

# Tajikistan

*Capital:* Dushanbe  
*Population:* 7 million  
*GNI/capita, PPP:* US\$2,300

Source: The data above are drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2013*.

## Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Electoral Process	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Civil Society	5.00	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25
Independent Media	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25
Governance*	5.75	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Corruption	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Democracy Score	5.71	5.79	5.93	5.96	6.07	6.14	6.14	6.14	6.18	6.25

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

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Since the end of the 1992–97 civil war, President Emomali Rahmon and a network of government elites have steadily asserted control over Tajikistan and its people, systematically suppressing independent political and economic activity and civil society through the use of the country's security apparatus and judicial system. Violence in the form of open military conflict has declined since the 1990s; however, in recent years the government has conducted a number of military operations to take firmer control over peripheral areas and to eliminate independent political and social actors as well as insurgents. In summer 2012, one such offensive was launched in the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, when men loyal to a former local opposition commander killed the head of the province's State Committee for National Security branch, prompting the central government's police, military, and security forces to take control of the region and arrest or kill former opposition commanders serving in local security (e.g., as border guard commanders). Government forces committed a bevy of human rights violations during these operations. Dozens of civilians were killed, and local opposition leaders were tortured and occasionally assassinated; meanwhile, the government cut off communication to the region and actively suppressed both media coverage and public demonstrations.

Substantial barriers to free speech endure, and torture remains a standard tool of law enforcement. In 2012, state authorities made increasing efforts to censor online news and social media outlets, particularly in relation to the events in eastern Tajikistan.

**National Democratic Governance.** President Rahmon and his supporters continue to dominate politics and the economy. The president has strong control over all positions of power in the state bureaucracy and the judicial and legislative branches are unable to exercise their constitutionally appointed independent powers. The police, military, and security services serve primarily to protect the power of the president and his allies. Any new government programs that could liberalize or democratize national governance are closely monitored and constrained in order to ensure that operations and reforms do not weaken the executive's control over security, the economy, or other high-priority areas. In late July 2012, President Rahmon ordered military and security forces to forcefully take full control of the eastern Badakhshan Province. Dozens died during these operations, and government security forces committed several human rights violations, including the killing of noncombatants and the arrest and torture of local political figures. *Tajikistan's rating for national democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.25.*

**Electoral Process.** Elections in Tajikistan are managed closely to ensure the continued rule of President Rahmon and his party. After years of government-led harassment, repression, exile and jailing of potential opponents, President Rahmon faces no serious challengers in the upcoming 2013 elections. Nevertheless, in 2012 the government continued its efforts to mute opposition parties and figures, with the Islamic Revival Party being targeted in particular. Any sector related to elections (the media, education, etc.) is constrained in a manner to give the incumbents an unassailable electoral advantage. *Tajikistan's rating for electoral process remains unchanged at 6.50.*

**Civil Society.** In 2012 the Tajik government remained vigilant against perceived threats to its authority within civil society and especially among independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In October, the government, citing several minor administrative violations, shut down Amparo, a local NGO consisting of young lawyers who advocate for the legal rights of vulnerable citizens and military conscripts. Tajik authorities also continued their relentless harassment of independent religious leaders and Islamic groups, both legal and illegal. Throughout the year the government shut down or installed surveillance equipment in various mosques and closely monitored the activities of various religious actors and groups. *Tajikistan's rating for civil society declines from 6.00 to 6.25.*

**Independent Media.** In early 2012 the government decriminalized libel, a commonly used tool to silence journalists. At the same time, censorship of online media increased dramatically. Numerous news and social media websites were blocked for extended periods, sometimes in retaliation for specific published articles, and most notably in relation to the government's extended military campaign in eastern Tajikistan. The most commonly targeted news organization for the government's censorship campaign has been *Asia-Plus*, a respected local news outlet. Tajik journalists continued to be physically attacked in 2012, almost always by men who could not be identified. *Tajikistan's rating for independent media declines from 6.00 to 6.25.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** Tajikistan's local government bodies continue to serve as an extension of the national government, rather than a counterbalance to centralized authority or a mechanism for meeting local communities' needs. The presidential administration appoints the heads of local districts and the provinces directly. In some areas the government does allow a certain level of local decision-making, usually in sectors where it has no serious interest or where total cooperation by local authorities is assured. Local governance structures are most often used as instruments of control and repression by both local and central government elites. *Tajikistan's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.00.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** Tajikistan's justice system is deeply corrupt and subservient to the Rahmon administration, serving the interests of the

regime at every opportunity. Law enforcement and the judiciary target potential political rivals, businessmen outside of government networks, journalists, and civil society groups. The rate of acquittal in Tajikistan's courtrooms is almost zero. For most citizens, substantial bribes are the only way to successfully navigate interactions with the police and courts. Police investigations and security operations are noted for their consistent use of torture as an interrogation tool. In 2012 the Minister of the Interior and President Rahmon himself made statements on the impermissibility of torture by security and judicial officials, yet there have still been only a few token prosecutions of offenders. The release of a comprehensive report by Amnesty International in 2012 revealed a scale and severity of torture in Tajikistan that was not known with such certainty in previous years. Furthermore, the use of torture by the government extended to interrogations of representatives of legal political parties, in particular the Islamic Revival Party. *Tajikistan's rating for judicial framework and independence remains unchanged at 6.25.*

**Corruption.** Corruption pervades every part of Tajik society and government. Bribes are required for education, operation of businesses, securing of various permits, avoiding military service, legal problems and interactions with the police. The year 2012 saw token prosecutions of select, low-to-mid-level public figures and government bureaucrats on corruption-related charges. However, these infrequent and unsystematic prosecutions have had no effect on scale or ubiquitousness of corruption in Tajikistan. *Tajikistan's rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.25.*

**Outlook for 2013.** Despite the authoritarian tactics of his regime, President Rahmon remains genuinely popular among some segments of the population, who credit him with the relative security and stability of the postwar era. The economy, too, has grown steadily since the late 1990s, though the benefits to society have been very uneven. Presidential elections in 2013 will almost certainly be a scripted performance, calculated to reinforce the authority of President Rahmon and the circle of elites who benefit from his power. While numerous examples of seemingly unassailable governments falling have been seen elsewhere in the world in the last couple of years, the continuation of the poor political and social situation in Tajikistan seems likely to continue.

Less clear is the regime's ability to control the eastern part of the country, where security operations to eliminate the independent local social and political actors ended in late July with a ceasefire, the outcome of which is still unclear. The government will continue to treat independent Muslim leaders and Islamic groups as key threats to its rule. Alongside its campaign against independent Islam, the government of President Rahmon can be expected to suppress independent media outlets and any civil society groups that seek to empower citizens. Corruption and torture in the judicial system and by security forces show no signs of abating.

# MAIN REPORT

## National Democratic Governance

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
n/a	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

President Emomali Rahmon and his inner circle of supporters dominate both politics and the economy in Tajikistan. Separation of powers exists only in the country's largely disregarded constitution; in practice, the president controls both houses of the parliament (*Majlisi Oli*) and other government institutions through his political party, the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDP),<sup>1</sup> and an informal system of patronage and corruption that encourages government officials to implement Rahmon's desired policies in return for personal enrichment. In 2012, the central government's police, military, and security forces responded to the killing of a key local official by taking control of the Gorno-Badakhshan province that borders Afghanistan.

The judicial and legislative branches of government serve as rubber stamps for the executive branch. The president has the power to appoint individuals to all relevant positions of power, including ministerial roles and judgeships. Top-level appointments, particularly within the state's security apparatus, typically go to appointees from the president's home region. Some members of Rahmon's own family hold powerful and lucrative government positions, including his son Rustam, who was appointed in 2011 to head the State Customs Services' department responsible for combatting illegal activity.<sup>2</sup> However, most of the president's relatives use their privileged position to amass wealth in the private sector.<sup>3</sup>

For the last 20 years, the Rahmon regime has systematically sidelined or eliminated possible rivals at all levels of government and society. The president and his inner circle have done this by jailing individuals on politically motivated charges of corruption and other criminal activities and reportedly assassinating some political rivals. They have also employed less harsh techniques, such as appointing rivals to embassy positions outside the country and reshuffling appointees between government positions to prevent them from becoming too powerful in any one role. The perception of many observers in Tajikistan is that the only two leaders in the country whose positions are stable are the defense minister, who has held his position since 1995, and the mayor of Dushanbe, who has held his post since 1996.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases, the leadership reshuffles high-ranking bureaucrats to demonstrate its displeasure with their performance. In January 2012, the president removed several appointees in the education and security sectors from their positions. Some were arrested on charges of drug trafficking. Reportedly, this was in response to media criticism of government corruption. However, several commentators rejected any notion that the removal of these bureaucrats would lead to improvements in

governance and accountability. Many of the sacked officials were just moved to other positions within the government.<sup>5</sup>

In summer 2012, President Rahmon ordered a military offensive in the eastern Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Province, a mountainous region along the Afghan border that has existed largely outside Dushanbe’s control for decades. In July, Major-General Abdullo Nazarov, the head of the province’s State Committee for National Security (the GKNB, still known locally as the KGB) branch, was stabbed to death by men loyal to another former opposition commander. The central government responded by deploying police, military, and security forces to seize control of the region and arrest or kill former opposition commanders serving in the local security apparatus (e.g., as border guard commanders). Reportedly, dozens to hundreds of civilians and military personnel were killed or injured during these operations, the region’s communications were cut off, and many residents were trapped in their homes.<sup>6</sup> Although negotiations led to a short period of peace, the killing in August of another former opposition leader, Imomnazar Imomnazarov, prompted protestors to gather at government buildings to protest the continuing military operations and killings. Security forces responded to one escalating confrontation with gunfire, reportedly injuring two people in the crowd.<sup>7</sup> The government subsequently announced it would completely withdraw forces from the still-unstable region.<sup>8</sup>

The year witnessed occasional small-scale street demonstrations in Dushanbe to protest very specific issues. In August students who believed their university spots had been given to children of high-level government officials gathered at the education ministry and presidential palace.<sup>9</sup> In September, vendors at the Korvon bazaar in Dushanbe demanded payment for their businesses and stock that were lost in what some believed was an intentionally set fire.<sup>10</sup> Both of these groups were promised some concessions and ended their protests. There were no open protests in the capital over broader or more political issues, and no demonstration was sustained for a significant period of time.

Electoral Process

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

Elections in Tajikistan are closely managed performances devoid of any real democratic character. President Rahmon has been the country’s top leader since November 1992 and faces no serious opposition—not because citizens are especially enthusiastic about his rule, but because potential rivals are routinely discredited or removed.<sup>11</sup> It is overwhelmingly probable that the 2013 presidential elections will bring another victory for Rahmon, who will sidestep constitutional term limits by claiming that his 2006 electoral victory—the first since the constitution was reformed in 2003—marked his first term in office. By this interpretation, he could serve until 2020.

Rahmon and his supporters closely control all dimensions of the electoral process. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are restricted from participating in many election-related activities and media outlets are controlled in a manner that heavily favors the incumbent. Potential challengers are targeted for disqualification or arrest. To appear on the ballot, new candidates must amass an often-prohibitive number of signatures. Ruling party incumbents spend state funds on campaigns, with impunity, whereas rivals face strict spending limits.<sup>12</sup> After the PDP landslide in the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted many irregularities<sup>13</sup> and the U.S. State Department reported widespread fraud.<sup>14</sup>

Opposition parties are weak and marginalized, and all key opposition leaders have been exiled or permanently removed from active political life. In August 2012, three prominent members of an unregistered wing of the opposition Democratic Party applied for political asylum in Sweden.<sup>15</sup> With two seats in the parliament, the legally registered Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) is the country's dominant opposition party, though most experts estimate that it has the support of only about 10 percent of the electorate. Some observers claim public support for the IRP is much higher, and that it has been growing, especially since 2010.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the IRP's criticism of Rahmon's government is becoming more direct. In response, the government has stepped up its harassment of the party and interference with IRP activities.

#### Civil Society

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.00	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25

The Tajik government treats civil society groups with increasing distrust and hostility. It maintains restrictions on foreign and local NGOs<sup>17</sup> and harasses independent religious leaders and Islamic groups, both legal and illegal, sometimes resorting to violence. Programs that include a liberalization or democratization component are closely managed to ensure that they cannot achieve genuine reform.<sup>18</sup>

In late October, a court decided in northern Tajikistan to shut down the Association of Young Lawyers (Amparo), which monitors and advocates for the rights of orphans, the poor, the disabled, and Tajik army recruits. The alleged violations included changing its office location without informing the government of its new address, illegally running a website, engaging in activities outside the northern Sughd province where it is registered, and conducting unapproved human rights seminars for high school students. Amparo maintains it had permission for all these activities. Human Rights Watch assessed the case as “politically motivated and devoid of substance from the beginning...and a major step backward for human rights in Tajikistan.”<sup>19</sup> Of the organization's broad roster of causes, the government objected in particular to Amparo's advocacy for the rights of military conscripts; ultimately, the government shut down the group's activities.<sup>20</sup>

In recent years, the government has been increasingly concerned about the influence and popularity of Islam and the spread of other religions. Targets for continued persecution in 2012 included two underground Islamist groups, Hizb-ut Tahrir and Jamaat ut-Tabligh. Since banning the latter organization—a nonviolent missionary Islamic organization with roots in South Asia—in 2006, the government has regularly sentenced members to jail for allegedly planning to overthrow the government. In February 2012, a court sentenced seven accused members in northern Tajikistan to between three and five years in prison.<sup>21</sup> The Tajik government also arrested and convicted many alleged members of Islamic groups, including Jamaat Ansarullah and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, that openly advocate violence against the state.

The government continued throughout 2012 to exercise control over the practice of Islam, restricting private religious lessons and even extending its reach into the operations of local mosques. The previous year's ban on children attending prayer at mosques has been enforced only sparingly, but some penalties have been imposed. In early October, the muezzin at a Dushanbe mosque was fined for having children present when he made the call for prayer.<sup>22</sup> Even those Tajik citizens who live and work in Russia felt the grip of the Tajik government on their freedom of religion; the government-controlled Council of Ulema—official representatives of Islam in Tajikistan—secured an assurance from Russian authorities that independent religious figures would not be permitted to address Tajik worshippers in Russia without permission.<sup>23</sup> One family of independent religious figures, the Turajonzoda family, has suffered particular government scrutiny and harassment. The government accused the family of practicing foreign Shia Muslim rites and consequently stripped their mosque of its right to hold large Friday prayers.<sup>24</sup> Then, in late May, a court issued a written order that the mosque be closed altogether; the family vowed to ignore the ruling.

The government has also increased pressure and attacks on the IRP, the country's strongest opposition party.<sup>25</sup> According to commentators and the party itself, government tactics in 2012 included audits and fines for alleged legal violations,<sup>26</sup> strong pressure against members to leave the party,<sup>27</sup> and threat of prosecution over unspecified allegations of involvement in crime and terrorism.<sup>28</sup> Independent observers blame Tajik government security forces for the abduction, torture, and killing of Sabzali Mamadrizoyev, the IRP's leader in Badakhshan.<sup>29</sup> Mamadrizoyev had participated in a demonstration in Khorog protesting the government's large-scale military operations in the region. Security forces detained him on July 23, and three days later his body was discovered close to a nearby military base. The GKNB also arrested Sherik Karamkhudoyev, the head of the IRP office in Khorog, and detained him for two weeks before admitting that he was in their custody.<sup>30</sup> He is still being held in Dushanbe on politically motivated charges; his lawyer claims that he was tortured when arrested in Khorog.<sup>31</sup>



## Independent Media

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25

In July, President Rahmon approved a law decriminalizing libel and insult and placing them instead under the jurisdiction of civil law (except for libeling the president, which remains a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in prison). Though this move was commended by advocates of press freedom,<sup>32</sup> it was overshadowed by the government's persistent censorship and blocking of access to online news, as well as continuing violence toward Tajik journalists at home and abroad.

In the first half of 2012, the Tajik government blocked access to several news and social media websites for extended periods. In early March, the State Communications Agency, citing first technical reasons and then cybercrimes and national security, ordered internet providers to block access to Facebook and several Russian-language news websites, including *centrasia.ru*, *tjk.news.com*, and *zvezda.ru*.<sup>33</sup> State Communication Agency head Beg Zuhurov at first denied any government responsibility for the restriction but then remarked that people had started "to post lying articles and comments defaming the honor and dignity of the Tajik authorities," and that "by such lying articles, some persons are trying to split Tajik society and destabilize the situation in the country." Zuhurov maintained that the authors of such articles should be brought to justice.<sup>34</sup> By mid-March, local media outlets reported that the government had ordered the website blocks in response to an article published by the online Russian newspaper *Polyarnaya Zvezda* that blamed President Rahmon's government for corruption, poverty, and the authoritarian system in Tajikistan. The article was republished and shared on several of the blocked websites.<sup>35</sup> Access to Facebook was restored after one week—in response to criticism from international organizations and embassies, according to one media report.

The country's largest private newspaper, *Asia Plus*, published a broad attack on Rahmon's leadership in late 2011, in response to which the government targeted the paper with restrictions throughout 2012.<sup>36</sup> In June, online access to the paper was blocked. Beg Zuhurov again obfuscated, claiming unconvincingly that the blockage was due to technical problems before eventually conceding that the government had shut down access because of reader comments that insulted and libeled high-ranking government officials.<sup>37</sup> In mid-July Zuhurov announced that the government was forming a monitoring organization, consisting of volunteers and journalists, that would be tasked with finding and exposing online publications critical of the government.<sup>38</sup> However, nothing has been heard of the group since this announcement. Around the same time, an 18-year-old in Dushanbe claimed that the GKNB had summoned him for questioning and warned him about his criticism of the president on Facebook.<sup>39</sup>

In late July, the government's military operations in Badakhshan brought an intensive new round of online censorship. The government first cut off all phone, mobile, and internet connections to the area (Zuhurov claimed the outage was

caused by a bullet that struck a telephone wire).<sup>40</sup> Within the rest of the country the Tajik government blocked access to YouTube; the *Asia-Plus* website; the local forum site Pamir-vesti.ru; the Russian news sites vesti.ru, Fergana.ru, Lenta.ru, and Centrasia.ru; and the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Russian service, a move criticized harshly by Reporters Without Borders.<sup>41</sup> All telecom and internet providers, including the Swedish company TeliaSonera, cooperated with the government’s demands to cut off communication and censor websites.<sup>42</sup> Two internet service providers interviewed by Eurasianet.org stated that the blocks were ordered directly from Zuhurov’s office, and that failure to follow the order could result in a tax audit or license revocation. By late September, several internet providers had unblocked *Asia-Plus*, and by mid-October the government had lifted restrictions on many of the approximately 50 blocked websites.<sup>43</sup> However, in late November the government again temporarily blocked several websites, including Facebook and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Tajik language service. While the blocks on Facebook are usually short term, other websites, particularly Russian news sites, have been blocked permanently since March.<sup>44</sup>

Violence against journalists persisted throughout 2012. In March, unidentified men attacked Nuriddin Qarshiboev, the head of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, at the airport in Khujand after he lobbied for reporters’ right to interview passengers whose flights had been delayed. Qarshiboev believes that the men, whose orders were followed by both police and airport security, were part of an organized crime group.<sup>45</sup> One month later, unidentified men attacked TV Safina reporter Daler Sharipov, an incident that drew the attention of Reporters Without Borders.<sup>46</sup> Attacks against Tajik reporters extended beyond the borders of Tajikistan. Dodojon Atovulloev, an independent journalist and critic of the Tajik government, was stabbed and hospitalized in Russia; one commentator suggested that the Tajik government may have been responsible for the attack.<sup>47</sup> Although the Tajik government may not have perpetrated any or all of these assaults, the perception that they did creates a climate of fear for independent journalists.

Local Democratic Governance

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00

Local government in Tajikistan acts as an extension of the national government, rather than as an independent, decentralized, or democratic set of institutions. The heads of local districts and provinces are appointed directly by the president’s administration. Areas of the country that enjoy more autonomy do so either because they are deemed to be of limited economic or political significance to Dushanbe, or because the central government has full confidence in the obedience of local officials.

Kinship networks, village and neighborhood “communities” and Islamic identity play an important role in shaping some local political and economic

structures.”<sup>48</sup> However, even governance at the local level that is technically outside the state’s control serves the state’s economic interests and maintains local stability.

The cotton harvest exemplifies the penetration of state directives into local governance and economics. As cotton is a valuable cash earner for elites tied to the state leadership, there is a structure in place to ensure that farmers are compelled to grow the crop. Those involved in local governance, both formal and informal, participate in efforts to maximize the cotton harvest, forcing locals to pick cotton for next to nothing.<sup>49</sup>

The state also continually interferes in the religious lives on Tajiks at the most basic levels. This interference includes harassment of and discrimination against men wearing beards and women wearing the hijab and restrictions against what can and cannot be said in a mosque. Local mosques are monitored via a comprehensive system of surveillance, and mosques deemed to have violated state rules suffer forced closure or conversion.<sup>50</sup>

Local, informal, social structures are permitted to handle most legal disputes that do not affect the agenda of the central government. This both reduces burdens on state institutions and allows for more effective enforcement of resolutions to conflicts than might be possible via state courts. However, because the system of informal justice reflects local culture, it often reinforces the marginalization of the more vulnerable members of society, including women and children.<sup>51</sup>

#### Judicial Framework and Independence

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

Tajikistan’s judicial and law enforcement systems are deeply corrupt and exercise almost no independence in cases of relevance to government authorities. Violations of due process and the use of torture to extract real or false confessions are common, while acquittals are virtually unheard of.

Executive leadership routinely applies pressure to judges and prosecutors.<sup>52</sup> In June 2012, a court began proceedings against Supreme Court judge Nur Nurov, who admitted (on a secretly recorded tape leaked by the media in 2010) that “his leadership” had ordered him to give a harsh sentence to a high-profile defendant the Tajik government had had extradited from Russia.<sup>53</sup> The judiciary is firmly under the control of the president thanks to his ability to appoint and remove judges and prosecutors.

Police frequently make arbitrary arrests and beat detainees to extract confessions. Suspects are detained for extended periods, and often have insufficient access to a lawyer during the detention and pretrial period.

Although the government of Tajikistan is a signatory to several international human rights treaties, the use of torture is pervasive and the prosecution of police or jailers who use torture is rare. Amnesty’s International’s special 2012 report on Tajikistan describes methods of torture including, but not limited to, the use of

electric shocks, boiling water, burning with cigarettes or chemicals, mutilation of genitals, and regular beatings.<sup>54</sup> Representatives of the local NGO Avesto told Amnesty that victims of torture suffered from “burst ear drums, broken teeth, broken noses; dislocated jaws; loss of function in fingers after electroshock torture [...] post-traumatic stress disorders such as depression, chronic insomnia, nightmares and emotional instability.”<sup>55</sup>

In January 2012 the newly appointed Minister of the Interior stated that the government would no longer tolerate police and security officials who illegally mistreated suspects. In the same month, the Minister of Justice claimed that there were no incidents of torture in jails during the previous year.<sup>56</sup> Following the release of the Amnesty International report in July, a spokesman for President Rahmon refuted the organization’s findings and stated that there were only a few isolated cases of torture in Tajikistan.<sup>57</sup>

Police have strong incentives to use torture. It increases their ability to secure bribes for the release or protection of suspects and to meet conviction quotas. The government claims a 91 percent success rate in solving crimes and conviction rates are close to 100 percent.<sup>58</sup> In late 2012 the media in Tajikistan continued to report cases of torture by police and jailers,<sup>59</sup> and in some cases were able to produce video evidence.<sup>60</sup> In late September 2012, the lawyer for Shेरик Karamkhudoev, the leader of the Islamic Revival Party in the city of Khorog, reported KGB interrogators had been torturing his client for nearly two months.<sup>61</sup>

Corruption

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

Corrupt practices are deeply embedded in Tajik society and political life. Citizens pay bribes in order to access higher education, operate businesses, secure various permits, avoid military service, and resolve legal problems. Throughout the country, road police routinely stop drivers demanding “fines.” Tajiks are so accustomed to the system of bribery and corruption that they are quite likely to initiate the payment of a bribe in return for a service or favor, reacting with incredulity if their offer is rebuffed.

In comparison to other countries, Tajikistan received a very unfavorable ranking in Transparency International’s most recent Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 157 out of 182 countries on the list.<sup>62</sup> One survey from 2011 with a local focus found that the Tajik public considers prosecutors and police to be the most corrupt of all government representatives.<sup>63</sup> The U.S. Department of State reports: “Serving the interests of the Tajik citizenry, upholding the rule of law, and maintaining public order are secondary police functions that are undertaken in a serious manner only if the security of the state is threatened.”<sup>64</sup> However, corruption extends beyond law enforcement to all sectors of government and public life, involving university instructors and officials, district level officials, city government employees, officials

in charge of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, customs officials, in the prison system and in various ministries.<sup>65</sup>

While the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, they are not systematically enforced. Graft is endemic and nepotism and regional hiring bias pervade all levels of government.<sup>66</sup> The state anticorruption agency charges a few low- and mid-level offenders, usually from government sectors that are not vital for maintaining control over the population (for example, healthcare, education, and agriculture). However, these arrests are too infrequent and arbitrary to deter graft. In general, charges of corruption against high-ranking officials and politicians are more likely a sign of that person's fall from the favor of the leadership rather than part of a genuine effort to combat corruption and embezzlement. In June, Supreme Court judge Nur Nurov was arrested following a recorded admission that his leadership had pressed him to pass harsh sentences against several high-profile defendants.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (USDRL), *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Tajikistan* (Washington, DC: USDRL, 2012), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Tajik President's Son to Head Customs Service Department," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 28 February 2011, [http://www.rferl.org/content/tajik\\_president\\_son/2323586.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/tajik_president_son/2323586.html).

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