provincial, district, city, or village—are chosen, or at least approved, by the executive in Tashkent. Citizens cannot nominate

candidates for local posts. Instead, officials are selected based on their perceived loyalty to the regime and ability to carry out the central government's policies.

There is room for abusing this system as power trickles down. The former acting governor of Samarkand was sentenced to 15 years in jail in March 2009 after being found guilty of, among other things, creating a shadow economy and selling senior posts in the province. Former governors in the central Jizzakh province and areas of the Ferghana Valley have been sacked and later jailed for seizing control of local economies, embezzling millions of dollars, and, in the Jizzakh case, terrorizing the local population.

According to the constitution, the Uzbek population should be able to address grievances with the government through local representatives. However, since independence, regional and local officials, owing their positions to Tashkent, are more interested in fulfilling their appointed tasks than responding to their constituents' needs. There are examples of governors using their office to promote business interests, often to the detriment of local merchants, while law-abiding citizens have grown accustomed to keeping their complaints to themselves. Now, any sort of business success brings the risk of catching the attention of the governor, or more significantly, business associates of the governor. Some have blamed the change of leadership, and thus the patronage system, in the Andijan province as a primary cause of the 2005 protests.

As power disperses into district, town, and village levels, governance takes on a clan character in Uzbekistan. Since there are no elections for these posts, the officials appointed are nominated by some higher official and approved by Tashkent. A town mayor is likely to employ several or more members of his extended family, as would a village chief. At these lowest administrative levels the system may be far from representing democratic governance, but it is also, arguably, the most fair. Town and village heads generally know the families in their area and their history, and there is little reported conflict in small communities. These town and village officials also work to resolve minor problems—such as obtaining fertilizer or farm implements, materials for repairing houses and areas to keep animals—presumably more out of a feeling of kinship with their communities than as a service to the state.

#### Judicial Framework and Independence

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50      | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.25 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 7.00 |

The judicial branch of government in Uzbekistan is entirely subordinate to the executive branch and exists to formalize decisions made by the executive. One after another, alleged enemies of the state—such as members of banned Islamic groups, non-traditional religious groups, secular political opponents, independent journalists, and rights defenders—have appeared in Uzbek courts for nearly two

decades. One after another, they have been sentenced to jail or, for lesser offenses, given stiff fines. None are ever declared innocent.

Amendments to the Law on Advocacy at the start of 2009 dissolved the country’s Bar Association, replacing it with a Lawyers Chamber that is overseen by the Ministry of Justice. All Uzbek lawyers are required to be certified by the Lawyers Chamber, and lawyers such as Rukhiddin Komilov and Rustam Tulyaganov who engaged in human rights causes have lost their licenses. Lawyers in Uzbekistan are now wary of taking on cases involving journalists, rights activists, or members of religious groups.

The Uzbek NGO Ezgulik focuses on human rights violations in Uzbekistan. In June, Ezgulik reported about six young men, aged 19 to 24, who were caught stealing candy, bottles of ketchup, and an old refrigerator from a school kitchen. According to the watchdog group, the defendants showed obvious signs of mistreatment and told the court they were beaten and threatened by police. Although under Uzbek laws, evidence obtained under torture cannot be used in court, the judge proceeded with the case. Additionally, when the Nurchilar supporters were sentenced in Samarkand and Khorezm, they were reportedly brutally beaten by the secret police in pre-trial detention. When rights defender Farhad Muhtarov was convicted of fraud and sentenced to five years in jail, the judge appeared not to take into consideration that two of the original three witnesses against Muhtarov later withdrew their testimonies as being submitted under pressure by the police. The U.S. State Department’s 2008 report on human rights in Uzbekistan said there was information “of security forces torturing, beating, and otherwise mistreating detainees under interrogation to obtain confessions or incriminating information.”<sup>18</sup> Judges routinely ignore such claims by defendants.

In a February 2009 article published in the Parliament and cabinet’s newspaper, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Boritosh Mustafayev, praised the judicial system saying efforts to reform and liberalize the legal system “help protect citizens’ rights, which are guaranteed by laws, and ensure social justice and rule of law.” The article continued that the “session noted that some judges did not abide by laws” and that “disciplinary measures were taken against 106 judges in 2008 as punishment, and decisions to terminate three judges’ terms in office were adopted. Criminal charges were brought against four judges for breaching their oaths.”<sup>19</sup>

Corruption

| 1999–2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.00      | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.75 |

The government does not provide information about corruption in Uzbekistan, thus it is difficult to determine just how much of a problem corruption is in the country. The Heritage Foundation’s 2009 Index of Economic Freedom noted that Uzbekistan is perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and

that corruption is a major obstacle to foreign businesses and direct investment in Uzbekistan. The report also noted that Uzbek law does not prohibit government officials from serving as consultants, which the Heritage Foundation describes as a common method for extracting payment. Heritage ranked Uzbekistan 148 out of 179 countries surveyed. In its 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International ranked Uzbekistan 174 out of 180 countries surveyed, just above Chad, Iraq, Sudan, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Somalia.

In April 2009, the chairman of Uzbekistan's State Tax Committee, Botir Parpiyev, announced that the country's private sector would receive tax preferences, while the number of checks on business would be reduced by 30 percent and the number of businesses checked by tax bodies reduced by 62 percent.<sup>20</sup> This reduction in checks invites money laundering and other aspects of a black market economy.

The lure of money from illegal narcotics trafficking continued to snare law enforcement officials. One example in 2009 was a 27-year-old customs officer sentenced to 20 years in jail for drug trafficking. An Uzbek newspaper reported that the officer was caught with heroin in his car, and a subsequent search uncovered over one hundred kilograms of opium buried in his backyard. In March, two former police officers from the Tashkent region were discovered with stolen property and were jailed after being found guilty of abuse of office. All Central Asian states report increased narcotics seizures, which is likely indicative of a growing trafficking network rather than greater efficiency in interdiction efforts. Uzbek authorities burned more than three tons of narcotics in just two separate instances in 2009.

There are no figures for how many Uzbek law enforcement officials are involved in the narcotics trade. Yet, in response to human rights complaints against the police, the Uzbek Interior Ministry reported in April that criminal cases had been opened against 8 police officers, while 220 officers faced administrative charges, 20 were relieved of their posts, 9 were brought to account for not fulfilling their duties, 75 were reprimanded, and the cases of 66 officers were submitted to unofficial courts.<sup>21</sup>

The fight against corruption claimed a victim in 2009—Hasan Asadov, head of the Uzbek Interior Ministry's directorate for fighting terrorism and corruption—who was killed in his flat on August 9. Uzbek investigators later apprehended a group of so-called terrorists for shootings in Tashkent just before the Independence Day celebrations and blamed Asadov's murder (and Imam Tursunov's attack) on the group's members.

Nepotism is common in clan-based Central Asia, and Uzbekistan is no exception. Persons appointed to upper-level positions typically hire at least some relatives. The most obvious example of nepotism is the president's daughters, who receive a great deal of publicity. The younger of the two, Lola, is Uzbekistan's ambassador to UNESCO. Her older sister, Gulnara, was an advisor in Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry, then an advisor to the Uzbek ambassador in Russia. Since 2008, the 37-year-old Gulnara is Uzbekistan's representative to the UN office in Geneva. Reportedly one of the 10 richest people in Switzerland, Ms. Karimova is also rumored to be the owner of several nightclubs and retail stores in Uzbekistan, and

has been linked to the Swiss company Zeromax, one of the few Western companies to receive oil and gas contracts in Uzbekistan. She is also a pop culture figure, sometimes performing under the name GooGoosha. In early August, *Foreign Policy*, released a list of the worst behaved daughters of world leaders with Gulnara topping the list.<sup>22</sup> The dark side of nepotism was seen after Ms. Karimova's 2001 divorce: her ex-husband's Coca-Cola bottling factory in Uzbekistan was shut down, three of his relatives were imprisoned, and 24 were deported at gunpoint to his family's homeland of Afghanistan.

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