

Uzbekistan

by Bruce Pannier

Capital: Tashkent
Population: 26.0 million
GNI/capita: US\$2,190

The social data above was taken from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's *Transition Report 2007: People in Transition*, and the economic data from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2008*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

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

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uzbekistan gained its independence in 1991, and since that time, a government led by President Islam Karimov has maintained strict control over the country. The judicial system has rendered verdicts in step with the government's internal policies, and state media have touted government success while remaining silent on shortages of basic foods and civil unrest. At times, the government has eased control over independent media and political organizations in the country, only to rein in these groups when their criticism increased. The repression became much worse, despite vigorous criticism and heightened attention from international rights organizations and Western nations following the 2005 violence in Andijan, during which Uzbek government troops opened fire on an assembled crowd. This event marked a watershed for the Uzbek government's policies, and since then the Uzbek government has worked with renewed energy to stamp out any perceived opposition or threat to stability. Political and social groups, foreign-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), rights defenders, foreign media, and religious communities have all faced legal actions; organizations were closed, and activists were jailed by order. Uzbek authorities also tightened control over local groups, especially the political opposition, rights activists, journalists, and members of various religious communities.

Repressive conditions continued in 2007: Harassment of independent journalists, rights defenders, and members of religious groups (particularly non-mainstream Islamic and non-Russian Orthodox communities) as well as further closures of foreign-based NGOs occurred throughout the year in Uzbekistan. The government denied involvement in the October killing of 26-year-old Alisher Saipov, an independent journalist critical of President Karimov's regime, despite assertions from opposition groups to the contrary. Also in October, the European Union (EU) lifted the visa ban established after the events in Andijan, "with a view to encouraging the Uzbek authorities to take positive steps to improve the human rights situation,"¹ just prior to the release of a 90-page report on the continued use of torture in Uzbekistan.²

With political and economic support from Russia and China, and once the government had purged Western organizations from Uzbek territory, the regime's hold on society remained seemingly unchallenged in 2007. Thus, it did not come as a surprise when Uzbek authorities ignored constitutional restrictions and allowed President Karimov to win an unconstitutional third term in the presidential elections held in December.

National Democratic Governance. President Islam Karimov has exerted unchallenged control over Uzbekistan since the country gained its independence in 1991. Members of the five registered political parties, all of them loyal to the president,

compose the two-chamber Parliament. Uzbekistan has a strongly centralized government, with nearly all decisions made in the capital. During 2007, no efforts were made to reform the political system or to allow citizens greater participation. *The executive branch of Uzbekistan's government continues to dominate all aspects of society and proved again in 2007 its absolute intolerance of criticism and dissent. Thus, the national democratic governance rating remains at 7.00.*

Electoral Process. In December 2007, Uzbekistan held a presidential election that saw incumbent Islam Karimov win an unconstitutional third term in office without any official attempt to explain the legal basis for this violation. President Karimov's term officially expired on January 22, 2007, yet he remained in office based on a constitutional amendment. State media remained silent regarding the elections until mid-September, when officials announced that elections would take place on December 23, 2007. Six state-approved candidates were forwarded, including the first female and independent candidates, but only four were registered by the November 16 deadline. The Central Election Commission ignored several rights activists and members of the unregistered opposition who announced their intention to enter the presidential race. *While Uzbek authorities, particularly electoral officials, made token gestures of recognizing the mechanics of a democratic election (candidate access to voters and media), all opposition representatives were, in effect, barred and a genuine competition did not take place. Uzbekistan's rating for electoral process for 2007 worsens from 6.75 to 7.00.*

Civil Society. Voicing criticism or publicly disagreeing with government policies remained difficult if not impossible for civil society organizations in Uzbekistan. However, a protest against rising prices of basic goods reported in Uzbekistan's section of the Ferghana Valley did result in government intervention to lower prices. This was an exception resulting from declining social conditions in one area. Other attempts at smaller political protests were quickly broken up. Members of the Birlik movement tried unsuccessfully to register a civic initiative group to forward a presidential candidate. *In 2007, the Uzbek government again harassed and detained rights activists and members of religious communities and ordered the closures of more foreign-based NGOs. As a result, Uzbekistan's rating for civil society remains at 7.00.*

Independent Media. Uzbekistan has never proven fertile ground for independent media. Independent journalists who remained in Uzbekistan faced the usual difficulties in 2007, but reports of their harassment declined, reflecting the authorities' success at silencing critical voices inside the country. The murder of Alisher Saipov, a journalist critical of the regime and its policies, raised the suspicions of many who saw the Uzbek government as the only party interested in the correspondent's death, though it happened in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek government blocked the appearance of these and other news stories on several Internet Websites. *Continued harassment of independent journalists, blocked opposition Web sites, and the government's suspected involvement in the killing of an independent journalist in*

neighboring Kyrgyzstan have assured that Uzbekistan's rating for independent media remains at 7.00.

Local Democratic Governance. Uzbekistan has a strongly centralized government, and provincial, regional, district, city, and town officials are chosen for their ability to carry out Tashkent's orders. There is no opportunity for citizens to elect their local officials. The right to petition official decisions is provided by law, but few citizens believe they can receive justice in such disputes. *In 2007, nothing was done to address key problems of local democratic governance. Accordingly, Uzbekistan's rating for local democratic governance remains at 6.75.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. The judiciary continued to serve as an arm of the executive branch of government in 2007. Uzbek courts jailed independent journalists, rights activists, and members of minority religious groups and ordered the closures of foreign-based NGOs. Acts of clemency coincided with key foreign policy events for the Uzbek government and thus appeared as token gestures to curry favor. No effort was made at reforming the judicial system or giving it more independence. *The Uzbek court system continued its practice of placing formal legal pronouncements on the decisions of the executive branch by ordering the closures of foreign-based NGOs and fining and incarcerating rights activists, independent journalists, and members of religious communities. With no deviation from this well-established proclivity, Uzbekistan's rating for judicial framework and independence remains at 6.75.*

Corruption. The problem of corruption was not seriously addressed in 2007, though three former provincial governors were dismissed and charged with abuse of office. In other reported cases, however, officials engaged in illegal activities with relative impunity. An international organization tracking corruption worldwide ranked Uzbekistan as one of the most corrupt countries on the planet. *Former and current officials stood trial for abuse of office, though in some cases the punishment seemed lenient for the crime. Uzbekistan's rating for corruption remains at 6.50.*

Outlook for 2008. Concerns have been growing over the future of Uzbekistan after President Karimov, who turns 70 in 2008. Yet little evidence suggests the Uzbek regime will ease its control over society during the coming year, especially after the election of President Karimov to an unconstitutional third term in office. Karimov appears convinced that support from Moscow and Beijing will shield his government from any actions that might come from Western countries. Furthermore, the EU decision to lift sanctions against Uzbekistan, as well as renewed contacts with high-level U.S. officials, will probably be interpreted by Tashkent as proof that Uzbek authorities need only outlast criticism and sanctions for Western nations to eventually seek warm ties again. Thus, there is little hope that Western governments could exert any effective pressure on Karimov's regime to implement democratic reforms or show a greater respect for human rights.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00

In his speech to the nation on August 31, 2007, the eve of Independence Day, Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, remarked: "The key strategic tasks of this stage are to further promote democracy and to liberalize all aspects of political and economic life, to advance the state and public life, to strengthen the independent judicial system, to protect human rights and liberties, to encourage political and economic activeness, and to build the fundamentals of civic society."³ Such a strategy would mark a drastic change in the way the Uzbek government has ruled the country. President Karimov has dominated Uzbekistan's politics since the country gained independence. The executive branch exerts control over not only the legislative and judiciary, but nearly every aspect of running the country. Though the Constitution provides guarantees for all basic rights, the law of the land is in fact whatever President Karimov wishes.

The economy is centrally planned, perhaps in part because of the president's background as a Soviet-era trained economist, with quotas established for key sectors—particularly agriculture, where many farmers must sell a percentage of their harvests to the government at low state rates. Furthermore, there are no checks on the Uzbek government, making it difficult to know how decisions are made, how much revenue the country takes in, or how that money is spent.

In 2007, Uzbek government agencies cited economic statistics claiming the country's gross domestic product growth was more than 9.5 percent in the second and third quarters of the year, compared with the same period in 2006.⁴ These statistics could not be verified independently. The government also claimed an increase in foreign investment; according to state media, in March foreign investment grew 20 percent compared with the same period in 2006. In July, Uzbekistan's Ministry of Economics and the State Statistics Committee announced that Uzbekistan had attracted US\$416 million in foreign investment (a figure that owes much to the Uzbek government's friendship with Russia and China) in the first half of the year—more than twice the amount during the same period in 2006.⁵

Since the violence in Andijan in May 2005, in which the Uzbek government sent in troops who opened fire on an assembled crowd, Uzbek authorities have attempted to build relations with China and Russia while working with renewed energy to stamp out any perceived opposition or threat to stability. Many foreign-funded organizations, including media and humanitarian aid groups, were forced to close. Uzbek authorities also tightened control over local groups, especially the political opposition, rights activists, journalists, and members of various religious

communities. Political and social groups, foreign-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), rights defenders, foreign media, and religious communities have all faced legal actions, forcing organizations to close and jailing activists by order.

Western nations and international rights organizations vigorously criticized Uzbek authorities for the heavy-handed action in Andijan. In response, in July 2005, the Uzbek government demanded that U.S. forces using a military base in southern Uzbekistan for operations in Afghanistan leave Uzbek territory. Four months later, in November, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan, including an embargo on arms exports to the country and an EU-wide ban forbidding member countries from issuing visas to “those individuals directly responsible for the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in Andijan.”⁶

In 2007, while Uzbekistan’s relations with both Russia and China were strong and cushioning Karimov’s regime against Western criticism, Karimov showed some signs of improving relations with the West. Yet despite meeting with EU representatives and U.S. government officials—including Central Command chief General William Fallon—the Uzbek government remained cautious in its dealings. In May, when the EU voted to extend the sanctions, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry responded with a statement calling the EU decision “unfounded and biased” and an “instrument of systematic pressure on Uzbekistan dressed up in human rights rhetoric.”⁷ However, in October, without the Uzbek government making much effort to demonstrate progress in respect to human rights, the EU lifted the sanctions “with a view to encouraging the Uzbek authorities to take positive steps to improve the human rights situation.”⁸

Government stability centers on President Karimov, who has constructed a formidable security force and on occasion pursued enemies of the state into neighboring countries. Usually, civil disobedience is quickly and publicly punished with coverage on state media to set an example of the penalty for opposing the government. Yet in 2007, despite the efforts of security forces, protests against rising prices of basic goods in Uzbekistan’s section of the Ferghana Valley did result in government intervention to lower prices. In a telling sign of the security problems, President Karimov himself visited the area in late June. Reports indicated that security measures for Karimov’s visit to the provinces included cutting off phones in the region and blocking mobile phone calls, as well as shutting down streets in Namangan.

Banned Islamic groups continue to oppose President Karimov and his government. Several, including Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), call for the overthrow of the Karimov government and the establishment of an Islamic state. Hizb ut-Tahrir seeks this through nonviolent means, while the IMU has already used violence. Neither is currently in a position to topple the regime, but terrorist attacks in February 1999 and March–April 2004 and small IMU-armed incursions into Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 demonstrate that these and other groups do pose at least a security threat in Uzbekistan.

Reported arrests of members of banned Islamic groups decreased in Uzbekistan in 2007, but the number of those arrested in neighboring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,

and Tajikistan increased during the year. In most cases, those arrested had links to Uzbekistan. In September, the German government announced that three men detained on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in Germany were linked to the Islamic Jihad Union, a group that in March–April 2004 claimed responsibility for terrorist attacks in Bukhara and Tashkent and, according to German investigators, maintains contacts in Uzbekistan.

History has shown that in the wake of terrorist attacks, the Uzbek government's response was quick and severe and, according to statements from international rights organizations, excessive. The government has sponsored at least two documentary films on militants and terrorists; the most recent portrayed the Uzbek government's view of the Andijan violence.⁹ Some groups and analysts have warned that the government's heavy hand in dealing with such groups encourages disillusioned youth to join such movements. The government has cast an increasingly wide net over society as these acts of violence occurred, with each incident eliciting an increasingly severe response. Islamic communities have been under surveillance for years, and in September, during Ramadan, authorities limited prayer hours and specified when children could attend mosque. The authorities put a new focus on Christian groups in 2007, with the exception of the Russian Orthodox community.

In late August, the International Crisis Group released a report titled *Uzbekistan: Stagnation and Uncertainty*, which included this assessment: "Two years after the Andijan massacre, the country remains a serious risk to itself and the region." The report also notes: "The political scene is full of uncertainty. The apparent public apathy reflects not support for the regime but rather pervasive fear and a sense of hopelessness."¹⁰ Additionally, the magazine *Foreign Policy* and the Fund for Peace published their third annual Failed States Index Score in June 2007. The survey rates 177 countries "in order of their vulnerability to violent internal conflict and societal deterioration." Uzbekistan ranked 22nd, making it the most vulnerable country in Central Asia.¹¹

Electoral Process

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00

Five registered political parties exist in Uzbekistan, all of which are pro-presidential. With the exception of the Erk (Freedom) Democratic Party, which was registered for a brief period after the 1991 independence, opposition political groups have never been allowed to enter elections. Furthermore, Parliament has adopted a law introduced by President Karimov that purportedly strengthens the role of political parties but seems only to give them a louder voice for agreeing with the president.

Having served as first secretary since 1989, Islam Karimov became president of the newly independent Uzbekistan in 1991. In 1995, a referendum extended his first term in office. In 2000, presidential elections were held, and Karimov's

sole opponent, Abdulhafiz Jalolov, emerged from the voting booth and announced that he himself had voted for the incumbent. Karimov was therefore elected to his second, and constitutionally last, term in office. A national referendum in 2002, however, changed the Constitution and again extended the president's term in office an extra two years.

Karimov's presidency was due to expire on January 22, 2007, the seventh anniversary of his inauguration—a date ignored by Uzbekistan's state media. Yet even in early 2007, signs suggested that improvements to presidential election procedures were not likely.

Opposition groups and rights activists posted open letters and appeals for international help in pressuring the Uzbek government to speak about the planned 2007 elections. According to the Constitution, elections must be announced 90 days before the opening of the polls. However, a report leaked on September 18 revealed that the Central Election Commission (CEC) had named December 23 as the election date, based on a constitutional amendment from the 2002 referendum.

When campaigning officially started on September 21, there were no declared candidates. According to CEC chairman Mirza-Ulughbek Abdusalomov, campaigning begins with the process of preparing documents and collecting the signatures of 5 percent of eligible voters—814,870 individuals.¹² Furthermore, according to the CEC, the candidate's registration process would finish only in mid-November.

None of the country's five registered, pro-presidential political parties held congresses to nominate candidates until November, though by early October the parties' elites had already named their candidates. The party with the largest parliamentary faction—the Liberal Democrat Party—nominated President Karimov as its candidate, despite the fact that Karimov was constitutionally bound to step down after two terms in office. Two other parties—the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan and Adolat Social-Democratic Party—nominated their own candidates, unlike in previous elections when all five parties backed Karimov. Candidates from *Fidokorlar* and *Milli Tiklanish* were later denied registration because they failed to collect the requisite number of eligible voters' signatures.

True opposition groups such as the *Birlik Popular Movement*, *Erk Democratic Party*, or *Ozod Dehkonlar Partiyasi* (Free Peasants Party) had their registration denied. One civic initiative group backed by the government managed to nominate a candidate, Akmal Saidov, but other such groups without government backing were rejected. Others who declared their intention to run, like Suhbat Abdullayev,¹³ Akbar Aliyev,¹⁴ and rights activists Abdullo Tojiboy Ogli, Akhtam Shoymardonov, and Jahonghir Shosalimov, were simply ignored and excluded.

Karimov easily won the election. None of his opponents received even half a million votes.¹⁵ Western election monitors have never deemed any of Uzbekistan's previous elections free or fair. In 2007, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sent a "limited election observation mission" that did not "conduct any systematic and comprehensive observation of election-day proceedings" because of "the apparent limited nature of the electoral competition."¹⁶

Observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States, however, and those from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (a monitoring team of three people) said the election was well organized, free, fair, and transparent.

Civil Society

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.50	6.50	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00

Uzbekistan's Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and freedom to form social organizations. It also provides for freedom of religion. According to Uzbekistan's Religious Affairs Committee, a total of 2,222 religious organizations are registered in Uzbekistan (2,042 Islamic, 164 Christian, 8 Jewish, 6 Baha'i communities, 1 Krishna community, and 1 Buddhist temple).¹⁷ In 2007, although there was a drop in the number of people reportedly arrested for being members of banned religious organizations, Uzbek authorities did not demonstrate improved respect for the rights of religious groups, including small Christian communities.

The Norway-based group, Forum 18, chronicled the case of Protestant pastor Dmitri Shestakov, convicted in March of inciting inter-religious hatred, leading an illegal religious organization, and possessing illegal extremist recordings. He received a four-year sentence of internal exile and was subsequently imprisoned in his home in Andijan province. By late March, Forum 18 reported that Shestakov was prevented from kneeling while praying and that his copy of the New Testament was taken away from him and he was offered a Koran to read instead. Two months later, Forum 18 reported Shestakov's transfer to a labor camp in central Navoi. The camp was reportedly "much harsher" than the prison in Andijan, and Shestakov remained much farther from family and friends in eastern Uzbekistan.¹⁸

Forum 18 reported in September that the Uzbek National Security Service (NSS) had stepped up surveillance of religious communities in recent years. The human rights organization said surveillance included "hidden microphones in places of worship, the presence of NSS agents during worship, and the recruitment of spies within communities."¹⁹ The Muslim community also came under special scrutiny, and reports indicated that during the fasting month of Ramadan, authorities banned children from attending night prayers and placed adults on a ten P.M. curfew.

Transitions Online published an article by Felix Corey of Forum 18 in late September in which Corley wrote that Uzbek state television aired a two-part program (November 30–December 1, 2006) on Christian groups called "Hypocrites."²⁰ The program reportedly accused some Christian groups of luring people in with the promise of money, and "soon the targeted people become complete zombies." In October, the Russian news agency Interfax reported that the Tashkent Office of the Prosecutor accused the local Evangelical community,

registered in Uzbekistan since 1992, of using psychotropic drugs. Other Christian groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Pentecostal, Grace Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, faced legal problems, and some members were jailed for illegal religious activities.

Overall, the number of reported arrests of members of banned Islamic groups in Uzbekistan declined in 2007. There were, however, several reported arrests of Hizb ut-Tahrir members and "Wahhabis," a term the Uzbek government uses to denote anti-government Muslims rather than the Islamic sect from Saudi Arabia. The decreased number of arrests in Uzbekistan has accompanied an increase in the number of members from such groups detained in neighboring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Also in 2007, the Uzbek government continued its crackdown against foreign-based NGOs through the assistance of the legal system. In February, the Justice Ministry stated that "dozens" of foreign-based NGOs failed to submit reports on their activities and financial sources, as required by Uzbek law. Quite often the Justice Ministry included other charges to discredit foreign-based organizations. In late February, the Justice Ministry claimed that not only did the U.S.-based NGO Population Services International²¹ fail to submit required legal paperwork, but the group also supported the "interests of homosexuals" in Uzbekistan. The ministry said, "PSI is especially famous for its projects universally asserting interests of persons with unorthodox sexual orientation," adding that homosexuality is punishable by up to three years in prison in Uzbekistan.²²

The Uzbek state Website (press-uz.info) reported in January that the U.S.-based NGO Counterpart International, closed down in Uzbekistan in 2006, was providing radioactive rice to areas in Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad province. That charge was rejected shortly afterward by the Kyrgyz NGO Center for Supporting Civil Society, which took the opportunity to thank Counterpart International for its help.

In mid-April, Human Rights Watch said the Uzbek government had halted the rights organization's activities in Uzbekistan. On April 13, the Uzbek Justice Ministry notified the director of the Human Rights Watch office in Tashkent that her work accreditation had been denied, as she had "exceeded her authority" and "worked outside the office charter."²³ The accreditation was reportedly taken away two weeks before the EU met to consider extending sanctions against Uzbekistan.

A few rights defenders continue their activities and reports from Uzbekistan, among them the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan, the Rights Defenders Alliance of Uzbekistan, and Ezgulik (Goodness).

Throughout 2007, the case of rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva was closely followed within and outside of Uzbekistan. Turayeva was detained on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border in January when a search of her belongings revealed books that prosecutors claimed called for the overthrow of Uzbekistan's constitutional government. In late April, Turayeva was found guilty of encroachment on the constitutional regime, slander, and proliferation of materials posing a threat to

society. She received a six-year jail sentence. On May 10, Human Rights Watch released a statement announcing Turayeva had received an additional prison sentence during a second trial on May 2–7. However, the sentence against Turayeva was overturned in June after she reportedly criticized several independent journalists in court who had fled the country after the May 2005 violence in Andijan. Rights defenders, including some Turayeva mentioned, attributed the alleged statement to the authorities' pressure on her while she was detained.

Yelena Urayeva and her colleague Abdulla Tojiboy-Ogli, of the Rights Defenders Alliance of Uzbekistan, were placed under house arrest in early February. Urayeva was arrested, along with two others, on February 12 for trying to stage a protest against Turkmenistan's presidential election outside Turkmenistan's embassy. On November 6, the independent *uznews.net* reported that Urayeva had been denied permission to fly to Ireland for an international rights activist conference.

On February 21, police broke up an attempted demonstration outside the Senate building in Tashkent. Rights activists planned to protest the detention of independent journalists and rights defenders Umida Niyazova and Mutabar Tojibayeva. That same day, Akrom Khoja Mukhitdinov and activists from the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan held a protest outside the Foreign Ministry building, calling for the resignation of the foreign minister, Vladimir Norov. Mukhitdinov received a sentence of 10 days' administrative detention for organizing the demonstration.

At the end of 2007, poet and rights activist Yusuf Jumayev protested in Bukhara, demanding the resignation of President Karimov and calling for his son's release from jail. His son, Mashrab, had been arrested at the end of November for involvement in a fight. On December 10, Yusuf Jumayev staged a "picket on wheels" around Bukhara with banners calling for Mashrab's release. Later that day, police arrived at Jumayev's home, reportedly killing the family dogs before arresting Jumayev. On the day of his arrest, the Website *press-uz.info* posted an article claiming Mashrab had stabbed a man in the back because Mashrab was having an affair with the man's girlfriend. The article asked Yusuf Jumayev how "he could raise a son who would stab people in the back?" The article also said that "the Jumayevs apparently think that 'if we defend the people's rights, then we can do anything we want.'"²⁴

At the beginning of November, the organization Human Rights Watch released a 90-page report about the continued use of torture in Uzbekistan. By the end of that month, Uzbek rights activists reported two separate incidents in which men convicted for religious activity—Fitrat Salohiddinov and Tohir Nurmuhammedov—were tortured to death while in prison. In an April 19 statement, Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director of Human Rights Watch, urged the EU (preparing to review sanctions against Uzbekistan in May) to make respect for human rights an integral part of a new EU strategy toward Uzbekistan. Cartner mentioned the plight of many of Uzbekistan's rights defenders now jailed or kept under house arrest and surveillance, saying, "These prisoners of conscience are paying the price of the EU's feeble human rights policy."²⁵

Independent Media

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00

Uzbekistan's Constitution states, "The mass media shall be free and act in accordance with the law. It shall bear responsibility for trustworthiness of information in the prescribed manner. Censorship is impermissible." Yet Reporters Without Borders ranked Uzbekistan near the bottom of its list, 160th out of 169 countries, in its annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index in October—a move that perhaps more accurately reflects the state of media freedom in Uzbekistan.

At the beginning of 2007, a 32-year-old woman with a small child was investigated for attempting to overthrow the constitutional government. Umida Niyazova traveled to Kyrgyzstan in May 2005 to speak with people in Andijan. Upon her return to Uzbekistan in late December 2006, Niyazova was detained, while authorities confiscated her research and her computer. She was released but taken into custody again at the end of January 2007 under charges of illegal border crossing, smuggling subversive literature, and distributing materials that threaten national security. International rights organizations issued dozens of statements and appeals leading up to and following Niyazova's trial. OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Miklós Haraszti also publicly called for her release. Nonetheless, on May 1 she was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. A Tashkent appellate court suspended Niyazova's sentence one week later, just prior to an EU meeting to consider maintaining the November 2005 sanctions.

In August, Reporters Without Borders issued a statement concerning the declining health of independent journalist Jamshid Karimov (President Karimov's nephew). In 2006, Jamshid was arrested and placed in a psychiatric hospital. The August 2007 statement revealed that Jamshid had smuggled a note to friends describing his failing health and asserting that he had been given psychotropic drugs. That same month, Reporters Without Borders issued a press release on the eve of Uzbekistan's independence celebrations to condemn "the severity of governmental repression of independent news media and human rights activists, especially when they try to point out the lack of democracy and freedoms, combat discrimination or expose corruption or torture."²⁶ Reporters Without Borders cited the cases of Said Abdurakhimov of *uznews.net* and Aleksei Volosevitch of *ferghana.ru*, who were detained and interrogated by the military on July 23 "for unclear reasons." The release from the Paris-based organization also claimed that "Deutsche Welle correspondent Nataliya Bushuyeva would almost certainly have been imprisoned if she had not fled the country after being accused of working without a license and tax fraud in March." Bushuyeva and three other Deutsche Welle journalists²⁷ were accused of failure to pay taxes and working without accreditation.

The absolutely dire situation of independent media in Uzbekistan was demonstrated on October 24, when Alisher Saipov, a 26-year-old Voice of America journalist and father of a three-month-old daughter, was gunned down as he left

work in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Saipov reported critically on the crackdowns on dissent and the use of torture in Uzbekistan. Two days before his murder, Saipov reportedly told friends he thought Uzbek security agents were following him. Friends, colleagues, and opposition figures such as Erk Democratic Party leader Muhammed Solih directly accused Uzbek authorities of the killing. Websites such as *centrasia.ru*, *ferghana.ru*, and others carried a number of articles asserting similar accusations against the authorities.

The Uzbek government denied any involvement in Saipov's murder, but two days after the tragedy occurred, state-controlled Web providers reportedly blocked Websites carrying articles on the slain journalist. The Web site *ferghana.ru* reported that several Russian-language Internet publications became inaccessible in Uzbekistan after they published articles speculating on the possible reasons for Saipov's murder. Uzbek authorities had also blocked Russian Websites earlier in the year, including the Russian-language religious news Website *portal-credo.ru*, *newsru.com*, *rian.ru* (RIA Novosti), *lenta.ru*, *gazeta.ru*, and *trud.ru*.²⁸

According to amendments to Uzbekistan's media legislation that came into effect in January 2007, Websites fall under the category of media outlets—meaning they come under legislation requiring all local and foreign media to register with the authorities and must provide the names of their founder, chief editor, and staff members. Furthermore, Websites must provide authorities with copies of each publication.

Print media also came under attack. In late July, authorities ordered the closure of the independent weekly *Odam Orasida* (*Among the People*). The Islam-oriented weekly reported on issues such as infant mortality, homosexuality, and prostitution from a Muslim point of view. *Odam Orasida* began publishing in February, but by July, at the time of its closure, its circulation had reportedly reached 24,000 in Tashkent. Editor Khairullo Khamidov told the Associated Press that authorities claimed they had breached media legislation, but did not elaborate on these breaches.

Local Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75

Citizens of Uzbekistan do not choose their provincial, regional, district, or city officials. Instead, local authorities are chosen according to their perceived ability to remain loyal to the regime while carrying out tasks from Tashkent. As a result, local officials must balance the wants and needs of constituents with the possible personal repercussions for making special requests from the central government. Furthermore, while citizens have the right to petition for change or register complaints, most citizens assume they will face punishment for their suggestions or complaints.

Officials receive sets of tasks or goals to be met for their area. Once officials achieve these, they have completed their duty. This system leads to reporting false

figures when target figures cannot be met and, in cases of surplus, the opportunity for officials to enrich themselves.

This system of local governance lacks personal initiative, as demonstrated during the Andijan violence of May 2005. Officials in Andijan initially allowed the demonstration, as orders did not come from Tashkent to prohibit it. When the violence broke out, the same Andijan officials proved too slow in reacting, and some were taken hostage during the disorder.

Family and clan play a significant role in local governance. Families tend to be large in rural areas, which constitute most of the country. A local official is likely to have dozens of blood relatives and relations by marriage living within a 50-kilometer radius. Such relatives usually profit from this situation, and it is not uncommon that local leading businesspeople are somehow related to local officials. In a number of areas, particularly in western Uzbekistan, communications with Tashkent are poor, which, when combined with nepotism, creates a favorable environment for corruption.

Rights defenders have complained about corrupt local officials in open letters posted on opposition Websites, but officials rarely look into such stories. For example, the governor of Jizzakh province served as the source of complaints posted on opposition Websites for several years, yet his dismissal and detention came only in 2007.

Saidullo Begaliyev, governor of Andijan province in May 2005, went on trial in January 2007 for abuse of office. Some held him partially responsible for the Andijan incident, suggesting he upset the arrangements his predecessor had with local businessmen when he took office in 2004. The businessmen whose trial sparked the original Andijan protest allegedly had agreements with Begaliyev's predecessor, but not with Begaliyev.²⁹ That predecessor, Kobiljon Obilov, also went on trial in 2007. The Web site *uznews.net* reported on his conviction for helping to organize the Andijan unrest. He received a one-year suspended sentence in a closed trial in late January.

A new law passed in 2007 gives political parties more influence in the selection of regional and local officials as well as in the naming of a prime minister. The new law refers to elections of provincial governors chosen by the president and approved by the five parties, but does not provide citizens with the ability to elect their local officials.³⁰

Judicial Framework and Independence

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75

Despite the separation of branches of government enshrined in Uzbekistan's Constitution, the judiciary does not function independently but is an extension of the executive branch in Uzbekistan. Prosecutors and courts give formal, legal

backing to the government's internal policies. The government selects judges, but the criteria these judges must meet to receive their positions remain unclear.

One judge, Zokir Isayev, who presided over the trials of alleged organizers of the Andijan violence, fled to Kazakhstan at the end of October, asking for political asylum. Should Judge Isayev ever decide to speak to the media, he may provide details regarding the inner workings of Uzbekistan's court system. He has already accused unnamed government officials of using the president's name to "destroy anyone who is in their way."³¹

Trends in Uzbekistan's judiciary are clearly visible. Defendants must overcome a number of obstacles to meet with lawyers. Those facing charges of supporting banned religious groups or conspiring to overthrow the government are assumed and treated as guilty prior to their trial. Owing to closures of foreign-based NGOs, a decreasing number of observers are able to attend the trials of independent journalists, rights activists, and members of religious groups—when those trials are open to the public.

Local and international rights groups have chronicled the cases of numerous defendants who claimed their confessions were made under torture. Uzbek courts regularly ignore these claims, but the UN's special rapporteurs on torture have consistently confirmed these statements of coerced confessions. Uzbek rights activist Elena Urlayeva sent an open letter in March to the UN Committee Against Torture, asserting that the systematic beating of prisoners continues in police detention centers.

During 2007, Uzbek courts convicted independent journalist Umida Niyazova, rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva, Isroil Kholdarov of the opposition Erk Democratic Party, Birlik member Mukhamadali Karabayev, and Pentecostal pastor Dmitri Shestakov and sentenced them to several years in jail. In March, Rustam Muminov, extradited from Russia amid great controversy in 2006, was found guilty of being a Hizb ut-Tahrir member and sentenced to five years and six months in jail. Courts gave lesser sentences to Jehovah's Witnesses Irfon Hamidov and Dilafruz Arziyeva (both received two years in a labor camp), members of God's Love Pentecostal Church Hudoer Paradaev and Igor Kim (10 days detention in a holding cell), and Akrom Khoja Mukhitdinov from the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan (10 days detention in a holding cell). However, in October, the Tashkent Economic Court annulled the 1999 purchase of a former cinema used as a house of worship by the Grace Presbyterian Church.

Corruption

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.50	6.50

The levels of corruption in Uzbekistan remain difficult to gauge owing to the secrecy of the government—for example, beyond a few individuals, no one knows the key governmental officials. The information available suggests that a great deal

of state corruption persists. Many lower-level representatives, such as police officers and border guards, are likely to take, or demand, bribes as opportunities present themselves.

Occasionally, local officials are dismissed and taken to court on embezzlement charges. In January, the independent Website *uzmetronom.com* reported that Interior Ministry spokesman Alisher Sharipov and Aziz Ernazarov, head of the Interior Ministry's newspaper (*On Duty*) and magazine (*Defense*), faced charges of abuse of office. Both had served for several years as the voice of Uzbekistan's Interior Ministry, explaining arrests and imprisonments and denying accusations of beatings or other mistreatment of prisoners. In 2007, Uzbek courts convicted other former officials, including Andijan governor Kobiljon Obidov, who was given a one-year suspended sentence for abuse of office. The punishment for fallen officials, however, appears light compared with what is given the rest of society under similar circumstances. Reports have also surfaced about the construction of a new special prison for incarcerated bureaucrats in Tashkent's Yunus-Abad district.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2007 revealed Uzbekistan as the most corrupt country in Central Asia and ranked 175th out of 180 countries globally. According to the CPI the state of perceived corruption in Uzbekistan had worsened from its score of 2.1 in 2006 to a score of 1.7 in 2007—a significant drop on the 0–10 scale (where 10 is the best possible score, indicting perceived as least corrupt).

In October, Surat Irkamov, chairman of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan, posted an open letter on the Website *centrasia.ru* claiming that the local administrative head, prosecutor's office, and district judges of Tashkent's Yunus-Abad district were using the law to seize people's apartments.³² Later in October, another article was posted on *centrasia.ru* reporting that Jizzakh governor Ubaidulla Yamonkulov was brought handcuffed to Tashkent by helicopter, facing charges of embezzlement of millions of dollars during his six years in office. Reports also indicated that Yamonkulov terrorized his constituents for several years.³³

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- ² Human Rights Watch, *Nowhere to Turn; Torture and Ill-Treatment in Uzbekistan*, November 6, 2007.
- ³ “Karimov Hopes to See Strong Civil Society,” Interfax, August 31, 2007, http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:0BJDFbx3ON0J:goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/summary_0199-6908975_ITM+%22The+key+strategic+tasks+of+this+stage%22&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1.
- ⁴ Prime Minister Sharif Mirziyayev on July 18 said gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first half of 2007 was 9.7 percent, compared with 2006. On October 18, the government reported GDP growth for January–September was 9.8 percent, compared with the same period in 2006.
- ⁵ “Foreign Investment in Uzbekistan Up 2.2 Times,” Interfax news agency, July 26, 2007.
- ⁶ “Press Release: 2678th Council Meeting, General Affairs and External Relations, External Relations Council Conclusions (Provisional), Luxembourg,” Summary: EU External Relations Council Conclusions, Luxembourg: October 3, 2005, http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_5086_en.htm.
- ⁷ “Uzbekistan Rebuffs EU Sanctions,” Agence France-Presse, May 17, 2007, as appeared in *Turkish Daily News*, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=73353>.
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- ¹⁰ “Uzbekistan: Stagnation and Uncertainty,” International Crisis Group, Asia Briefing No. 67, August 22, 2007, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5027>.
- ¹¹ Tajikistan was at position 39, Kyrgyzstan at position 41, Turkmenistan at position 43, and Kazakhstan at position 103.
- ¹² Abdusalomov also noted there were 16,297,400 registered voters in Uzbekistan.
- ¹³ Suhbat Abdullayev, a medical doctor from the western Kwarezm province, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Uzbek Service in a September interview that officials “summoned me to the regional national-security committee and told me so openly [that I should run].” Gulnoza Saidazimova, “Uzbekistan: Field of Presidential Hopefuls Wider, Not Deeper,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 29, 2007, <http://rferl.com/featuresarticle/2007/09/a05355ba-bbb7-44ad-8ef3-240ca340967c.html>.
- ¹⁴ Akbar Aliyev described himself in a September interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Uzbek Service as a “scientist, poet, sociologist, philosopher, historian, and specialist in literature” and said he had been unemployed since 1997. Aliyev said the authorities had no role in his decision to seek the presidency. Gulnoza Saidazimova, “Uzbekistan: Field of Presidential Hopefuls Wider, Not Deeper,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 29, 2007, <http://rferl.com/featuresarticle/2007/09/a05355ba-bbb7-44ad-8ef3-240ca340967c.html>.
- ¹⁵ According to the final tally given by Uzbekistan’s Central Election Commission on December 28, Karimov took 88.1 percent of the vote—Asliddin Rustamov of the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan received 3.17 percent, Diloram Tashmukhamedova of Adolat Social-Democratic Party 2.94 percent, and Akmal Saidov, who was nominated by a civic group, 2.85 percent.

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