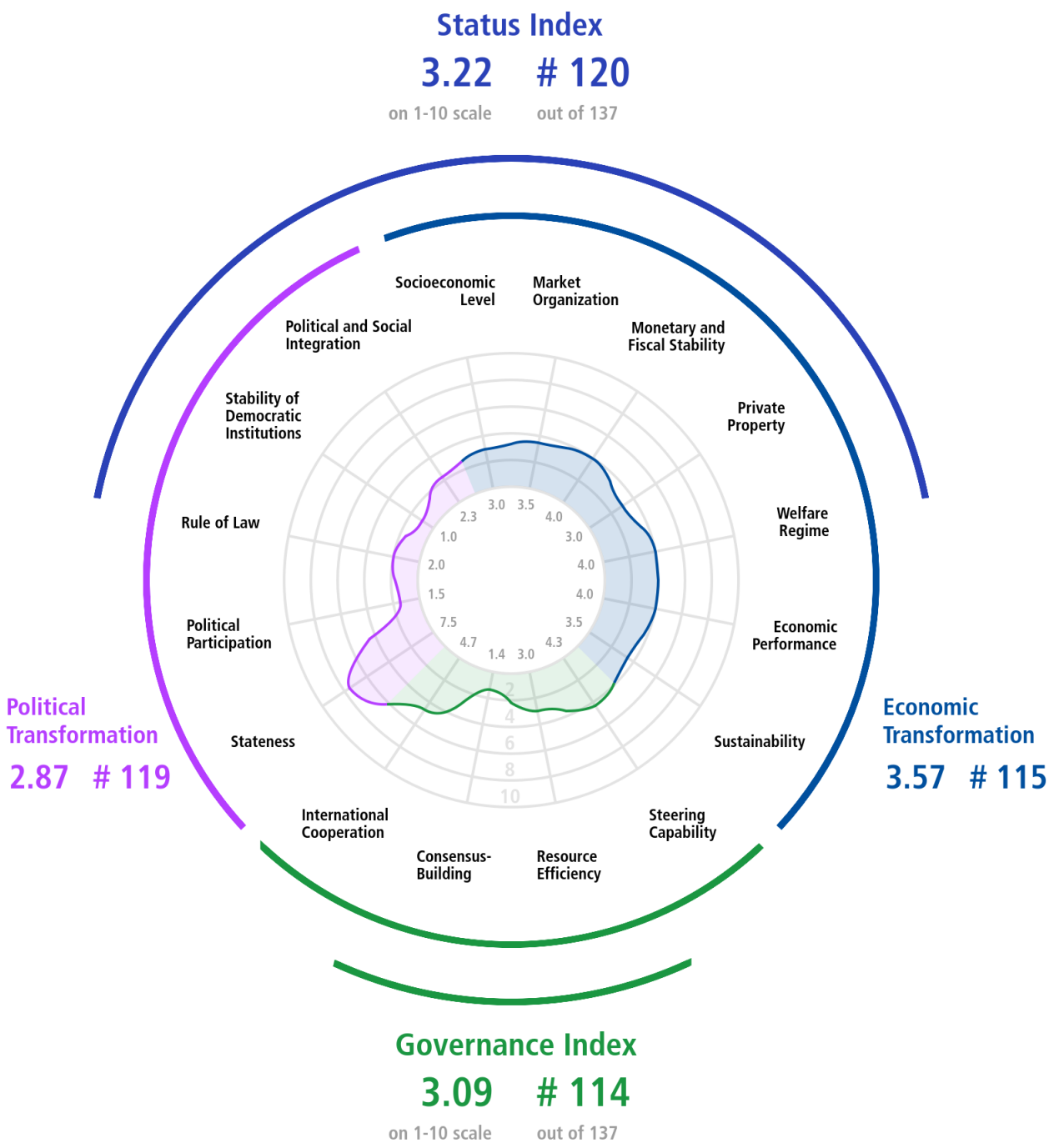
BTI 2026 Country Report

Tajikistan



This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at https://www.bti-project.org.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	**10.6**	HDI	**0.691**	GDP p.c., PPP	$	**5406**
Pop. growth[1]	% p.a.	**1.9**	HDI rank of 193	**128**	Gini Index		**36.1**
Life expectancy	years	**71.8**	UN Education Index	**0.677**	Poverty[3]	%	**25.7**
Urban population	%	**28.5**	Gender inequality[2]	**0.258**	Aid per capita	$	**51.1**

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than $3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Tajikistan is a consolidated authoritarian state in which President Emomali Rahmon, his family and a small circle of confidants have monopolized political power and maintain firm control over state institutions and major economic enterprises. The 2025 parliamentary elections further cemented the dominance of the president and his ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT). Although Rahmon is expected to remain in office until the 2027 presidential election, preparations for a dynastic transfer of power are already underway. His eldest son, Rustam Emomali (born 1987), was appointed chairman of the upper house in 2020. The character of the regime – authoritarian, clientelist and patriarchal – has changed little in recent years. Criticism from Western governments has grown more muted, and appeals from international human rights organizations largely go unheeded. In 2024, Human Rights Watch reported that "Tajikistan's human rights record continues to deteriorate amid an increased crackdown on freedom of expression and the political opposition, as well as the targeting of independent lawyers, journalists and family members of opposition activists abroad."

Security problems in recent years have been domestic in origin, despite the government's attempts to frame them as external. The regime has further marginalized regional groups and ethnic minorities. In particular, the Pomiri community has faced systematic repression in recent years. Although there are concerns about the situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East, where an unknown number of Tajiks have joined the Islamic State (IS), these factors have not undermined Tajikistan's internal stability. During the period under review, several Tajik citizens – mostly labor migrants – were recruited to the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K). In 2024, Tajik IS-K sympathizers carried out two large-scale terrorist attacks in the Iranian city of Kerman and in Moscow, resulting in over 250 fatalities. The attack in Moscow intensified public resentment toward Central Asian labor migrants in Russia, further aggravating their situation.

Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and NATO's withdrawal, President Rahmon initially adopted a confrontational stance toward Kabul, warning repeatedly of potential spillover violence and Islamist destabilization. He sought international security assistance and positioned himself as a guarantor of internal order. During the review period, however, the government adopted a more pragmatic approach: Tajikistan continued to sell electricity to Afghanistan, reopened several border markets and re-established communication between the two countries' intelligence agencies to address IS-K-related security threats.

Political and economic relations with Uzbekistan continued to improve in the reporting period. After a violent border conflict with Kyrgyzstan in 2022, both governments entered negotiations on border demarcation, which concluded in December 2024. The war against Ukraine has diminished Russia's political influence in Tajikistan and the region. Nevertheless, Moscow still maintains significant political, military and economic influence over the regime in Dushanbe. International aid aimed at governance reform has declined in political significance as Chinese loans and credits have significantly increased. This trend has further bolstered the power of the executive branch over other institutions.

The regime establishes strategic objectives and maintains cooperative relations with donors and the United Nations. At the same time, civil society continues to struggle, weakened and divided by substantial government pressure and reliance on external donors for funding. Tajikistan remains the most remittance-dependent country in the world, with approximately 38% (2023) of its GDP comprised of remittances. International sanctions imposed on Russia and worsening conditions for labor migrants in Russia have again underscored both the unpredictability of labor migration and the vulnerability of Tajikistan's economy to external shocks.

The government continues to prioritize large-scale hydropower and transportation infrastructure projects as the pillars of its economic development strategy. Aluminum and cotton remain Tajikistan's primary exports. Throughout the reporting period, construction on the Roghun Dam has continued; however, logistics disruptions affecting key components produced in Ukraine, environmental hazards, financial constraints and a shortage of skilled labor have delayed construction and increased the estimated costs of the project from $3.9 billion to $6.3 billion. The business environment remains dominated by state-owned utilities and enterprises owned by associates of the regime, leaving most families outside the privileged elites struggling to subsist, often relying on remittances from labor migrants for their livelihoods. The government has so far resisted Russian pressure to join the Eurasian Economic Union.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Tajikistan, once the poorest republic of the Soviet Union, continues to hold that status among the former Soviet states. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, independence was overshadowed by a severe political and economic crisis that led Tajikistan into a five-year civil war (1992 – 1997). The conflict was fought between government loyalist commanders, led by Rahmon from November 1992, and commanders aligned with the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), a heterogeneous movement comprising various political and regional groups, including the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Accurate casualty figures are unavailable, and for political reasons, no official inquiry has ever been conducted to determine responsibility for wartime abuses. In a 2024 speech, President Rahmon casually estimated the death toll at 150,000, most of whom were civilians. Additionally, more than half a million individuals were internally displaced or sought refuge outside the country.

In 1997, the government and the UTO signed a peace accord under the auspices of the United Nations. Elections to a new bicameral parliament were held in 2000, formally bringing the peace process to a successful end. Tajikistan is among the few post-conflict countries to have rapidly transitioned from war to internal stability and established a functioning government. Most remarkably, stability was re-established without the liberal reforms deemed essential by international actors. Nevertheless, the country has experienced several incidents of minor armed conflict since 1997, each of which was suppressed by the government. The main opposition party, the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT), whose members were allied with the UTO, held a handful of posts in the government until the mid-2000s as well as two seats in parliament from 2000 to 2015. In 2015, the IRPT lost its representation in parliament and was declared a terrorist organization.

Despite facing challenges such as a deteriorating public health system, education system and infrastructure, Tajikistan has made economic progress since the war. According to official statistics, the economy has demonstrated strong growth, averaging 7% annually since 2000. External debt has been reduced by half, and the poverty level has decreased from 83% of the population in 1999 to 21% in 2023. However, much of this growth can be only partially attributed to structural reforms and increased productivity. Most of the country’s growth has been aided by favorable world prices for aluminum and cotton and, importantly, substantial remittances from Tajik labor migrants in Russia. Remittances account for up to 45% of GDP, making Tajikistan one of the most remittance-dependent economies in the world.

Since 2000, stability has consistently taken precedence over substantial progress toward democratic reform. Parliamentary and presidential elections between 2000 and 2020 merely confirmed the existing power structure and drew muted criticism from the international community. At the time of this writing (February 2025), parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2025 are expected to deliver the outcome forged by the ruling elite. Following the peace accords, Rahmon adopted a policy of incorporating influential opposition figures into prominent roles and offering them a share of power.

Since 2010, Tajikistan has evolved into a consolidated autocratic state in which dissidents, potential opponents and those who fall out of favor are often suppressed, jailed or forced to flee the country. Some have even been killed abroad. Politics in Tajikistan rely heavily on patronage networks and personal loyalties, and governance is frequently conducted through informal channels. NGOs are weak and have little presence beyond the capital city and a few other major towns. Local governments play a limited role in local decision-making. However, they lack autonomy from the central government and operate under a patriarchal model of governance. Electoral democracy and a market economy are merely a façade for a consolidated autocracy and a patron-client system.

Over the past decade, Tajikistan's authoritarian government has promoted an exclusive nationalism that combines ethnicity with a concept of traditional Islam, legitimizing the president's rule and prompting a strong patriarchal shift in societal affairs. Minorities are systematically marginalized. Tajikistan is a necessary, albeit weak, security partner for Western states, Russia and China. The country has managed to engage with and extract resources from all these great powers to the benefit of its regime. Due to its extensive border with Afghanistan, Tajikistan is considered strategically important for combating extremism and the drug trade. However, it has largely remained unaffected by the strategic balance of the conflict and the perceived threat of transnational Islamic militancy within Central Asia. Despite repeated claims that instability in Afghanistan and the Middle East would spill over into Tajikistan, this has not materialized.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

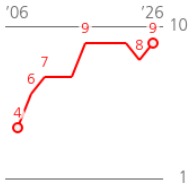
I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

Question Score

Monopoly on the use of force

9



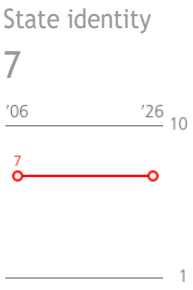
Tajikistan is a consolidated authoritarian state that maintains a complete monopoly on the use of force across its entire territory. Terrorism incidents are relatively uncommon compared to global standards. In recent years, the Islamic State in Khorasan (IS-K) has emerged as the most prolific terrorist organization; however, it has not yet challenged internal security. Instances of violence are primarily linked to organized crime, specifically trans-border drug-trafficking. In November 2024, a Chinese national was killed near the Tajik-Afghan border; however, authorities provided no details about the incident. While the authorities often highlight the risk posed by militant Islamic groups, these groups have not demonstrated the ability to pose a substantial challenge to the state, and the threat is likely greatly exaggerated.

In 2022, the government conducted a significant military operation in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) to disrupt informal networks made up of local authority and civil society actors. The operation resulted in more than 80 civilian deaths and the arrest of 200 individuals. Although these informal networks were mostly dismantled and the government established complete control over GBAO, the relationship with the local population remains extremely strained, primarily because of ongoing repression, marginalization and alienation of the Pomiri minority.

The border conflict with northern neighbor Kyrgyzstan over water distribution, land ownership and access to markets dates back to Soviet times. The peculiarities of an unmarked and unusually complicated border eased during the reporting period. In December 2024, both governments announced that confidential negotiations on the border demarcation had concluded. The Kyrgyz parliament ratified a formal agreement in February 2025, and the Tajik parliament is expected to follow suit after its reconstitution in April 2025.

Tajikistan's security institutions continue to receive significant assistance in training and equipment from China, Russia and the United States. Political loyalty among the security forces appears high, while operational capacity has further improved.

A majority of the population accepts the legitimacy of the Tajik nation-state. At the same time, natives of the former opposition regions (Rasht Valley and GBAO) feel increasingly marginalized due to their economic, cultural and social exclusion, as well as ongoing repression by state security forces. The regime continues to target the Ismaili-Pomiri communities, who are portrayed as Shi'ite Muslims – as opposed to the majority Sunni Tajiks – and non-Tajiks.



According to the last official census conducted in 2010, ethnic Uzbeks comprised 14% of the population. This statistic is widely regarded as inaccurate, in part due to the politicized nature of the census, which discouraged citizens from claiming an Uzbek identity and in some cases was deliberately manipulated by local authorities. The number marks a further decline in the share of ethnic Uzbeks estimated by censuses in 2000 (16.5%) and 1989 (23.5%). Most independent analysts put the share of Uzbeks in Tajikistan at about 20% to 25%.

The government's ethnic-based nationalism and exclusive identity politics create a sense of unity among ethnic Tajiks but contribute to the alienation of many members of ethnic and religious minorities. Politically, Tajiks hold all major posts, and proficiency in the Tajik language is required for all major political officeholders. The government seeks to strengthen a Tajik national identity vis-à-vis traditionally strong regional affiliations, which continue to be undermined by the prevailing distribution of government positions that strongly favors individuals from Danghara district in southern Tajikistan – President Rahmon's native district.

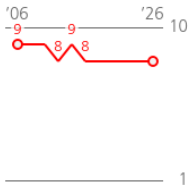
While all citizens are formally granted equal rights, widespread corruption and nepotism increasingly limit access to certain rights for those who are wealthier and have influential connections to the elite. Women, youth and minorities continue to be marginalized and frequently face informal obstacles in exercising their civil rights. Although citizenship is formally granted to all groups without discrimination, there is a significant movement toward nativization – as evidenced by an official state list of approved baby names and stringent regulations on eliminating "russified" surnames.

The only known groups that have questioned Tajikistan's stateness were clandestine and banned radical Islamic groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The prevalence of these groups is unknown, but they are unlikely to be widespread within the country due to the effects of state surveillance and repression. Since 2015, the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) has replaced these groups in the government's security discourse. The IRPT's chairman, who is in exile in Europe, has consistently denied that his party is involved in terrorist attacks and has vowed to adhere to democratic principles and a peaceful political struggle. Allegations of contacts between the IRPT and Islamic State (IS) are implausible due to their diametrically opposed religious and political agendas.

During the reporting period, the so-called Islamic State in Khorasan (IS-K) emerged as the most prolific terrorist group. In 2024, Tajik IS-K sympathizers were behind terrorist attacks in Kerman, Iran and Moscow, Russia. German and Austrian authorities arrested several Tajik citizens on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in Vienna, Cologne and Munich. IS-K explicitly targets Tajik labor migrants through social media platforms in coordinated recruitment efforts. The specific context of labor migration – including social and political exclusion as well as xenophobia – appears to have facilitated the often-rapid radicalization and recruitment process in Russia and Europe. However, IS-K has not been active within Tajikistan yet.

Formally, Tajikistan is a secular state, and the law forbids any religious involvement in political matters such as election campaigns or the work of state bodies. However, in the past decade, the authoritarian state has imposed strict control over religious affairs and integrated Islam into its authoritarian identity politics. The government actively interferes in the internal affairs of religious communities and evaluates religious dogmas. In general, religious belief is an important part of Tajik culture, and religious dogmas informally influence politics and the law by implicitly confirming patriarchal concepts of social and political order. As a legacy of the post-civil war peace accord, the regime allowed the moderately Islamist IRPT to operate legally until 2015, but this opposition party has now been outlawed and declared a terrorist movement.

No interference of religious dogmas



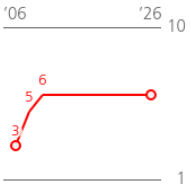
The government has increased the capacity of official institutions regulating religion, such as the Islamic Center and the Committee on Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebration and Ceremonies. Both institutions certify religious personnel, pay salaries, impose a uniform dress code, monitor mosques and religious schools and distribute mandatory topics for important Friday sermons. Government intervention has reduced the diversity of religious practice and has undermined the independent authority of religious figures in the country. In 2012, three new articles were added to the Code of Administrative Offenses to punish those violating the Law on Religion's tight restrictions on religious education and unsanctioned ties with foreign institutions. In 2024, authorities initiated a campaign against witchcraft and fortune-telling (which is formally illegal), informal and highly popular practices conducted by local healers, cunning folk and religious figures outside a normative understanding of officially sanctioned religious traditions.

In 2020, the national census for the first time included a question on religion. This provision violates domestic laws and international commitments that guarantee the right to privacy and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The government's formal secularism and its belief that only a specific interpretation of Hanafi Sunni Islam truly represents the Tajik people constitute a form of dogma that significantly hampers religious freedom. This, in turn, exacerbates political polarization within the country and leads to the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly the Ismaili Muslim minority.

The state maintains a highly centralized, multilevel system of administration throughout the territory. This system includes all major civilian institutions, such as local governments functioning at the municipal, district and provincial levels; a system of courts; tax authorities; law enforcement agencies; and local health and education departments that supervise hospitals and schools. All spheres of public service suffer from underfunding, mismanagement, rampant corruption, arbitrary intervention by superordinate authorities and inadequate technical facilities.

Basic administration

6



During the review period, the authorities continued to implement a variety of significant infrastructure projects in the transportation, electricity and heating sectors, largely due to substantial Chinese funding. However, during colder periods lasting from one to six months, large areas in the Rasht Valley and, at times, the entire GBAO remained isolated from the rest of the country. Despite investments in hydropower and the power supply system, a constant shortage of energy persists even in the capital Dushanbe, particularly during winter. Continual power outages severely hamper the functioning of health care and educational facilities. At the same time, urban centers are experiencing rampant housing development and relocation of people from rural areas, while the expansion of water, sanitation, electricity and transport networks does not keep pace with development.

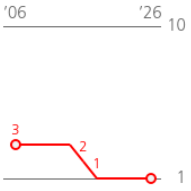
The provision of basic services remained undermined by low public expenditures in the social sector. In 2023, the World Bank stated that only 55% of Tajikistan's population had access to an improved drinking water source. Although this statistic has improved over time, it still places Tajikistan alongside sub-Saharan African states. However, those states never had the infrastructure development that Tajikistan benefited from due to Soviet modernization programs.

2 | Political Participation

General presidential and parliamentary elections are regularly held in Tajikistan at the national level through unrestricted universal suffrage with secret ballots. However, elections and the multiparty system are largely orchestrations of democratic processes and institutions for an international audience. Local and international observers have described all past elections as fraudulent and lacking basic political competition.

Free and fair elections

1



There has been no change in presidential leadership since 1994. In the most recent presidential election in October 2020, Rahmon was re-elected as president for a fifth consecutive term (until 2027) with 93% of the vote. The four rivals to Rahmon were largely unknown to the public and received between 1.5% and 3% of the votes without any campaigning. This indicated a massive election engineering campaign, since each contender needed at least 5% of registered voters' signatures to be formally registered as a candidate.

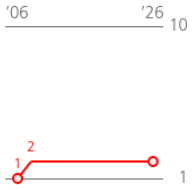
The president-led People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) has controlled parliament since 2000, when it became the basis for consolidating regional elites and presidential allies under a single political party. The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which was part of the peace agreement signed in 1997 and was the primary opposition party until 2015, has been banned, and its leading members are in exile or imprisoned.

Public trust in the election process remains very low. Parliamentary elections were held in March 2025 without meaningful campaigning, keeping the PDPT in power with an overwhelming majority. A handful of remaining seats were distributed among four minor parties that barely register in the public consciousness and are explicitly loyal to the president. The OSCE canceled its election observation mission in February 2025 due to the lack of assurance by the Tajik authorities that observers would be accredited.

The president holds an uncontested monopoly over the country's governance, though his election is only de jure democratic. Most crucial decisions are made by the president and an informal circle of family members and close associates. There are no significant veto players. Parliament has limited competencies and serves as a rubber stamp for the president's initiatives. In 2016, the president's eldest son, Rustam Emomali, became mayor of Dushanbe, and in 2020, he was appointed chairman of parliament, the country's second-most important political position. As a result, it appears that Rahmon and his family are preparing for a dynastic transfer of power.

Effective power to govern

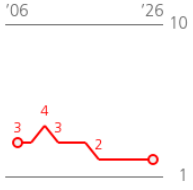
2



The constitution guarantees freedom of association, but the government severely restricts this right in practice. Some loyal political parties are allowed to operate because they are not considered to hold serious political ambitions in their own right while instead helping the regime maintain a democratic facade. The law provides for freedom of assembly, but the government often restricts and denies this right in practice. Local government approval is necessary to hold public demonstrations, and officials generally refuse to grant permission, making gatherings illegal in almost all cases.

Association / assembly rights

2



Groups and individuals critical of the government, and particularly of the president, are systematically harassed, imprisoned and persecuted. This has included Group 44 and human rights activists in GBAO. The actions of such groups are strongly restricted at the district level, where local administrators unscrupulously curtail them. In June 2024, the chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), Saidja'far Usmonzoda, was ousted from his leadership role in an irregular process that contradicted the party's charter – the new chairman was voted in without party delegates from the regions. Usmonzoda filed an official complaint with the Ministry of Justice; however, instead, he was arrested and charged with plotting a violent overthrow of the constitutional order.

Citizens have the legal right to join trade unions, but these associations are largely subservient to authorities and cannot organize members effectively. Watchdog-type organizations, typically funded solely by foreign sources, are subject to strict monitoring. Since 2015, NGOs must register all activities that receive foreign funding with state authorities. In 2019, the Law on Public Organizations further strengthened legal regulations for NGOs. For example, organizations are now required to have a website that discloses comprehensive legal and financial information about their activities. There is also a growing body of evidence indicating repression of intellectuals, potentially leading to an increase in the number seeking refuge abroad.

Freedom of expression



Freedom of expression, speech and the press are guaranteed by Tajikistan's constitution. However, in practice, freedom of speech is restricted by government interference, widespread self-censorship, a lack of independent financial support for journalism and severe criminal libel laws. The government owns all television stations and controls broadcasting facilities and internet infrastructure, leaving little room for independent news and analysis on TV, radio and the internet. Coverage of particular topics – such as the war in Ukraine or the GBAO special military operation – is closely monitored or forbidden outright. The popular Russian satellite TV service offers no alternative and has contributed to the proliferation of anti-Western propaganda in Tajikistan. Independent newspapers have shut down due to political pressure, harsh libel laws and financial constraints. The state has increased its capacity to censor and restrict internet access. In 2020, parliament enacted a law that allows authorities to block websites or social networks without a prior court order. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, parliament passed laws penalizing the spread of "misinformation."

Websites operated by independent news agencies based outside Tajikistan are frequently blocked, and local websites are regularly closed by the monopolistic internet provider for "maintenance" reasons. Internet penetration is estimated at 41.6% (2024), with substantial disparities between urban and rural areas. Compared regionally, internet access is costly, and speeds rank among the world's slowest (122nd out of 155 countries surveyed in the Speedtest Global Index 2024).

Tajikistan ranked 155th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2024 World Press Freedom Index, a decline of 40 places since 2015. According to Reporters Without Borders, independent journalists are regularly subjected to interrogation by intelligence officers, as well as intimidation and blackmail. The organization writes: "The authorities continue to step up their control of communications using new technology and have created 'troll factories' to discredit critics. The blocking of the main news websites and social media is now virtually permanent."

Over the reporting period, several journalists experienced intimidation, violent assaults, arrest or prosecution. In January 2025, Ahmad Ibrohim, editor of the independent regional newspaper Paik in Khatlon, was sentenced to 10 years in prison

for “radicalism.” Additionally, family members of journalists were subjected to harassment and threats. Individuals are increasingly singled out for their social media and blog posts, with young women in particular publicly shamed for violating an informal national moral code.

3 | Rule of Law

The executive maintains tight control over Tajikistan’s legislative and judicial branches. Despite the constitutional provision mandating the separation of powers and their institutional differentiation, the president and his inner circle hold both a formal and informal monopoly on power. The president appoints and dismisses senior members of the government, provincial governors and district heads, including the mayor of Dushanbe. Likewise, the president appoints judges and high court justices. The removal of presidential term limits in 2016 has increased the office’s power.

Separation of powers

2

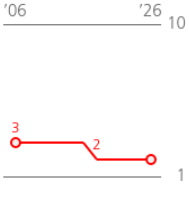


Checks and balances are both formally limited and largely ineffective due to informal modes of governance. Regarding the judiciary, it is the president’s prerogative to nominate and dismiss judges at all levels, and the courts generally yield to rulings issued by the prosecutor’s office. The bicameral parliament, which is largely dominated by the president’s PDPT, has limited authority and typically votes as directed by the executive, thus failing to exercise its constitutional powers. Parliamentary debates mainly occur when specifically requested by the executive. Most parliament members are former high-ranking executive branch officials who have been appointed to parliament as a form of quasi-retirement. Banning religious parties is a constitutional guarantee against the return to legality of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT).

A 2009 change to the legal framework for local government – initiated and supported by representatives of the international community – has not yet had any noticeable effects on the power of local authorities relative to the national government. Since the local elections in 2020, the PDPT has maintained control over all city and district councils, rendering any prospect of genuine independence nonexistent.

Independent judiciary

2



The judiciary in Tajikistan is de jure independent and institutionally differentiated, but in practice it remains tightly subordinated to the executive branch. There is no practical separation of powers. The president wields significant influence over the judiciary through constitutional authority to appoint and dismiss judges at all levels, including the prosecutor general. These appointments are not based on merit.

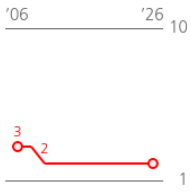
The courts are also influenced by rulings delivered by the prosecutor’s office, which holds significant political power. In politically sensitive cases, legal proceedings are held in camera, and judges follow directives from high-ranking officials in the presidential administration. Judges who exercise even a minimal degree of judicial independence face prosecution. For example, Rustam Saidahmazoda was sentenced

to nine years for issuing an acquittal. Defendants in political cases have no access to legal assistance. Independent defense lawyers have been arrested on politically motivated charges after defending opposition politicians or dissident intellectuals. One notable case is Buzurgmehr Yorov (see BTI 2018), who is serving a 28-year sentence.

Once charged, individuals are almost always convicted in all but the most exceptional cases. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the judiciary is significantly undermined by functional deficits such as widespread corruption, limited resources and inadequate training. In 2020, a new law on extremism went into effect, featuring a vague definition of extremism that enables authorities to suspend online communications and freeze bank accounts without prior court hearings.

Prosecution of office abuse

2

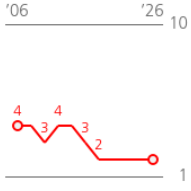


Rampant corruption and abuses of power have remained an integral part of Tajikistan's political system despite repeated presidential announcements that anti-corruption efforts were being stepped up. Public prosecutions of corruption occur almost exclusively at lower levels of state administration, particularly in the health, education and agriculture sectors. High-level figures, who are often members of the president's family or inner circle, are rarely penalized for corrupt practices.

Many senior officials in the Tajikistan government have secondary roles in the business sector and hold extensive properties in the country and abroad. This is typically tolerated unless an official falls from grace for another reason. During the period under review, a group of senior officials associated with the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hamrohkhon Zarifi (in office between 2006 and 2013), were arrested on charges of an attempted coup. Because the court case is held in camera, only rumors are circulating about the background of the trial. In February 2025, the defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 8 to 27 years.

Civil rights

2



All civil rights are enshrined in domestic legislation in accordance with international human rights standards. However, in practice, civil rights are severely restricted and systematically violated. Arbitrary arrests, lengthy pretrial detentions, torture and abuse remain widespread. Torture, rape and deaths continue to occur in custody. Conditions in prisons remain life-threatening due to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and high rates of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. In 2018 and 2019, security forces quelled two riots in penal camps, reportedly killing more than 80 inmates.

Conscripts frequently report torture and ill-treatment in the armed forces that regularly result in deaths, long-term injuries and disabilities.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community face systematic repression and even violent assaults. Since 2017, the Ministry of Interior has required members of the LGBTQ+ community to register with the state. State media reproduces Russian anti-Western propaganda, criticizing societal diversity and civil liberties.

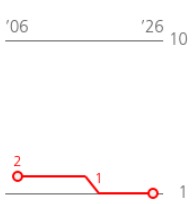
Police and security forces often violate citizens' civil rights and are rarely prosecuted for those offenses, which contributes to a culture of impunity. Corruption, patronage and the arbitrary application of the rule of law hinder justice mechanisms. Domestic violence against women remains widespread, and cultural and institutional obstacles discourage women from seeking redress for rights violations.

Religious groups that do not follow the national brand of Islam, as defined by the government's religious administration, face particular pressure. Police frequently crack down on public observance of religious practices or alleged "alien" Muslim attire such as the hijab or a "Muslim" beard. During the period under review, authorities persecuted dozens of nonviolent religious figures who offer non-normative religious practices, including fortune-telling or spiritual healing ceremonies. Many Muslims were detained and sentenced to lengthy jail terms, mainly without a fair public trial, for alleged membership in banned Islamic groups. Non-Muslim religious groups, including several Christian congregations, remain subject to persecution through bureaucratic and administrative means.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

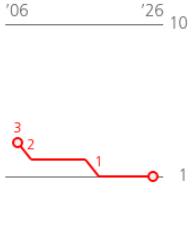
Tajikistan is an authoritarian state where democratic institutions and processes serve only as a facade. The president and his inner circle have monopolized governance. The executive, legislative and judicial branches defer to decisions made within this circle. Parliament tends to refrain from exercising its constitutional powers, and the courts often rule as advised by the prosecutor or the executive. Opposition political parties and independent media groups are weak and tolerated only if they do not challenge the regime. Although the institutional framework for democratization formally exists, it does not function. The presidential, parliamentary and local elections in 2020 were highly controlled and fell far short of meeting any democratic standards. Prospects for transparent parliamentary elections in 2025 or meaningful democratic reform in the near future are dim.

Performance of democratic institutions



According to its constitution, Tajikistan is a democratic state. However, the commitment to democratic institutions is merely superficial. As they exist, these institutions are widely perceived as lacking legitimacy or a popular mandate based on elections. The country has limited experience with democracy, and many older citizens associate political pluralism, media freedom and election campaigning with the political confrontation and violence that led to the civil war. The Tajik opposition groups in exile are divided and hold no sway over political developments within the country. A growing number of young people feel abandoned and marginalized by the current government, prompting them to seek alternative sources of inspiration such as religion. Migration, primarily to Russia, remains a significant option for those who possess higher-level qualifications and want to leave the country.

Commitment to democratic institutions

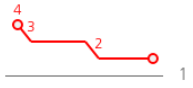


5 | Political and Social Integration

Party system

2

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Tajikistan formally has a functioning multiparty system; however, political parties lack deep social roots and do not play a significant role in political mobilization. Opposition within the country and in exile remains fragmented and divided. Under the consolidated autocratic system, authorities monitor opposition parties and allow them to function only if they do not challenge the regime.

In March 2025, five political parties were elected to the lower chamber of parliament, known as the Majlisi Namoyandagon. The presidential People's Democratic Party (PDPT) secured 51.9% of the votes, followed by the Agrarian Party (APT) with 21%, the Party of Economic Reforms (PER) with 12.7%, the Socialist Party (SPT) with 5.3% and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) with 5.1%. The Communist Party failed to clear the 5% threshold for the first time since independence. Notably, all these parties are loyal to the president, with the PDPT holding near-total control over the political space within the party system. As a result, membership in the PDPT is compulsory for all civil servants at high and medium levels.

The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which had seats in parliament from 2000 until 2015, was banned in 2015 on terrorism charges and now operates only in exile. The 2016 constitutional referendum codified the exclusion of "religious" parties from politics.

Interest groups

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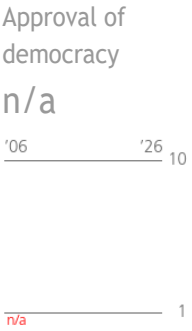
Interest groups exist within specific social segments and often do not collaborate with one another. These interest groups tend to be informal networks based on family, regional or professional connections, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). International organizations often refer to these NGOs as part of "civil society," but these organizations in fact focus primarily on technical assistance and service delivery in a limited third sector. The government severely restricts civil associations and frequently orders NGOs to suspend their activities. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice ordered the liquidation of 700 NGOs in GBAO after the 2022 unrest.

Remaining NGOs function more like consulting firms than advocacy groups. Their structures and agendas primarily respond to donor requests for proposals and do not address local communities or their concerns. Most of these organizations focus on cultural, educational, gender-related or domestic violence issues as well as distributing humanitarian aid to specific populations. Although NGOs provide some assistance to vulnerable groups, NGO work does not effectively mobilize civil society, because the NGOs themselves view their role as service providers rather than as aggregators of interests, resources or actions.

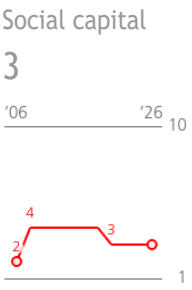
The NGO sector has, to some extent, become a profitable market for the entrenched elite. After about 30 years of expansion in the number and scope of NGOs, there is

significant anecdotal evidence of cynicism among both international donors and NGO representatives themselves regarding their role and effectiveness in society. As a result, the population remains comparatively inactive in forming interest groups, leaving a substantial number of social interests unrepresented.

Tajikistan has limited experience with democracy, and there is no reliable survey data on the extent of popular approval for democracy or democratic institutions. Most of the country's older population associates democracy with the socioeconomic hardships that followed independence, as well as political polarization and the outbreak of the civil war in 1997. They tend to be apathetic toward elections and hold a general disdain for political parties. Tajikistan's political culture remains authoritarian, shaped by the legacy of the Soviet Union and by contemporary Russian media narratives that link democracy with chaos, violence and instability. Political discourse is underdeveloped, and the government uses a strategy of depoliticizing the public sphere. Parties lack a genuine ideological foundation or the intention to compete for power. The regime prioritizes authority and stability. Political elites take a patriarchal view of politics, which serves to rationalize the widespread presence of nepotism and clientelism.



There is a low level of trust among the population, particularly between groups from different regions or ethnic and religious backgrounds. A deep division exists between the urban and rural populations. As a result, trust is highly localized or familial, as increasingly evident in marriage, migration and employment patterns. Official identity politics have exacerbated the divides in Tajik society. In particular, Ismaili-Pomiris and – since the escalation of border conflicts with Kyrgyzstan – ethnic Kyrgyz are excluded from the imagined national community.



The capacity to self-organize is distributed unevenly in society. Self-organization within neighborhoods (mahalla) and communal labor contexts (hashar) is highly developed in rural areas, where traditionally strong bonds of solidarity within villages and extended families help individuals cope with routine problems and emergencies, such as the COVID-19 crisis. International development agencies have widely supported local village-based mobilization and community-driven development as a stepping stone toward economic and social progress. However, rather than being regarded as ideal grassroots organizations, mahallas should also be recognized as deeply patriarchal institutions of order that are being co-opted by local state authorities. When individuals move to the cities, most continue to support and rely on their extended families and former residents of their home region. These family- and village-based self-organized groups and associations are unevenly distributed and often resentful of each other.

II. Economic Transformation

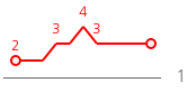
6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Question Score

Socioeconomic barriers

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Tajikistan is a low-income, landlocked country in Central Asia. It is rich in hydropower potential and several natural resources, including gold, silver, antimony, rare earths, coal and precious stones. Unlike some of its neighbors, Tajikistan does not have significant proven oil or natural gas reserves. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan was the poorest and most underdeveloped periphery of the country.

Since 2003, Tajikistan has made continuous progress in poverty alleviation. The poverty rate fell from 67% in 2003 to 21% in 2023, according to the IMF. However, poverty reduction has unfolded unevenly, disadvantaging rural communities in the country's periphery. The highest levels of poverty are found in rural areas, where about two-thirds of the population live in poverty and rely on subsistence economies. This is especially true for households headed by women and those with children. Geographically, areas with the highest poverty rates include the GBAO, the Rasht Valley and certain isolated districts in Sughd and Khatlon that do not cultivate cotton.

The economic slowdown and severe disruption of remittances during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the economic crisis in Russia due to international sanctions in the wake of its aggression against Ukraine, further increased disparities. The Gini Index (34 in 2015) and the Gender Inequality Index (0.269 in 2022) suggest that inequalities in Tajik society have increased over the past years. However, unreliable national statistics make it difficult to analyze the level of inequality, especially among disadvantaged populations – for example, women, religious and ethnic minorities. According to the Gender Inequality Index, the situation for women has gradually improved in recent years, but significant disparities remain, as shown by the 2021 World Bank Gender Assessment report.

Irrespective of the improvements, Tajikistan remains the poorest of all post-Soviet states. In 2022, Tajikistan ranked 126th out of 191 countries surveyed by the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), faring worse than all other former Soviet states and scoring only slightly above its 1990 HDI value (2022: 0.679, 1990: 0.623). In recent years, improvements have stalled.

Tajikistan remains one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world. Remittances from labor migrants have been the key factor behind Tajikistan's economic growth and poverty alleviation. Money sent home by typically more than 1 million Tajikistani migrant workers, mainly from Russia, has in recent years provided for the most basic needs of more than half the population.

However, remittance inflows to Tajikistan have shown high volatility over the past decade – remittances rose in 2014 to an estimated $3.7 billion (or 42% of GDP), but dropped sharply by more than 50% by 2016 due to Russia's economic crisis following the imposition of international sanctions after its annexation of Crimea. After a substantial recovery, remittances declined again in 2020 due to the pandemic and the closing of borders. The IMF reported in September 2020 that Tajikistan's GDP per capita had declined to $833, below the 2011 level. In 2021, remittances hovered around $2 billion (or 34% of GDP).

Initially, observers expected a significant decline in remittances for 2023 and 2024 due to the war in Ukraine and the international sanctions regime against Russia. Additionally, the terrorist attack by Tajik citizens on Krokus City Hall in Moscow in March 2024 significantly worsened the situation for Tajik labor migrants in Russia to the extent that the Tajik government explicitly cautioned its citizens against traveling to Russia. Throughout 2024, more than 20,000 Tajik labor migrants have been deported from Russia, and over 120,000 have faced deportation. Furthermore, Russia adopted unprecedented regulations restricting migration and severely curbing the allowed activities and employment opportunities of labor migrants, making the country increasingly inhospitable, particularly for migrants from Central Asia.

The trend continues in 2025, with restrictions extending to the families and dependents of labor migrants. Despite these constraints, the World Bank estimates that remittances will increase to 45% of GDP in the first half of 2024. Since the labor force remains the country's most important export line, the government of Tajikistan has increased efforts to sign bilateral agreements with countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East to develop new work destinations for labor migrants.

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	**2024**
GDP	$ M	8937.8	10713.5	12244.2	**14204.6**
GDP growth	%	9.4	8.0	8.3	**8.4**
Inflation (CPI)	%	-	-	-	**-**
Unemployment	%	12.3	11.6	11.5	**11.6**
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	0.9	1.6	1.1	**2.1**
Export growth	%	55.4	-24.0	13.4	**-**
Import growth	%	20.0	4.0	-4.3	**-**
Current account balance	$ M	735.5	1634.6	584.0	**887.0**

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
Public debt	% of GDP	42.0	31.8	29.9	**24.9**
External debt	$ M	6590.6	6723.5	6872.8	-
Total debt service	$ M	502.7	507.3	577.1	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-1.6	-0.4	-1.0	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	10.3	10.3	10.8	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	10.9	10.1	10.7	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	4.4	5.4	5.4	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.9	1.8	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.0	2.0	1.2	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Market organization

4





Although Tajikistan has the legal and institutional framework necessary for a functioning market economy, only some segments of the economy feature genuine market competition. Legislative and procedural rules regulating market competitiveness are unreliable and frequently ignored. Price fixing, state subsidies and endemic corruption continue to shape the domestic economy.

There is significant state intervention in the agricultural sector, which employs approximately 60% of the labor force and generated about 25% of GDP in 2023. The intervention is particularly notable in the cotton sector, which represents around 60% of agricultural production and about 15% of exports (as of 2022). This intervention appears specifically aimed at safeguarding the interests of influential businessmen associated with the ruling elite. However, agricultural reforms since 2014 have brought changes to the cotton sector, indicating a greater emphasis on the commercialization of agriculture in Tajikistan. Cotton cultivation has become an extremely unprofitable venture for farmers, who remain mandated to grow the crop. Environmental conditions, including soil erosion and changes in weather patterns, undermine the viability and quality of the harvest each year. In addition, the

monopoly on seed supply, lack of agricultural technology expertise and insufficient training of farmers result in improper cultivation practices. As a consequence, the low-quality cotton harvest fails not only to meet farmers' profit expectations but also to cover even the costs incurred.

Local governments throughout the country still routinely attempt to regulate retail prices for basic foodstuffs, particularly around major holidays. Tajikistan imports about 75% of its food supply and 50% of its agricultural inputs, including seeds, animal breeds, fertilizers, pesticides and farm equipment (2022).

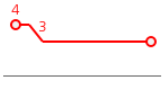
There are no significant formal entry and exit barriers in product or factor markets. However, informal barriers are considerable. Widespread corruption and patronage networks effectively restrict most foreign trade in certain products to members of the presidential family and senior government officials. Furthermore, businesses owned by members of the president's family – for instance, the lucrative import of pharmaceutical products – are consistently granted advantageous tax and customs exemptions that effectively drive smaller competitors out of the market. Although there are legal guarantees for the freedom to launch and withdraw investments, rampant corruption and extortion by tax and regulatory agencies make private investment very scarce.

The informal sector of the economy remains large, accounting for about a third of GDP and employing more than 40% of the working population. The national currency, the somoni, is fully convertible.

Competition policy

3

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With support from international financial institutions, Tajikistan has been reforming its economy to enhance business activity and expand the SME sector. In general, external experts have noted the substantial improvements with some skepticism, acknowledging positive advances in the SME sector on paper but pointing to numerous informal restrictions.

Formally, Tajikistan is a member of the International Competition Network through the State Agency for Antimonopoly and Support of Entrepreneurship. Basic regulations to prevent monopolistic structures and conduct are in place. An anti-monopoly agency exists, but it has generally been a marginalized body with little effective power. The agency's interventions are mainly limited to preventing unwarranted food price increases before major holidays. The state itself is still the main monopolist, controlling key sectors of the economy through so-called natural monopolies. These monopolies shield broad sectors of the economy deemed significant to national security from competitive pressure.

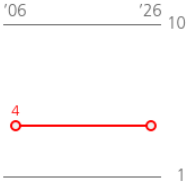
Most of these monopolies, particularly in energy and transport, are undergoing gradual restructuring and privatization by members of the president's family or his close associates, with little transparency or competition. For example, the Tajikistan Aluminum Company (Talco) is fully state owned, lacks meaningful corporate

governance and has a managing director who reports directly to the president. It accounted for approximately 10% of Tajikistan's exports in 2022 as well as 50% of the country's electricity usage.

Foreign trade is liberalized in principle, but significant exceptions remain, including differentiated tariffs and special rules for state-controlled export commodities – notably aluminum and cotton. Tajikistan's trade deficit has fluctuated between one-fourth and one-half of GDP since 2020 and reached approximately $3 billion in 2023.

Liberalization of foreign trade

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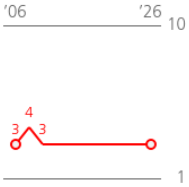
The country's economy relies heavily on the export of precious metals and ore (2022: 44% of all exports), aluminum (10%) and cotton (15%). Formal tariff barriers and quantitative restrictions are generally low – usually special rules and tariffs – but there are substantial informal barriers, mainly due to widespread corruption in the Customs Service. The country has seen certain trade areas open up and border controls relax, and the resumption of airline flights, since relations with Uzbekistan began improving in 2016. The bilateral trade volume between the two countries has tripled since 2016, reaching $750 million in 2023.

Apart from aluminum and cotton, which accounted for approximately one-fourth of Tajikistan's export earnings in 2022, the economy remains largely disconnected from the world market. Tajikistan has been a World Trade Organization (WTO) member since 2013. In 2021, Tajikistan's simple most-favored-nation tariff average was 8%.

The country's president claimed in 2014 that Tajikistan was considering joining the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a move that could potentially increase trade with other member states and provide better conditions for labor migrants. However, no significant progress in this direction has occurred since then, as the impact of Western sanctions on Russia and the uneven economic development in neighboring Kyrgyzstan after its accession to the EAEU made membership a less attractive option. Furthermore, the ruling elite is not willing to give up its lucrative control over customs and tariff regulation.

Banking system

3



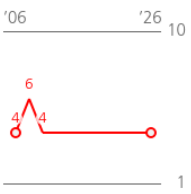
Tajikistan's banking sector remains dysfunctional, underscoring the need for comprehensive reforms. The National Bank's performance is limited by low capitalization and weak institutional capacity. The country lacks a functioning capital market. The capital-to-assets ratio has declined significantly in recent years (2021: 20.9%, 2019: 27.4%). The consumer economy predominantly operates on a cash basis with a high level of dollarization. Public trust in the banking sector is nonexistent. Although the non-performing loans ratio has improved from 58% in 2016 to 13% in 2022, the dysfunctional banking sector will require additional financial resources in the future.

As a recent (2021) IMF report indicates, the banking sector remains constrained by a low level of integration into global financial markets, limited credit lines, a shallow capital market, a cash-based economy, nonexistent confidence in the sector, a weak loan repayment culture, the decline in the national currency and poor corporate governance and accountability.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Monetary stability

4



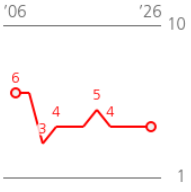
Controlling inflation and establishing an appropriate foreign exchange policy are formally among the most important goals in the country's economic policy. Nonetheless, Tajikistan ranks among those countries with high levels of inflation volatility. Over the review period, average consumer price inflation rates ranged from 10% in 2020 to 3.5% in 2023. The World Bank projects that inflation will remain between 5% and 6% in 2024.

The domestic currency is not pegged to a foreign currency but operates under a flexible exchange rate (in 2020, one dollar equaled 9.5 somoni; in December 2024, the rate was 10.9 somoni). Due to a high level of dollarization, the flexible exchange rate policy has not fulfilled initially optimistic expectations. The National Bank is fully subordinated to the government, and its currency policy is dictated by macro-level stability objectives, as advised by international financial institutions (IFIs).

Inflation and foreign exchange remain largely outside the government's control but are influenced by broader political and geopolitical factors. Specifically, global food and energy price trends have a significant impact, as Tajikistan relies on imports for much of its fuel and 75% of its food needs. Global raw material prices also influence inflation due to the import of capital goods for massive and politically important infrastructure projects in the country.

Fiscal stability

4



The government has declared the maintenance of macroeconomic stability as a key goal; however, its policies in this area have often been inconsistent or ineffective. To contain external debt, Tajikistan has adopted a tight fiscal policy. Due to fluctuations in the global economy, Tajikistan's external public and publicly guaranteed debt increased from 43% of GDP in 2019 to 55% in 2022, but it is planned to stabilize at around 40% in 2024. The country faces a high risk of debt distress.

China is Tajikistan's largest lender, holding approximately 75% of the country's external debt. China's Eximbank alone accounts for over $2 billion, making up nearly 60% of the country's total external debt. Additionally, China has acquired various mining concessions for gold, antimony and silver, which are believed to serve as potential collateral for the debt owed to it.

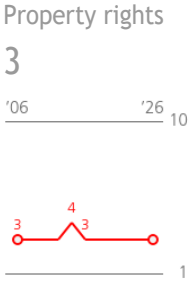
The country's public debt is expected to increase in absolute terms, as the government plans to continue external borrowing to fund infrastructure and energy projects. In 2017, the government successfully issued a 10-year bond worth $500 million with a yield of 7.125% in the international government securities market. In 2021, the government announced it would seek $562 million in foreign credit to continue construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power plant. However, since the announcement, the government has secured only piecemeal loans for the $6.3 billion project, including a $150 million agreement with the Islamic Development Bank in June 2024 and a $350 million grant from the International Development Association of the World Bank in December 2024.

During the reporting period, Tajikistan's external debt rose to $6.2 billion. It is unclear how the government plans to repay its rising debt. After recording a surplus in 2022, the country faced a current account deficit of 3.7% of GDP in 2023. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated total reserves to be only $2.9 billion in early 2023.

The government's tax base remains very narrow, with a significant portion of revenue still tied to the performance of the cotton and aluminum sectors. In addition, the government continues to depend on international aid to meet some of its spending needs, particularly in the social sector.

9 | Private Property

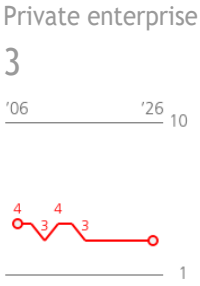
Property rights



Property rights are formally defined by law through legislative and procedural norms, which regulate the acquisition, benefits, use and sale of property. Since 2023, a new civil code has been implemented to protect private property and tenure rights. However, the weak system for protecting private property, combined with judicial corruption and state intervention, undermines enforcement of these regulations.

During the review period, municipal authorities continued to acquire large parcels of land in major urban centers, especially in the capital city Dushanbe, for development projects at the expense of long-term residents. While compensation for evictions has improved since the late 2000s, it remains inadequate and has triggered muted protests. Private ownership of agricultural land is not permitted; however, farmers can lease land parcels for life and have the right to transfer these leases to their descendants. It is important to note that the government can reclaim the land if it is not actively cultivated.

Private enterprise

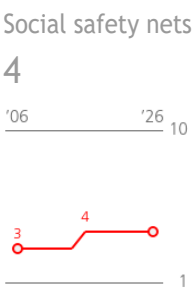


The government of Tajikistan claims to view private companies as significant contributors to the economy. Nearly all small and most medium-sized enterprises have already been privatized, and the privatization process is ongoing for many large state-owned enterprises. However, the government intends to maintain ownership of certain key entities, including the Talco aluminum company, the Tajik Azot fertilizer company (after a thorny history of failed investors) and major hydroelectric power stations. The privatization of state companies has not been consistent and has often been influenced by corruption and insider deals. Establishing a larger company typically requires political connections and access to patronage networks.

Official statistics suggest that the private sector contributes approximately 60% to GDP and accounts for 70 to 80% of employment (2021). However, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) reported that the private sector actually contributed only 17% to GDP, 24% to formal employment and 25% to investment in 2018 – 2019. Additionally, the World Bank stated in 2023 that the private sector in Tajikistan lacks dynamism and competitiveness compared to the regional context.

10 | Welfare Regime

Social safety nets



The integrated Soviet social welfare system has steadily eroded since Tajikistan gained independence. National legislation provides for cash and subsidies for pensions, illness compensation, unemployment, disability and maternity benefits, and the right to these benefits is generally respected. However, these benefits are often so low that many vulnerable groups, including senior citizens and persons with disabilities, would struggle to survive without additional support from non-state sources. The government increases pensions and public sector wages with some regularity – the latest adjustment occurred in January 2024 – but minimum retirement pension rates and wages are still considered precarious.

Only a small number of unemployed citizens receive unemployment benefits. Although the official unemployment rate was reported at 6.9% in 2023, observers believe the actual unemployment rate is closer to 40% or 50%. Given the inflexibility of the labor market, the country will face difficulties integrating labor migrants returning to the country.

Labor migration plays an important role in the labor market and overall economy, with migrants' remittances providing a crucial alternative social safety net for about two-thirds of the population. Informal self-help networks based on extended family and community structures also serve as significant social safety nets.

The government is committed to poverty alleviation. Since 2012, the poverty rate has declined from 37% to 23% of the population in 2021. However, progress in poverty alleviation remains vulnerable to external shocks, such as the recession in the Russian economy and the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, recent macroeconomic data – yet of questionable reliability – show the surprising resilience of the Tajik economy.

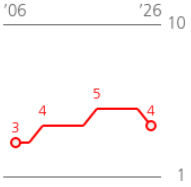
Aside from poverty reduction, the welfare system has not been among the government's top priorities. Health care spending has remained stagnant at about 7% of GDP during the reporting period, with more than half of that budget allocated to salaries and maintenance. The government's welfare responsibilities have mainly consisted of occasional minimal increases in compensation rates for social risks and the renovation of clinics and orphanages.

Officially, employers contribute 25% of total wages and salaries to the social security system, financing benefits for old age and disability pensions, sickness, maternity and unemployment and family allowances. Insured individuals contribute 1% of their salaries toward old age and disability pensions (retirement ages are 58 for women and 63 for men; the average pension was 321 somoni per month, or approximately $28, at the beginning of 2022). Sick leave benefits can generally be claimed for up to four months at a rate of 60% – 100% of salary, depending on the length of uninterrupted employment. Maternity benefits are provided to female citizens for at least 70 days

before and after childbirth at a rate of 100% of salary. In the event of unemployment, an individual can receive up to 50% of previous gross pay for a maximum of three months. Under the family allowance program, citizens of Tajikistan can receive up to 150 somoni upon the birth of a child and 50 somoni per month until the child is 18 months old, provided that one parent is employed in an insured position. However, due to the substantial informal sector – and employment – these transfer programs often exist only in theory.

Equal opportunity

4



The constitution guarantees equal access to education, public office and employment for all citizens. However, in practice, equality of opportunity has not been achieved. Individuals from the Rasht and Vakhsh valleys, the GBAO and the Uzbek and Kyrgyz minorities continue to face discrimination in government appointments and business opportunities. These opportunities are also largely denied to members of the political opposition.

Although there are no official legal obstacles to employment, ethnic minorities often struggle to secure government jobs due to a lack of proficiency in the Tajik language. Similarly, education opportunities are theoretically available to all citizens; however, corrupt admission practices limit access to higher education to those able to pay significant bribes. While legal provisions against discrimination exist, they are not consistently enforced.

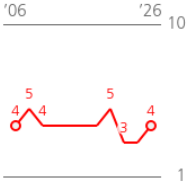
Education opportunities are equally open to boys and girls at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. However, there are significant gender disparities in higher education attainment. According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR), Tajikistan is ranked 111th out of 146 countries surveyed. The female-to-male ratio of individuals enrolled in higher education was 0.757, compared to 0.924 in secondary education. The gender gap in higher education attainment is particularly pronounced in rural areas. The introduction of a presidential quota mechanism – aimed at enabling girls from remote regions to pursue higher education – has had limited effect. In recent years, female participation in the labor force has increased, with women constituting approximately 37% of those working outside the home. However, this statistic does not account for the disproportionately high number of male labor migrants who have exited the country's labor market.

Women remain significantly under-represented in public offices and businesses. In the current legislative period, women hold only 19% (down from 23%) of the parliamentary seats and 6% of deputy-level ministerial positions (down from 13%). Although the country's economic reform and poverty reduction strategies contain robust components aimed at addressing these inequalities, various institutional, social and cultural factors have hindered their effective implementation. The political elite surrounding President Rahmon promotes a highly conservative and patriarchal societal model – in which women and youth occupy subordinate roles.

11 | Economic Performance

Output strength

4



Official data from Tajikistan's government is often viewed as unreliable by independent experts, especially in light of recent global developments. According to official figures, Tajikistan's economy has experienced robust GDP growth of 7% annually over the past decade, with a reported growth rate of 8.3% in 2023. Initially, observers anticipated higher volatility in the country's economic performance due to the increasingly strict sanctions regime against Russia and the worsening situation of labor migrants there. However, despite these challenges, the economy has proven to be remarkably resilient, with growth officially projected to moderate slightly to 6.7% in 2025.

Tajikistan operates with a significant trade deficit, primarily due to its reliance on imports for petroleum, food and capital goods. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the country's trade deficit has fluctuated between one-third and half of its gross domestic product (GDP) – reaching an estimated 25% in 2022. In 2022, the official unemployment rate was reported to be 7%; however, observers estimate the actual rate may be as high as 50%.

The government continues to primarily rely on foreign state-led loans and investments from China, Russia and Gulf States rather than fostering an environment favorable for private investment. Rampant corruption, nontransparent practices, power supply shortages, poor infrastructure and a burdensome regulatory process significantly hinder private investment in the country. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has shown significant volatility and decline in recent years, falling from $346 million in 2019 to less than $80 million in 2021. In 2022, FDI rose modestly to $174 million and in 2023 to $221.4 million. The largest investors in Tajikistan in 2023 were Kazakhstan, China and Russia. In prior years, Chinese investment accounted for up to 75% of total FDI.

In 2016, Tajikistan began constructing the Roghun Dam, a project led by the Italian engineering company Salini Impregilo. The initial cost estimate for the project was $3.9 billion; however, inflation, supply chain disruptions, a lack of skilled labor and environmental challenges have driven expected costs to $6.3 billion by 2024. The first phase of the dam became operational in November 2018, with plans for full completion and commissioning by 2033, providing a power generation capacity of 3.6 GW. Throughout the construction period, various obstacles – including logistical, technical and financial constraints – have caused delays.

A 2014 assessment by the World Bank supports the government's claim that the Roghun Dam is the most cost-effective solution to address Tajikistan's energy deficiencies. However, the studies also indicate that for the Roghun project to be financially sustainable, the government must implement energy sector reforms, raise electricity tariffs and ensure that the state-run Talco aluminum smelter pays its

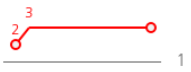
outstanding energy bills and debt, which have accumulated over the years. Currently, it remains uncertain whether the government has the ability or willingness to fully carry out these recommended reforms.

12 | Sustainability

Environmental policy

3

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Tajikistan has adopted a Green Economy Strategy (2023 – 2037) and pledged to implement sustainable practices across all sectors of the country's economy. However, aside from official statements by the president, environmental concerns receive only occasional attention and are largely subordinated to economic growth efforts.

About 62% of Tajikistan's energy is generated by hydropower and 37% by coal. Because of soil erosion, water pollution and deforestation, environmental degradation increasingly constrains economic growth. Cotton cultivation continues to rely on high levels of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, causing severe consequences for public health and water quality. Locally, the aluminum smelter in Tursunzoda, the chemical plant in Yovon, the cement factory and the heating facility in Dushanbe contribute to air pollution. Also, radioactive waste from the Soviet-era enrichment plant in northern Chkalovsk (now Buston) is stored in about 30 tailing dumps near residential areas without appropriate safety regulations – leading to serious public health implications. The remains of uranium, lead and mercury mining in central Tajikistan have contaminated water resources.

Environmental regulation exists but is rarely enforced – particularly in cotton cultivation, gold mining and aluminum production, especially regarding water and waste management. Measures to protect the environment are largely absent from tax policies. Legal and institutional frameworks for sustainable energy use remain rudimentary. Public awareness of environmental concerns is limited. Climate change has increased the incidence of floods, mudslides, avalanches and extreme weather conditions, and has accelerated the melting of glaciers in Tajikistan, eroding the resilience of poor communities. According to national authorities, an average of 150 small- or medium-scale disasters occur annually. However, when residents raise concerns about environmental safety, their pleas often receive inadequate response.

Education policy / R&D

4

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Tajikistan's education and training system remains substandard. Public expenditure on education has remained stagnant at approximately 6% of GDP since 2016. Enrollment and completion rates at the primary and secondary levels are the lowest in Central Asia. As of 2023, the gross enrollment rate is 99% at the primary level, 93% at the secondary level and 34% at the tertiary level. Female enrollment rates in secondary and tertiary education are significantly lower than those of males. The quality of schooling, particularly at the secondary level, is significantly impaired by a shortage of qualified teachers, low motivation, outdated textbooks and deteriorating school infrastructure. Most public school buildings require extensive repairs.

Facing a population growth rate of 1.9% in 2023 and the disintegration of Soviet-era educational infrastructure, the government has implemented various reforms in the education sector. These reforms include a transition from a 10-year to a 12-year education system. However, conflicting reports regarding the implementation of the reform have emerged, leaving it unclear how authorities plan to address shortages of school places and teachers. Scores on the United Nations' education index have shown a slight improvement, reaching 0.682 in 2019 – the most recent data available.

Despite these shortcomings, Tajikistan officially reports a high literacy rate of over 99%. However, this figure may mask underlying problems, including a growing number of young people, particularly women, who experience very weak literacy or only functional illiteracy. Most institutions of higher education are state-owned. Nonetheless, the government has consistently sought to convince foreign universities to establish branches in Tajikistan. Additionally, the country receives offers of subsidized placements (quotas) at foreign educational institutions, particularly in Russia, Kazakhstan and China. These quotas are then effectively exchanged for bribes. The government has created further hurdles for students seeking education abroad by demanding special permits to study, attend conferences or conduct research internationally.

Moreover, in most if not all of the country's higher education institutions, plagiarism by both students (in copying from textbooks or others' research) and faculty members (in reading from textbooks instead of writing their own lectures) is widespread and condoned.

R&D remains inadequate, with public spending on R&D consistently below 0.1% of GDP per year during the reporting period. More than half of the country's researchers are employed in 13 institutions in the higher education sector, with the rest largely working in the Academy of Sciences or in the more than 50 research institutes and design bureaus. The R&D sector faces severe challenges, including rampant corruption, underfunding, outdated equipment and aging staff. The emigration of talented youths, skilled scientists and researchers continues.

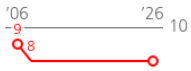
Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The structural constraints on governance in Tajikistan are significant. Key structural issues include a rugged terrain, a disadvantageous geographical location and underdeveloped transport infrastructure. Approximately 93% of the country's territory is covered by mountains, rendering large portions practically inaccessible during winter and unsuitable for agriculture. Moreover, Tajikistan faces challenges due to its rapidly expanding population and progressive soil degradation, resulting in a diminishing amount of farmland available per capita.

Structural constraints

8



Landlocked and bordered by Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, with a location 3,000 kilometers from the nearest deep-sea port, Tajikistan is likely the most isolated country in the region, with the highest transport and logistics costs. Chinese companies have invested in roads to improve the country's infrastructure. Recently, major roads connecting the north and south of the country have been refurbished. However, transport links during the winter months are considerably impaired. Overall, the country's road and rail networks remain underdeveloped.

After more than two decades of mutual obstruction and embargoes, bilateral relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have significantly improved. In 2018, the two countries signed several agreements, lifting trade and transport barriers that had impeded regional economic integration. In 2020, Tashkent and Dushanbe settled the remaining border disputes. Bilateral trade has tripled since then, reaching $750 million in 2023. Improved regional integration and ongoing Chinese investment will eventually reduce the country's isolation and structural constraints.

Tajikistan has weak traditions of civil society. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) largely depend on foreign grants, and the government has restricted their operational scope. Public trust in NGOs is low, and many NGOs resemble development consultancy companies rather than advocacy or interest groups. During the period under review, the government continued to exert pressure on human rights NGOs receiving foreign funding, forcing many to close. In December 2018, the Tajik parliament amended the Law on Public Associations, which exacerbates the challenges faced by NGOs in the country. The amendments included stiff requirements on financial reporting that few NGOs are able to meet.

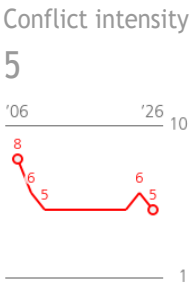
Civil society traditions

9



The country has a tradition of voluntary activities conducted by neighborhood groups and extended families. This tradition has not formed the basis for civil society development but instead fosters communalization. The intelligentsia, which participated actively in public life during the Soviet period, mostly left the country or was forced into conformity with the regime. During the COVID-19 pandemic, grassroots initiatives initially played an important role in informing the public about the disease but were later silenced by the authorities.

The government has established firm control over the Rasht Valley and the GBAO. Specifically, the Ismaili-Pomiri community has been systematically targeted and marginalized over the past decade. Due to the strategic and economic importance of the border with China, the already limited autonomy of local authorities in GBAO has been further constrained. In 2022, security forces dismantled the remaining informal authority networks in GBAO. Approximately 80 people were killed and more than 200 – among them almost all local civil society activists, such as Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva – were arrested, silencing any form of social or political dissent since then.



After a serious escalation of border conflicts with Kyrgyzstan over water distribution, land ownership and access to markets in northern Sughd in 2022 – with approximately 150 fatalities on both sides – the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments, which initially did little to reduce tensions and instead employed fierce nationalist rhetoric, eventually engaged in confidential negotiations on border demarcation, which were concluded in December 2024.

Tajikistan's political space remains dominated by the regime and is kept free of evidence of internal confrontation. The government represses activists from banned Islamic groups, resulting in deep grievances that may lead to their involvement in anti-state activities.

The government continues to label any form of social and political opposition as terrorism and uses it as a pretext to access international security assistance. Since 2022, about 20 to 25 Tajik citizens in Europe, Iran and Russia have been implicated in terrorist attacks or arrested on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks on behalf of IS-K. The Tajik authorities consider IS and IS-K the most serious security threats and have held IS-K responsible for two incidents in 2024 in Kulob and on the border with Afghanistan. However, in none of these cases did the authorities provide transparent documentation of the investigations or allow public court proceedings. The isolated and relatively low-tech militant attacks were likely of local origin and did not rely on a more elaborate network.

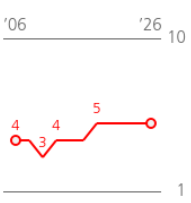
II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

Question Score

Prioritization

5



The government sets broad long-term aims and priorities and, in most cases, pursues them without interruption or political debate. Policymakers have identified five strategic priorities, as emphasized in the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2030 and the president's annual addresses to parliament. These priorities include achieving energy independence, eliminating communications isolation, ensuring food security and access to high-quality nutrition, expanding employment and addressing the alleged rise of radical Islam.

The regime's primary objective remains achieving energy independence. During the reporting period, construction of the Roghun Dam continued despite ongoing concerns regarding engineering, environmental impact and financing. The president and senior officials consistently emphasize the importance of building new hydropower plants and upgrading existing ones to position Tajikistan as a significant regional energy producer and exporter.

The regime also emphasizes the importance of overcoming the country's geographic isolation by constructing roads and railway lines that connect Tajikistan with major regional economic hubs. The government has attracted Chinese investment for major road projects; however, key regional railway projects have not yet included Tajikistan. Improved relations with Uzbekistan and the country's integration into China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative may change this situation.

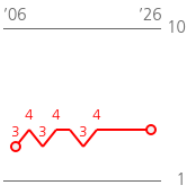
Despite pressure from foreign donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) to allocate more resources to social protection, education and health care, the government has maintained its long-term priorities. However, its strategic capacity to organize policy measures that would support long-term aims remains impaired by low levels of professionalism, lack of expertise and failure to embrace evidence-based policymaking. There are effectively no independent think tanks or academic institutions capable of critically assessing government policies, the current state of affairs in the country, governance issues or other pressing challenges to provide strategic insights and solutions.

The regime continues to claim that the development of democratic norms and institutions remains a priority. However, these assertions often appear to be mere rhetoric, primarily intended for the consumption of foreign donors, the media and IFIs.

The government has the capacity to gather administrative, human and financial resources to pursue its strategic priorities. It is implementing the strategic priorities outlined in the NDS 2030, as the – albeit slow – progress in constructing the Roghun Dam demonstrates. However, the authoritarian nature of the political system – characterized by a lack of accountability, transparency, cooperation, social inclusion and trust – routinely hinders the coherence of policy implementation. The government's deep-seated distrust of civil society involvement has clearly influenced its priorities, which tend to prioritize regime security above all else.

Implementation

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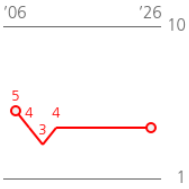


Hence, many government officials are hesitant to take initiative in implementing strategic policies or lack the necessary qualifications to do so. The president frequently reassigns officials, moving them from one position to another, often without regard for their expertise and skills in order to concentrate power in the hands of the autocrat and his close family. Consequently, many officials lack the institutional memory or qualifications needed to perform their duties effectively. Furthermore, a significant number of government members prioritize personal enrichment over the welfare of the country or the continuity of government policy.

During the review period, the government showed limited willingness and ability to engage in policy learning. Few institutionalized mechanisms exist to facilitate innovative policymaking. Learning from past experiences is significantly hindered by routine government reshuffling and weak monitoring and evaluation practices.

Policy learning

4



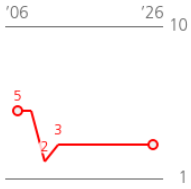
While donors and IFIs organize frequent workshops and study tours, their impact is limited because the government sends only a select few representatives to participate. The government also relies heavily on foreign consultants to develop policy measures, particularly for reforms driven by donors and IFIs. The high degree of centralization and rigid authority structure stifles policy innovation by preventing initiative from the lower ranks or from outside the governing circle.

The only notable exception to this trend is the expanding security sector. The state has invested substantial resources to strengthen loyalty to the regime and enhance the operational readiness of security forces, often with foreign assistance. Additionally, the state's repressive capacity has increased significantly, employing mechanisms such as electronic surveillance, with frequent intrusions into citizens' social media accounts and activities.

15 | Resource Efficiency

Efficient use of assets

3



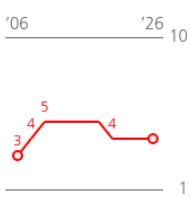
The government rarely uses its available human, financial and organizational resources efficiently. During the period under review, the president's extended family-maintained control over all high- to medium-level appointments. The 72-year-old president personally oversees all senior-level appointments within security and law enforcement agencies as well as the military. These appointments are primarily based on personal loyalty rather than professional aptitude and merit. Notably, the president's eldest son, Rustam Emomali, was appointed chairman of the upper house in 2020 while also serving as the mayor of Dushanbe – in an apparent move to prepare for a dynastic transition of power.

Although senior government officials consistently emphasize the importance of recruiting skilled individuals for government positions, the most lucrative positions – in terms of rent-seeking – within government institutions are typically allocated through informal mechanisms and patron-client networks. Some public offices – particularly in the presidential administration, the office of the Dushanbe mayor and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – have attempted to recruit skilled professionals for lower-rank positions through relatively transparent and competitive processes. However, the government remains suspicious of the hundreds of individuals who have received education in Western countries and is therefore reluctant to hire them. The president and his inner circle determine the allocation of the state budget, including matters related to debt management, without any independent audit. Additionally, the parliament lacks oversight over budgetary affairs.

In 2020, the government announced a local development action plan to delegate authority to local district (nohiya) and province (viloyat) level governments. However, this autonomy is generally limited to social affairs, and the central government often disregards the delegation mechanisms when it finds intervention necessary.

Policy coordination

4



The highly centralized decision-making structure enables coordination of key policies among various ministries and agencies in the event of conflicting interests. Duplication of responsibilities by different offices has largely been eliminated in critical sectors – particularly among security structures – but remains widespread across the government. A relatively strict hierarchy of policy priorities simplifies decision-making processes. All policy objectives are subordinated to internal security and regime survival. The president and his close associates monopolize major security and foreign policy decision-making. The president also assigns responsibilities for major policy areas to trusted members of the family network. At the same time, weak communication both across and within agencies, inefficiencies in government bureaucracy, personal distrust and corruption undermine the coherence of government policy.

During the review period, high levels of corruption and abuse of power have remained pervasive within Tajikistan's political system. A culture of impunity prevails among the security forces. The government largely fails to address or mitigate corruption effectively. Although several agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Anti-Corruption Agency, the Prosecutor's Office and the State Committee of National Security, are tasked with combating corruption, Tajikistan does not appear to have a cohesive anti-corruption strategy.

Anti-corruption policy

2

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There are no conflict-of-interest rules or codes of conduct, and independent audits of state spending are not carried out. Additionally, parliamentary discussions on the state budget do not take place. Despite pressure from donors and international financial institutions (IFIs), the government has yet to establish a transparent public procurement system. Furthermore, journalists and bloggers who report on corruption involving public officials face censorship and often encounter persecution, harassment and imprisonment, including on charges of libel, defamation and extremism.

Public prosecution of corruption primarily takes place due to political considerations or at lower levels of state administration, especially in sectors such as health, education, infrastructure and agriculture. Because the president's immediate circle of family and friends holds all major government positions, any investigation into corruption signals changes in the hierarchy rather than a shift in political orientation.

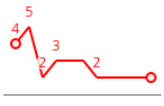
16 | Consensus-Building

The dominant elite surrounding the president continues to claim that mature democracy is a long-term priority and that it has, in fact, been partly achieved in recent years. In practice, however, their commitment to democratic institutions is entirely superficial and cynical. The Western model of political transformation is explicitly rejected, while ideas of an authentic Tajik patriarchal political and social order are popularized in textbooks and government media – though not systematically developed as alternative models. The dominant political elites are widely seen as lacking legitimacy or an election-based popular mandate.

Consensus on goals

2

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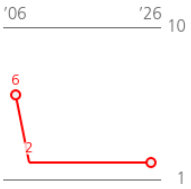


With the exception of the Communist Party (CPT), which has not been represented in parliament since March 2025, all registered political parties emphasize their dedication to democracy and the free market. Some members of the ruling elite present themselves to the international community as reform-minded individuals. However, it is impossible to assess the extent to which these individuals would remain committed to meaningful economic reforms if they attained full power. The important fact is that Tajikistan's political and economic system is patron-based and therefore institutionally opposed to democratic or market reform.

The only veto players who overtly oppose democracy in practice are members of the ruling regime who have banned or excluded all significant political opposition in the country. Very few relevant political actors are genuinely committed to advancing democratic reforms, and if they exist, they sit outside the center of power. The political culture remains closed and anti-pluralist. In recent years, domestic and international discourse on security and religious extremism has contributed to the entrenchment of anti-democratic power players.

Anti-democratic actors

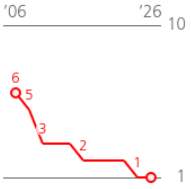
2



As the dialogue initiatives of the post-civil war period fade into distant memory, political leaders have neither reduced existing divisions nor prevented conflicts based on cleavages from escalating. The most influential cleavages, based on regional and ethnic lines, affect a wide range of people. The president's extended family and close associates from Danghara and Kulob in the southern Khatlon region monopolize most high- to medium-level government positions and lucrative economic resources. Citizens of Gharmi origin from the Rasht and Vakhsh valleys, natives of Sughd and GBAO provinces and ethnic Tajiks born in Uzbekistan still lack access to political and economic resources. The significant Uzbek minority, which makes up around 20% of the population, as well as the smaller Kyrgyz and Slav (Russian) minorities, also remain marginalized. The political elite consistently aims to suppress conflicts based on cleavages rather than moderate them. Establishing a broad societal consensus is not currently a government priority.

Cleavage / conflict management

1

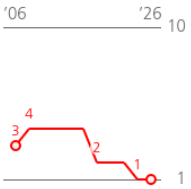


The government promotes an exclusive ethnic nationalism that merges an ethnic-based identity with a narrow conception of highly patriarchal Tajik Islam. Official identity politics have a negative impact on gender equality and worsen divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Specifically, repressive government policies target Ismaili Muslims. Persistent propaganda has deeply influenced how the Tajik public perceives the Ismaili community in Tajikistan – there was no criticism of the excessive violence employed during the government's crackdown in the GBAO, nor was there any solidarity shown with the Ismaili community. Similarly, the government did not mediate the conflict between Tajik and Kyrgyz border communities but instead heightened tensions by employing nationalist rhetoric.

Although the government has occasionally allowed civil society actors to participate in the deliberation of social policies, their involvement in developing economic, political or security policies is minimal. Civic organizations are also excluded from policy implementation and performance monitoring. They are viewed as complementary service providers and are expected to avoid contentious issues. Civil activism tends to be spontaneous, ad hoc and issue-specific, often dissipating as quickly as it emerges. The government capitalizes on this weakness, typically managing to weather initial social backlash following specific incidents – then works from within to discredit social activists. During the reporting period, the demonstrative persecution of citizen journalists, social media "influencers" reporting or commenting on social issues and human rights defenders reflected a steady decline in the deliberative political process.

Public consultation

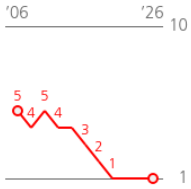
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In the first decade after the civil war, the political elite chose to avoid addressing past injustices and continued to formally practice a "forgive-and-forget" policy in connection with offenses that occurred during the civil war between 1992 and 1997. Most crimes committed during this period are covered by a general amnesty stipulated in the peace accord. During the period under review, there were no significant prosecutions for non-amnestied crimes. However, the government has largely abandoned the policy of formal and informal restrictions on discussing the civil war. Government officials, state-owned media, school textbooks and academics and intellectuals co-opted by the state blame the opposition for political violence of the 1990s, particularly the IRPT. Therefore, broad-based reconciliation is not possible at this time.

Reconciliation

1



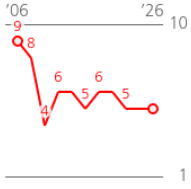
The ongoing political and economic marginalization of citizens of Gharmi origin from the Rasht and Vakhsh valleys, as well as the isolation of Pomiris, has increasingly led them to feel like the "losers" of the war. There remains a high level of distrust among the previously warring regional groups. The political exclusion of the IRPT reflects the manipulation of the past for political purposes – surprisingly, it has provoked little domestic or international backlash.

17 | International Cooperation

Tajikistan's government seeks to leverage international assistance for its long-term development agenda, as outlined in the National Development Strategy 2030 (NDS) and poverty reduction strategies. With significant Chinese investment and improved relations with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan may now have the capacity to implement key aspects of the NDS, such as enhancing infrastructure and addressing the nation's geographical isolation. Chinese investments and credits are playing a growing role in Tajikistan's economy, signaling a notable shift from the period when the previous national development strategy was adopted. China's One Belt, One Road Initiative offers opportunities for infrastructure investment that are not contingent on economic reform, though these may include political and economic conditions favoring Chinese businesses and excluding their competitors.

Effective use of support

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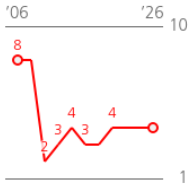


The Asian Development Bank, European Union, IMF and World Bank continued to provide direct budget support despite the country's pervasive corruption. The government has often solicited international support to address short-term needs, particularly for infrastructure maintenance, responses to natural disasters or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's Western partners and donor agencies often emphasize the importance of political reform during meetings with senior government officials. However, their ability to advance meaningful reform remains limited. Moreover, the regime is aware of – and willing to exploit – significant contradictions between key Western powers' democratization and political reform agendas and their foreign policy and security interests. Overall, the government's capacity to effectively channel available international support into long-term beneficial projects is limited.

Tajikistan's credibility as an economic and political partner is significantly undermined by corruption. For example, reports of off-shore companies being used to hide profits from road tolls and aluminum production have contributed to a widespread perception of corruption in Tajikistan. In an effort to improve its reputation and cultivate a more competent image, the government has promoted younger, Western-educated officials, often recruited from existing elite circles. However, their impact has been limited due to their frequently presumptuous behavior. Rampant corruption is a significant deterrent to foreign investment in the country's economy. Numerous government agencies and entire ministries have been blacklisted by international organizations and NGOs for misusing donor funds. As a result, engaging with state agencies carries significant risks.

Credibility

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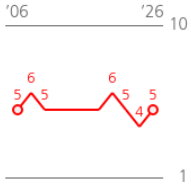


Tajikistan is increasingly viewed as a human rights pariah because of its brutal treatment of political opposition and civil society activists in recent years, which has included credible allegations of torture. Additionally, the government has misused the Interpol Red Notice system to harass political dissidents outside the country. Equally concerning are the frequent extraditions of alleged dissidents from Russia, who are arrested and imprisoned upon return. During the reporting period, European countries such as Germany and Italy extradited Tajik asylum seekers to Tajikistan despite the problematic human rights situation in the country. Beyond human rights, Tajikistan generally respects its commitments and complies with international agreements such as the CIS free trade agreement or its trade in services (GATS) commitment to the WTO.

The government generally supports cooperation with neighboring states and regional integration initiatives. During the period under review, the country's relations with Uzbekistan have continued to improve. The détente between the two neighbors has alleviated Tajikistan's transport isolation, leading to stronger regional integration as well as a significantly increased trade volume.

Regional cooperation

5



Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Tajikistan has taken a much more antagonistic stance toward Afghanistan. President Rahmon has responded to Western security concerns and invoked the imminent threat of violence spilling over from Afghanistan to destabilize Central Asia. This seems intended to secure international security assistance. At the same time, Rahmon has leveraged the chaotic withdrawal of NATO forces and the political crisis in Afghanistan to present himself as a guarantor of stability and order at home. During the reporting period, the Tajik government has maintained its official position that the Taliban government is illegitimate but has pursued an accommodating strategy. Tajikistan continues to export electricity to Afghanistan, and several border markets have reopened. Additionally, representatives from the Tajik and Afghan intelligence agencies have exchanged information on the IS-K in recent months.

Relations with Kyrgyzstan, the country's northern neighbor, deteriorated dramatically in 2022. Conflicts over water management, land use rights and access to markets – which date back to unresolved border delimitation disputes from the

Soviet period – escalated in 2022 into violent border clashes with more than 150 fatalities. In the reporting period, the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments have toned down their fierce nationalist rhetoric. In confidential negotiations, both governments agreed on the final delimitation and demarcation of the disputed sections of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in December 2024. A formal agreement is expected in 2025.

Tajikistan has continued to participate actively in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). However, the country's policy toward Western organizations, particularly the OSCE, has deteriorated. After 30 years, the OSCE has suspended its election observation mission to Tajikistan for the parliamentary elections in March 2025 because Tajik authorities refused to cooperate with the organization. Tajikistan's confrontational stance stems from an increasingly hostile attitude toward what it regards as Western concepts of development cooperation and political transformation.

China remains Tajikistan's largest creditor, accounting for an estimated 75% of the country's foreign debt ($2.4 billion). In 2020, China established a secretive military base in Tajikistan's autonomous GBAO, leading to a transformation of the country's regional and domestic security dynamics. Previously, Tajikistan had relied solely on Russia for security assistance and military presence in southern Tajikistan. China's economic and political influence in the country is expected to expand further. The war in Ukraine has diminished Russia's standing as an economic and political partner in the region. Nonetheless, Tajikistan's heavy reliance on remittances from labor migrants residing in Russia continues to give Moscow significant leverage over the Tajik government. This dynamic directly influences Dushanbe's relations with the West and its security policies.

Strategic Outlook

Tajikistan remains an authoritarian state with a consolidated elite centered around the incumbent President Rahmon and his family. The closed political system has rendered the domestic opposition ineffective, while political and personal animosities hinder the fragmented and divided opposition in exile. The government continues to selectively follow the economic and financial policy recommendations favored by international financial institutions and has managed to maintain economic growth. However, this growth has not resulted in a tangible trickle-down effect, leading to a concentration of wealth in the hands of the few with political connections.

After 30 years of authoritarian consolidation, these observations suggest that international organizations are, to some extent, complicit in the status quo. A different approach to Tajikistan is required – one that recognizes the state's dependency on remittances and foreign financing. International actors must acknowledge that far from being agents of change, by failing to speak out against the regime's abuses of power, they inadvertently serve as de facto apologists for it. Given the extent of poverty in the country, the international community should exert pressure on the regime to provide adequate support to the failing social sector – in particular health care and education, which the government has deprioritized.

However, Western states, international organizations and NGOs have limited leverage over a government that is neither committed to reform nor considers itself dependent on the donor community, especially with China's increasing role. FDI from Western states will likely remain limited due to the political risks in Tajikistan. Russia and China remain far more important than any other foreign actors. Tajikistan's future may be tied to the economic policies and international relations of these two states, given the country's growing reliance on financing from and trade with China and the prominent role still played by Russia diplomatically, militarily and as the host country for most of the country's labor migrants despite the loss of trust in Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. The question for Tajikistan, and indeed for Central Asia as a whole, is whether China's infrastructure investments will ultimately lead to Beijing playing a greater role in regional politics and any future crises. The recent détente with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is not the result of external mediation initiatives, but of decision-making processes within the narrow circle of dominant elites. However, regional integration is by far one of the most positive developments in recent years, with tangible benefits for the local population.

Alongside economic stability and growth, internal security challenges remain a concern. These challenges relate to struggles among elites within the state rather than to internal terrorist or foreign threats. Localized, small-scale outbreaks of political violence may occur, but due to their isolated and low-tech character, they will not threaten the regime's stability. A spillover of violence from Afghanistan is unlikely, since ruling elites on both sides of the border benefit from current informal arrangements that facilitate undisturbed drug traffic via the Northern Route.

Although the regime is not committed to political and economic reform, it is attentive enough to maintain some support from a significant portion of the population and to allow the marginalized to leave the country via seasonal labor migration for better prospects abroad. The regime has also fostered a stronger sense of unity among the majority ethnic Tajiks by promoting aggressive, ethnic-based nationalism. The public sphere is expected to be further restricted and monitored – leaving bleak prospects for civil society, intellectuals and dissidents.

Providing security assistance to such a regime effectively aids and abets the misdiagnosis and mismanagement of existing problems. In light of this, the international community should refrain from further technical assistance to the government's security forces until they show signs of implementing reforms that would lead to accountability within the security services and acceptance of the rule of law. Likewise, Western countries should suspend the extradition of Tajik nationals – in particular those with contacts to the opposition – due to the human rights situation in Tajikistan.