

Uzbekistan

by Bruce Pannier

Capital: Tashkent
Population: 26.9 million
GNI/capita: US\$2,430

The data above was provided by The World Bank, *World Bank Indicators 2009*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	1999-2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Electoral Process	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00
Civil Society	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Independent Media	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Governance*	6.25	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	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	6.89

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since Uzbekistan's independence in late 1991, the government led by Islam Karimov has maintained strict control over the country. The judicial system has consistently backed government policies and jailed perceived enemies of the government. President Karimov banned or declined registration to early Uzbek opposition groups, and law enforcement agencies focused on preventing groups from rising to a level where they could mount a challenge to President Karimov's regime.

In an attempt to demonstrate independence from Russia, President Karimov initially embraced Islam as the state religion but later reined in the influence of Islamic groups inside Uzbekistan. President Karimov also demonstrated his intentions to break ties with Moscow by flirting with Western countries, particularly the United States. As a result, many Western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were allowed to establish offices in Uzbekistan, but ties with the West soured abruptly when Western nations called for an independent international investigation into the events in Andijan in May 2005. In response, Uzbekistan scaled back ties with the West tremendously, closing down foreign broadcasting companies such as the BBC, Radio Ozodlik, and Deutsche Welle and, eventually, Western-based NGOs. U.S. forces stationed in Uzbekistan were ordered to leave within six months, and the Uzbek government turned to Russia and China for investment and security guarantees.

Ties with the West warmed significantly in 2008, owing mainly to the security situation in Afghanistan. The West depends on Uzbekistan for transit rights to Afghanistan, and Afghanistan's stability is essential for Uzbekistan. President Karimov attended the NATO Bucharest Summit in early April 2008 and agreed to allow NATO forces to expand their use of an Uzbek military base at Termez (on the Afghan border) and to transport nonlethal cargo for efforts in Afghanistan through his country. Yet there was no discussion of allowing the return of Western-based organizations evicted from the country.

Russian and Asian companies remain Uzbekistan's partners of choice for trade relations, but in a gesture to the West, Uzbekistan announced its withdrawal from the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Community toward the end of 2008.

The first month of 2008 established a pattern in Uzbekistan's new relations with the West. On January 1, 2008, the death penalty was officially abolished in Uzbekistan, a move international rights groups and some governments had been calling on Uzbekistan to make for years. That same month, President Karimov began his third term as president despite the country's constitutional two-term presidential limit. The abolition of the death penalty was applauded by Western nations; while the inauguration of Karimov for an unconstitutional third term in office was met with muted criticism in the West.

Western nations seemed content to note small signs of progress on human rights, such as the release of jailed independent journalists and rights activists ahead of meetings with European Union (EU) representatives, though as usual it was not long before other journalists and activists in Uzbekistan filled the emptied jail cells. The EU lifted the most significant remaining sanctions against Uzbekistan when ministers met on October 13, 2008, to again consider the sanctions imposed on the Uzbek government after Andijan. Despite the fact that Uzbekistan failed to meet almost all of the conditions originally set by the EU in order to lift those sanctions, the EU ministers agreed to keep only the rather meaningless sanctions on selling Uzbekistan weapons (Uzbekistan buys nearly all its weapons from Russia) but lifted travel bans that had kept several top Uzbek government officials from visiting any EU member state. The day the EU lifted the travel ban, a prominent independent journalist was jailed by an Uzbek court on charges declared “made up” by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Ten days later, Uzbekistan’s National Security Service chief, whose name was on the travel ban list, visited Germany. Human Rights Watch issued a statement noting, “Rustam Inoyatov, head of the National Security Service of Uzbekistan, flew to Germany on the same day that an Uzbek court sentenced a prominent human rights activist [Azam Turgunov] to 10 years in prison on what some called politically motivated charges.”¹

National Democratic Governance. President Karimov continues to rule Uzbekistan according to his wishes. No serious domestic objections were raised to his winning an unconstitutional third term at the end of 2007, and there were no challenges to his authority in 2008. The judiciary continued to support Karimov’s decisions and jail his perceived enemies, and barring any serious health problems, it is unclear when the 71-year-old president might leave office. *There was no change in the dominance of the executive branch of government and no reason to believe any reforms will come as long as the current regime maintains power. Uzbekistan’s rating for national democratic governance remains at 7.00.*

Electoral Process. Uzbekistan did not hold any elections in 2008, but the year opened with the inauguration of incumbent president Karimov to serve an unconstitutional third term in office. Both previous terms were extended through national referendums. Parliamentary elections should be held in late 2009, but that poll is virtually meaningless since all the registered political parties are pro-presidential and have never raised any serious objections to President Karimov’s proposals. Two of the five registered political parties—the Milli Tiklanish (National Revival) Party and the Fidokorlar (Self-Sacrificers)—merged in June. Legislation passed at the end of 2008 bars independent candidates from competing in elections. *There were no suggestions of electoral reform from Uzbek authorities or any of the registered civic groups in Uzbekistan during 2008. No serious efforts were made, or even discussed, to reform Uzbekistan’s electoral system, which organizations like the OSCE*

have heavily criticized in the past, and with parliamentary elections due in 2009, there appeared to be no progress in registering any new, truly alternative political parties for the impending poll. Uzbekistan's rating for electoral process remains at 7.00.

Civil Society. Within a tightly confined space, there are a handful of rights activists allowed to work, but owing to the vigilance of internal security forces, generally, there are no independent groups of sufficient size or influence in Uzbekistan to effect change in the country. Those individuals who do protest government policies risk detention, arrest, imprisonment, and abuse. Nearly all Western-based NGOs have left the country, with no signs the government will reconsider allowing them to return. Members of nontraditional religious groups (neither state-approved Islam nor Russian Orthodox) continue to experience difficulties in registering, practicing, or teaching their religion, and even Islamic groups continue to be closely monitored. *Since it is possible only for state-supported or -sanctioned groups—political, social, or religious—to exist in Uzbekistan, the rating for civil society remains at 7.00.*

Independent Media. Uzbek authorities have practically stamped out any signs of independent media in Uzbekistan. No independent media outlets are registered in the country, and those journalists who continue to contribute reports to media sources broadcasting to Uzbekistan from outside the country do so at great risk. Foreign radio stations such as the BBC and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were still denied permission to reopen the bureaus that were closed shortly after the Andijan violence. At the same time, 2008 saw an increase in state media's efforts to portray all outside influences, especially foreign media, as contrary to the values Uzbekistan's citizens should uphold and respect. Uzbek authorities have scared and intimidated nearly all of those trying to present alternative news to the country and the world outside and worked fairly effectively at blocking Web sites carrying information critical of the Uzbek authorities. *There are no independent media in Uzbekistan, and there is no indication the Uzbek authorities have any desire to ease their control over media; therefore Uzbekistan's rating for independent media remains at 7.00.*

Local Democratic Governance. Uzbekistan's government is highly centralized, with all decisions of any importance being made in the capital, Tashkent. Local officials are selected by the central government based largely on their perceived loyalty to the state, making sure the state's will is implemented while the desires of the local populace remain of secondary importance. The population has no say in their official representation or any means to change those officials without the intervention of the central government. *Local officials continue to answer only to the government in Tashkent, and their positions are secure only as long as they are perceived to be carrying out the tasks the central government sets them. As a result, Uzbekistan's rating for local democratic governance stagnates at 6.75.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. The executive branch of government continues to exert great influence over the judiciary, and nearly all court decisions are in line with the government's policies. Though there were a few surprise court decisions in 2008, judges for the most part took their cue from Tashkent when rendering verdicts. There were no efforts to reform the judicial system during 2008. *As the judicial system has consistently backed government policies and jailed perceived enemies of the government, and law enforcement agencies work to prevent opposition groups from challenging the regime, Uzbekistan's rating for judicial framework and independence worsens from 6.75 to 7.00.*

Corruption. At the beginning of 2008, the Speaker of the Parliament and a parliamentary deputy were dismissed, demonstrating the infiltration of corruption in Uzbekistan at all levels of government. Yet the opaque nature of the political system makes it impossible to say with certainty just how widespread and serious the problem is. A reassuring sign in itself, Uzbek media did report on a number of crimes and court cases against lower-level officials. No reports addressed the wealth accumulated by the president, his family, or his friends, though they obviously enjoy a lifestyle far beyond the means of most of Uzbekistan's citizens. *There were no official, publicized efforts to fight corruption in Uzbekistan in 2008, though authorities claim to have charged hundreds of lower-level officials with offenses. Tales of corruption in the top echelons of government persist but have gone uninvestigated, or certainly without much publicity; therefore Uzbekistan's rating for corruption holds at 6.50.*

Outlook for 2009. There is little reason to believe there will be much change in Uzbekistan in 2009 as long as President Karimov continues to rule the country. Karimov's government has achieved a foreign policy balance that suits the Uzbek president. Western governments' need for Uzbekistan is greater than the Uzbek government's perceived need for the West, at present. With Russia and East Asian countries facing difficulties owing to the global economic crisis, foreign investment in Uzbekistan should decrease. Furthermore, decreasing employment opportunities for the many Uzbek migrant laborers in Russia and Kazakhstan who send money back to families in Uzbekistan means a substantial decrease in remittances, and many will likely return home. As the ranks of the country's unemployed swell, social tensions could break out. The Uzbek government's history is such that it can be expected to deal severely with any such outbreaks, but even security institutions may be hard-pressed to contain widespread public discontent.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

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

The situation remains dismal, a fact emphasized when President Islam Karimov started an unconstitutional third term in office in 2008. Karimov weathered Western criticism and European Union (EU) sanctions following the Andijan violence. But during the course of 2008, Western nations perceived a growing strategic need for cooperation with Uzbekistan that led to muted criticism and the lifting of most of the post-Andijan sanctions against Uzbekistan. With this, and a renewed seven-year mandate as president, Karimov seems well poised to continue his undisturbed rule in Uzbekistan.

Though the Constitution enshrines basic freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of peaceful assembly, the state in fact has shown little enthusiasm for defending them. The ability of President Karimov to win an unconstitutional third term in office without a word of protest from any Uzbek official gives some indication of how the Constitution is regarded.

Citizens have the right to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections, but since presidential elections to date have heavily favored the incumbent and all the political parties are pro-presidential, these elections have never offered a genuine alternative. Authorities have continually ignored requests to register opposition parties, and legislation passed in late 2008 excludes independent candidates from competing in elections.

The power of government is concentrated in the executive branch. The Parliament simply formalizes the president's legislation, and the judiciary formalizes punishment to perceived challengers or threats to the regime. Therefore the executive branch makes all major decisions, and there are no legal channels for citizens to realistically challenge those decisions.

Security forces in Uzbekistan exert effective control over the country, though some militant Islamic groups have staged attacks. Analysts of the region and critics of the government say the appearance of groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), or more recently the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), is a natural result of a system that does not permit genuine choice and represses and jails potential opponents. The IMU staged armed incursions into Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 and has been linked to later attacks. The IJU claimed responsibility for bombings and attacks in Bukhara and the capital, Tashkent, in 2004.

Another group—Hizb-ut Tahrir—is active, although the Uzbek government long ago banned it. Hizb-ut Tahrir's doctrine forbids using violence in attaining

the group's goal—an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia. Uzbek authorities have been hunting down the group's members for a decade, jailing possibly thousands of Hizb-ut Tahrir supporters. International and local rights organizations have reported abuses against Hizb-ut Tahrir members, including the use of torture while incarcerated.

There were no violent incidents in Uzbekistan involving any of these outlawed Islamic groups during 2008, but the authorities continue to express concern about their potential threat to security. The fight against these groups is still often used to justify crackdowns in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan remained politically stable during 2008, but the draconian measures ensuring that stability restrict citizens from voicing any opposition to the authorities or acting in ways that deviate from the state's vision of order.

Electoral Process

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

Elections were not held in Uzbekistan in 2008, but parliamentary elections are scheduled for late 2009. There are now four registered political parties in Uzbekistan (after *Fidokorlar* and *Milli Tiklanish* merged in June 2008), but all are pro-presidential and differences in party platforms are often difficult to discern. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) monitored earlier parliamentary and presidential elections, none of which, in their judgment, met democratic standards.

The 2007 presidential election was practically a non-event in Uzbekistan, announced barely 90 days before the December 23 poll, with campaigning starting only in the second half of November. The OSCE released a statement in early December saying, “Due to the apparent limited nature of the competition, it is not considered necessary to deploy short-term observers, and the OSCE/ODIHR will not conduct any systematic and comprehensive observation of election-day proceedings.”

Presidential and parliamentary elections are the only polls held in Uzbekistan that involve the electorate. There are no regional or local elections, as the government in Tashkent selected officials at those levels.

Parliamentary elections offer a choice among four parties—the Liberal Democratic Party, the People's Democratic Party (formerly the Communist Party), the *Adolat* Social Democratic Party, and *Milli Tiklanish*—all pro-presidential. Even the election of these deputies falls in line with the wishes of the president; in the last two elections, the party President Karimov praised fared well in elections.² Members of minority groups and women are also deputies.

Just before the end of the year, Parliament approved a move to expand the number of seats in the lower house from 120 to 150 as of July 1, 2009. Under this

new structure, 15 of those seats will go to the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, a group created in August.

None of President Karimov’s opponents since Muhammad Solih—a member of the opposition Erk Democratic Party who officially won 12.7 percent of the vote in the 1991 elections—has ever received more than 4.1 percent of the presidential ballot.³ Commenting on the 2007 presidential election, ODIHR spokesperson Urdur Gunnarsdottir said the poll “was held in a very controlled political environment, which did not really leave much room for real opposition, and this election failed to meet many of the commitments that OSCE states have made to hold democratic elections.”⁴ The OSCE preliminary assessment one day after the presidential contest said that the election “did not offer a genuine choice.”

The 2007 presidential election was the first such poll in Uzbekistan where a candidate from a public initiative group (Akmal Saidov) competed. Critics said Saidov’s candidacy was contrived by the authorities, noting that other public initiative groups, some connected to opposition parties, could not register their nominees for the election. In December 2008, Uzbek media reported that Parliament had passed legislation excluding initiative groups from nominating candidates for elections. On December 6, the state-owned newspaper *Halq Sozi* wrote, “There is no need for such an imperfect practice like nomination of candidates from citizens’ initiative groups today, when an effective multiparty system has been created and is developing in Uzbekistan and when social, political institutions have developed highly.” The article suggested that criminal groups could use initiative groups to nominate their own candidates.

Civil Society

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

Constitutionally, religious and social groups in Uzbekistan have the right to register and conduct their activities as long as they do not violate the laws of the country. In reality, the situation is quite different.

Only groups sanctioned by the state can work in Uzbekistan, and the authorities have moved with increasing efficiency to halt the activities of any groups or organizations that represent, or potentially could represent, a challenge to the regime. The legal system, far from providing protection for such groups and organizations, usually acts as the agent of their closure.

Western-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) practically do not exist in Uzbekistan, though there are some government-operated NGOs. By the end of 2006, many of the foreign-based NGOs working in Uzbekistan prior to the Andijan violence in 2005 were closed. The vast majority of these NGOs were European- or U.S.-based efforts promoting democratic institution building or independent media and were usually closed for violations of Uzbekistan’s tax regulations or failure to provide all required documentation to the Ministry of Justice. The fact that in 2008

there were fewer investigations and closures of foreign-based NGOs testifies to the efficiency of Uzbek authorities in previously shutting down such organizations.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), often in concert with other rights and media freedom organizations, consistently urged the EU to maintain the sanctions imposed on the Uzbek government following the Andijan violence. One of the conditions the EU set for removing the sanctions was allowing some Western-based NGOs in Uzbekistan to reopen. Yet in late July, just prior to a meeting of EU ambassadors in Tashkent, HRW issued a statement urging the EU to maintain sanctions on Uzbekistan, noting the case of HRW's Tashkent representative, Igor Vorontsov, who had been denied work accreditation and was informed by Uzbek authorities while traveling abroad that he would not be allowed to return to the country. According to HRW, "Uzbek authorities stated that they would consider an alternative candidate for the post, but that that candidate 'should not be Russian.'"⁵ HRW added that "the basis given for this denial was that Vorontsov was, according to the Uzbek authorities, 'not familiar with the mentality of the people of the region' and was not capable of understanding 'the changes and reforms' taking place in Uzbekistan."

With the perceived threat of foreign-based NGOs promoting democratic values and media freedoms neutralized, 2008 saw a concerted effort to close down nontraditional religious groups (those outside the state-approved version of Islam or Russian Orthodox), and authorities used the state media to spread the campaign against these groups.

In May 2008, a program entitled *In the Clutches of Ignorance* was aired on Uzbek television's First Channel, warning that "missionary activities have turned into a global problem along with religious dogmatism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and drug addiction." The program criticized Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Presbyterians, Methodists, the Christian Full Gospel Church, and Blagodat. The Norway-based religious freedom monitor Forum 18 wrote often about events in Uzbekistan in 2008 and reported that *In the Clutches of Ignorance* aired again just prior to a broadcast of the Euro 2008 football championship.⁶ Forum 18 followed with a report in late June that said leaders of 26 Protestant congregations published an open letter complaining that the program was "encouraging intolerance and hatred of religious minorities" and that it presented "garbled facts, aggressive attacks, lies, and slander" against named members of churches.⁷

Forum 18 covered a number of incidents involving Christian communities. In January, the organization reported that Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Kagan faced ongoing police harassment and death threats.⁸ The group tried to register two years earlier but was still awaiting an answer. A week later, Forum 18 reported on Pentecostal Pastor Dmitri Shestakov, who was serving a four-year term in a labor camp, and Jehovah's Witnesses Irfon Khamidov and Dilafruz Arziyeva, who were serving two-year prison sentences. Forum 18 noted that the failure to free Arziyeva "is surprising, as [a recent] amnesty applies to almost all women serving sentences."⁹ There were many other examples: Baptists in Ferghana were fined for meeting for Sunday worship; and a young female member of the Jehovah's

Witnesses in Samarkand was taken to a police station, where she was “stripped and touched inappropriately by an apparently drunk police officer, Akmal Tilyavov,” in March. In April, Jehovah’s Witness, Olim Turayev of Samarkand, was tried and convicted of holding an unapproved religious meeting and teaching religion without state permission. He was sentenced to four years in prison.¹⁰ Samarkand Protestant, Bobur Aslamov, was detained in a police raid, and his whereabouts were unknown.¹¹

Uzbek TV’s Second Channel aired a program about a “Jihadist” group that collects money for charity but, according to the TV report, gives it to “the head of the extremist sect, Obid Nazarov,” who is the former head of Tashkent’s Tokhtaboi Mosque. Nazarov resisted government attempts to relocate his home and the mosque in the late 1990s, and he has since been on the Uzbek government’s wanted list, though other banned Islamic groups in Central Asia have never mentioned the mufti as being a supporter.

The Jewish community in Uzbekistan pre-dates Islam by several hundred (perhaps more than a thousand) years and could hardly be considered a “non-traditional” religion. But Uzbek authorities revoked the accreditation of the Chief Rabbi, Abe David Gurevich, in April. The rabbi told several news organizations that the appropriate officials would not even speak with him about renewing his credentials.

Rights defenders (and independent journalists) are often imprisoned and then released just ahead of meetings between Uzbek and Western officials or ahead of visits of high-ranking officials of Western governments and thus continue to suffer and serve as pawns in the Uzbek government’s foreign policy. These timed releases seem designed to be demonstrations of greater respect for human rights that the Uzbek government can point to and Western officials can then claim as progress on Uzbekistan’s part in respecting human rights.

Still, some notable independent journalists and rights activists were released from jail in 2008, including Ezgulik activist Karim Bazarbayev,¹² who was released from prison as part of an amnesty to mark the 15th anniversary of Uzbekistan’s Constitution, and activists, Saidjahon Zainabitdinov and Ikhtiyor Khamrayev. Uzbek authorities dropped all charges against independent journalist, Umida Niyazova.¹³

Mutabar Tajibayeva, a rights activist who spoke out against the government reaction to the violence in Andijan, was detained in October 2005 and in March 2006 was sentenced to eight years in jail for slander, extortion, misuse of land, and several other charges not related to her work as a rights activist. In May, she was named the recipient of the Martin Ennals Annual Award for Human Rights Defenders. In June 2008, the Uzbek government freed Tajibayeva, who suffers from cancer, in a move that the EU would later cite as “progress” in human rights. Upon her release from jail, Tajibayeva spoke of Uzbek prisons as “islands of torture” and her own mistreatment while in detention.

Poet and rights defender, Yusuf Jumayev was arrested at the end of 2007 after staging a “picket on wheels,” driving around the Bukhara area with signs hanging from his car demanding the release of one of his sons from detention and other

placards denouncing President Karimov. In April, Jumayev was sentenced to five years in prison for insulting the honor and dignity of the president, though some reports mentioned he was also found guilty of assaulting the police officer he bumped into while trying to flee his home and avoid arrest. One of Jumayev's sons who participated in the picket on wheels was given a three-year suspended sentence. In November, the International PEN Writers in Prison Committee issued a statement from Jumayev's daughter, who said, "Yusuf Jumayev's health is deteriorating and he is allegedly suffering beatings and ill-treatment by the prison wardens."

Uzbek authorities continued the campaign against Hizb-ut Tahrir members. Uzbekistan's Interior Ministry broke up an all-female Hizb-ut Tahrir cell in the Tashkent area in November, detaining some 28 women. On November 17, Interfax reported that the ministry said most of the women "were forced to recruit new women, to collect funds for underground organizations, and to spread religious-extremist literature among the population." In December, Shahlo Sultanova, mother-in-law of one of the suspected leaders of the cell, told the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Uzbek Service that "police tortured her daughter-in-law in an effort to get her to make a confession."

In March, the Fergana.ru Web site posted an article by Oleg Bairamov claiming that police in Uzbekistan use Roma to break up demonstrations by rights activists. The article cited Aktam Shaimardanov of the Rights Defenders Alliance of Uzbekistan as saying that police usually surround demonstrations and do not allow anyone to approach the demonstrators. But Shaimardanov said that incidents took place in 2008 where groups of Roma suddenly came at the demonstrating activists asking for money, and when they did not receive any, "they threw themselves at us, tearing up our signs and scuffling with us while children tried to pick through our pockets."¹⁴

The U.S. State Department issued its annual human rights report in March, which stated that Uzbekistan made "small but significant" steps toward improving its rights record.

Independent Media

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

Independent journalists practice their profession at their own risk in Uzbekistan. As an example of the restrictions journalists find themselves under, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) issued a press release on the third anniversary of the Andijan violence that claimed Uzbek authorities had a list that "forbids critical reporting on: the 2005 Andijan events; the president and his family; human rights abuses; opposition party activities; and social and economic problems in the country, among other topics."¹⁵ In its 2008 annual report, *Attacks on the Press*, the CPJ noted, "With six reporters in prison in late year, Uzbekistan was the region's leading jailer of journalists."

As of 2008, there were virtually no independent media or journalists left in Uzbekistan, though a few journalists did continue to work, contributing reports for foreign media. Uzbek authorities noticed their work, and some of these journalists, including Solijon Abdurakhmanov, found themselves facing legal problems. Abdurakhmanov, who had worked for foreign media such as Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and Uznews.net, was on his way to attend an international seminar on media freedom in June when he was detained in the northwestern city of Nukus during a routine traffic check in which police said they found narcotics in Abdurakhmanov's vehicle. The CPJ released a statement in early August saying Nukus authorities confirmed there were no traces of narcotics in Abdurakhmanov's blood tests. The CPJ cited Uznews.net stating that the Nukus authorities "slammed him [Abdurakhmanov] with another charge—drug possession with intent to sell, which carries up to 20 years in prison, as opposed to the original charge, which carried five years."¹⁶ Abdurakhmanov was convicted of intent to sell narcotics in October and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

RFE/RL President Jeff Gedmin spoke out after Abdurakhmanov's initial detention, saying it was "disturbing news, although I'm sad to say it is not surprising," since "Uzbekistan has one of the worst records in the world regarding press freedom." Miklós Haraszti, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, also voiced his concern about the arrest, saying later the charges against Abdurakhmanov appeared "made up, and his trial did not stand the scrutiny of a fair procedure."¹⁷

HRW released a statement the day after Abdurakhmanov's conviction that called on Uzbek authorities to "immediately and unconditionally release" Abdurakhmanov. HRW said, "Abdurakhmanov's conviction is an affront to human rights and free speech in Uzbekistan." His conviction came three days before the EU decided to lift its travel ban on eight top Uzbek state officials.

Uzbek authorities also employed a tactic to intimidate journalists working outside the country. In early June, state TV aired an hour-long program about Radio Ozodlik (RFE/RL's Uzbek Service) at prime time, accusing Ozodlik members living in Prague of being "traitors" who broadcast "unfriendly" messages in Uzbekistan. Photographs of the Prague staff were shown, and the home addresses of relatives in Uzbekistan were given.

The Uzbek government in conjunction with the EU held an international seminar on freedom of the media on June 9–10, 2008—the seminar Abdurakhmanov was planning to attend. On the day it opened, HRW, the International Crisis Group, the Open Society Institute, and Reporters Without Borders issued a joint statement calling the event a "sad farce and an empty shadow of the European Union's original intention to hold a meaningful meeting." The statement noted, "Those with critical voices, who would have highlighted the regime's appalling record on media freedom and other human rights abuses, have been locked out of the discussion."¹⁸

Uzbek authorities also monitor the Internet. Domestically, authorities say there are more than 7,000 Internet domains in Uzbekistan. International media rights groups point out that none of them are offering alternative views to state information. Reporters Without Borders released its annual list of "Internet enemies" in 2008,

and Uzbekistan was again on the list of the 15 worst countries. In a November 28 article, the Uzbek newspaper *Mohiyat* wrote, “It is a pity that legal regulations are not being applied to the Internet even occasionally,” and, “every know-it-all is easily running down those people he does not like,” adding, “articles which have been rejected by newspapers are being posted on the Internet.”

Uzbek authorities worked to block versions of events that contradict what the authorities wanted people to see, and state media worked to teach Uzbekistan’s people about the dangers of outside ideas. On February 20, the Uzbek radio program *Voqiflik* (*Awareness*) dedicated a segment to religious extremism, warning that “the nature of some alien ideas, which do not suit our national ideology...are aimed against a person’s character.” On September 17, *Voqiflik* warned that alien ideas could enter the country through mass media. Saidmurod Mamashokirov, introduced as a doctor of philosophy and guest on the program, said, “A case in point are TV serials. I think that these serials, by some hidden methods and means, promote the traditions of those countries [where these serials are produced].” That same day, the Uzbek newspaper *Hurriyat* had these words of advice for aspiring journalists in Uzbekistan: “Young journalists who speak foreign languages must not limit themselves to doing translations, but they should write analytical commentaries on facts in our country and should fight inaccurate reports [about Uzbekistan].” “People defend our country by means of weapons or laws,” the *Hurriyat* article continued, “and we, journalists, should protect it by using the power of media.”¹⁹

One case involving independent media haunted the Uzbek government during 2008. The murder of young independent journalist, Alisher Saipov in late October 2007 continued to be laid on the doorstep of the Uzbek government. Since Saipov’s death, many of his friends, colleagues, and some international organizations have blamed Uzbek authorities for arranging his murder in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, just across the border from Uzbekistan. Saipov was an outspoken critic of the Uzbek government and on good terms with a range of Uzbek opposition figures.

In February 2008, the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) issued a release about the Saipov murder titled “Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan’s Isolation.” ICG media and information director Andrew Stroehlein said, “Though Uzbekistan denies any involvement in the killing, there are strong circumstantial and other indications as to its possible motives.”²⁰

Local Democratic Governance

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

The government in Tashkent selects all regional and local officials. Residents of provinces, districts, cities, towns, and villages have no say about the selection of these officials. Local and regional officials are selected on the basis of their perceived allegiance to and ability to carry out orders from the central government.

Though citizens do have the right to appeal to their local or regional state representative on matters of concern, Uzbek citizens would do so knowing that those officials are beholden to the state for their positions and salaries. In this situation, few are willing to file a complaint, especially about the officials themselves, as such complaints are viewed as being taken up by higher-placed officials with the same allegiance to the central government.

It has been noted before that such a system is ill equipped to deal with emergency situations. During the violence in Andijan, local officials failed to act quickly to restore calm because they were waiting for instructions from Tashkent. Similarly, in July 2008 officials in the town of Kagan, near Bukhara, reacted slowly to news of a fire at an ammunition depot near the town. Eventually the whole town was evacuated, but at least 3 people were killed and 21 injured.

In the meantime, provincial officials were dismissed for reasons that were not entirely clear. In February, Andijan governor Alijon Allayarov was sacked for “unprofessionalism and a number of negative qualities,” and Khorezm governor Islam Babajanov was also dismissed. In early March, Fergana province governor Mamatisak Gafurov was fired after President Karimov visited and criticized economic progress in the province. Later that same month, Syrdarya province governor Abdukhokim Ishmuradov was also dismissed after Karimov said reforms were progressing too slowly there. In April, acting Samarkand province governor Azamkhon Bahromov was “freed from his post.”

Judicial Framework and Independence

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

President Karimov approves the selection of all judges; therefore it is not surprising that Uzbekistan’s court system and judges are almost totally subordinate to Karimov’s government and seem to exist mainly to provide a legal basis for implementing government policies. Courts regularly jail members of banned Islamic religious groups and sometimes members of nontraditional religious groups, as well as independent journalists and rights activists. The charges against the latter two groups rarely have anything to do with their work.

In January 2008, Uzbek courts ordered the suspension of the activities of an Evangelical group in Tashkent. A Samarkand court found Jehovah’s Witness Olim Turayev guilty of holding an unapproved religious meeting and teaching religion without state permission. Turayev began his four-year prison sentence in April 2008.

There were some notable exceptions in 2008. Forum 18 reported in January that charges against members of Protestant Grace Church were dropped “after the authorities’ claims that a cough medicine was psychotropic were proved to be false.” Forum 18 wrote in June 2008 on the case of Protestant Jandos Kaundikov, charged

with terrorism, that “in a highly unusual move, a court in the capital, Tashkent, found that charges against a Protestant had been fabricated and ordered police to be punished for this.”

Kyrgyzstan’s AKI press reported in October that the Olitariq district court in eastern Uzbekistan’s Ferghana province ordered Uzbek customs officials to return 800,000 som (US\$550) seized from two Kyrgyz residents of Batken. The report cited Tashtemir Eshaliyev, head of the reserve mobilization department of the Batken regional state administration, as saying, “Since the beginning of the year, the regional administration has received six similar complaints. However, some of the victims refuse to file a lawsuit to return their money as they are scared of [possible] troubles with travels to Uzbekistan.”

Corruption

1999–2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

Corruption has always been difficult to gauge in Uzbekistan since it is nearly impossible to penetrate the workings of the government. There was no official campaign against corruption in 2008, although President Karimov did sign a law on Uzbekistan joining the UN convention against corruption in early July. But there were reports of corrupt officials facing charges for their illegal activities. Part of the problem in combating corruption in Uzbekistan is the belief that the citizen who complains would be more likely to face punishment than any corrupt official. Transparency International ranked Uzbekistan 166th out of 180 countries in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index for 2008, tied with such countries as Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe.

Certainly corruption exists in Uzbekistan. Based on the few pieces of evidence available for 2008, it appears to be widespread and in some cases voracious. However, the Uzbek government has characteristically been loath to air its dirty laundry, making it difficult to determine the true extent of the problem.

The Speaker of Uzbekistan’s lower house of Parliament, Erkin Khalilov, was sacked at the beginning of January. Before the end of the month, authorities were confiscating his property and had demolished his three-story house in Tashkent. Khalilov’s sudden and steep drop from power appeared to come from battles within government and business circles, rather than as part of any anticorruption campaign. However, reports after his dismissal indicated he had acquired a great deal of material wealth that included a vast estate in Tashkent as well as other property, and a number of vehicles, all of which should have been beyond his financial means even as Speaker of Parliament.

Similarly, member of Parliament (MP), Matluyba Burkhanova faced charges around the same time as Khalilov, when her son was arrested for illegally crossing the border and using a false passport. There were allegations that her son—Batyр Umarov—was involved in human trafficking and when Burkhanova tried to defend

him, allegations emerged that the deputy herself was also involved in recruiting young women for prostitution in other countries. Burkhanova resigned as an MP in early March.

Other, less spectacular examples of corruption involving officials in the Ministry of the Interior and regional police forces occurred throughout the year. The Web site gorizont.uz reported in January that 15 members of the Ministry of the Interior were given prison sentences for embezzling 1.34 million som (US\$910). Also in January, a Tashkent court sentenced Shukrat Muradov, former editor of the Interior Ministry's newspaper, *At the Post*, to 10 years' imprisonment for embezzling some US\$300,000. Muradov was tried in absentia since he had already fled the country.

Evidence of nepotism remains in Uzbekistan. In February, President Karimov dismissed the Khorezm governor, appointing Allabergen Allabergenov to take over the post. At the end of March, hundreds of women in the city of Urgench (in Khorezm province) staged a protest against a decision made by the mayor of the city, Bahrom Allabergenov, a relative of the governor, to move a city bazaar to the outskirts of town.

Meanwhile, the fortunes of the Uzbek president's eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova, continued to improve. Karimova, almost surely because of her father's influence, has become a celebrity in Uzbekistan with music videos and recordings. She is also the co-owner of some of the most successful nightclubs in Tashkent. During 2008, she was named Uzbekistan's deputy foreign minister and later Uzbekistan's representative at the United Nations in Geneva. Her younger sister, Lola, was appointed Uzbekistan's representative at UNESCO in Paris, in January. The appointments of the president's daughters to prestigious posts abroad appear to be based solely on their relationship to the president, as there are questions about their qualifications to hold these positions.

The Russian news agency Regnum reported on October 27, 2008, that Uzbekistan's Ministry of Justice launched criminal cases against 48 officials between January and August 2008 and charged 793 officials with administrative violations. The report did not elaborate on which officials or their violations.

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- ¹ Human Rights Watch, “Germany: Uzbek Security Chief Visit a ‘Disgrace’” October 27, 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/10/28/uzbeki20068.htm>.
 - ² In 1999, the Fidokorlar party received the second highest amount of seats though it was the newest of the parties participating; in the 2004 elections the Liberal Democratic Party received the most amount of votes though it was the newest of the parties participating (and also the party that nominated Karimov for a third term in office).
 - ³ The candidate that won 4.1 percent of the vote was Abdulkhafiz Jalolov of the People’s Democratic Party who told journalists as he exited the polling station in the 2000 presidential elections that he had cast his own ballot for President Karimov.
 - ⁴ “Uzbek Incumbent Wins Presidential Poll Without ‘Genuine Choice,’” RFE/RL, December 24, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079295.html>.
 - ⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Uzbekistan: Human Rights Watch Representative Banned,” July 25, 2008.
 - ⁶ Felix Corley, “Uzbekistan: ‘The Government Is Trying to Stir Up Muslims Against Christians,’” Forum 18, June 13, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1143.
 - ⁷ Felix Corley and Mushfig Bayram, “Uzbekistan: Protestants Reject Government’s Religious Hatred Encouragement,” Forum 18, June 25, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1148.
 - ⁸ Felix Corley, “Uzbekistan: Death Threats and Massive Fines Follow Registration Application,” Forum 18, January 9, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1068.
 - ⁹ Mushfig Bayram, “Uzbekistan: Four Religious Minority Members Still Serving Criminal Sentences,” Forum 18, January 16, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1071.
 - ¹⁰ Mushfig Bayram, “Uzbekistan: Is a Four-year Sentence for Religious Activity Too Harsh?” Forum 18, April 29, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1122.
 - ¹¹ Mushfig Bayram and Felix Corley, “Uzbekistan: Asking about Religious Freedom Violations Is ‘Stupid,’” Forum 18, April 10, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1112.
 - ¹² In December 2007, a Syrdarya court found Karim Bazarbayev guilty of fraud and sentenced him to six years and three months in prison.
 - ¹³ Umida Niyazova was charged with illegal border crossing in January 2007, convicted in May that year and sentenced to seven years in prison. Saidjahon Zainabidinov, founder of the Appellation Human Rights Center, witnessed the Andijan violence of May 2005 and reported about it. He was arrested shortly after the Andijan incident and just before the end of 2005 was convicted of “information dissemination fomenting the panic” and “terrorism” and sentenced to seven years in jail. Ikhtiyor Khamrayev is the son of Bakhtiyor Khamrayev, a well-known rights activist from Jizzakh and the head of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan in Jizzakh Province. Ikhtiyor was found guilty of hooliganism and sentenced in September 2006 to three years in jail.
 - ¹⁴ Oleg Vairamov, “Узбекистан: Цыгане стали орудием милиции против право защитников” [Uzbekistan: Gypsies Have Become the Tools of the Militia Against Rights Defenders], *Fergana.ru*, March 21, 2008, <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5640>.
 - ¹⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Uzbek Journalists Under Tighter Restriction Since Andijan,” May 13, 2008, <http://cpj.org/2008/05/uzbek-journalists-under-tighter-restriction-since.php>.
 - ¹⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Uzbekistan: Authorities Alter Charge to Justify Journalist’s Arrest,” August 5, 2008, <http://cpj.org/2008/08/authorities-alter-charge-to-justify-journalists-ar.php>.

- ¹⁷ OSCE, “OSCE Media Freedom Representative Urges Uzbek Government to Dismiss Journalist’s 10-year Prison Sentence,” August 15, 2008, <http://www.osce.org/item/34363.html>.
- ¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Uzbekistan’s Farcical Media Freedom Conference*, June 9, 2008, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/06/10/uzbeki19078.htm>.
- ¹⁹ Hurriyat, Ibrahim Normatov, page 4, September 17, 2008.
- ²⁰ International Crisis Group, Bishkek/Osh/Brussels, February 14, 2008, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5293>.