

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

Tajikistan

NOT FREE

9
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	0 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	9 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

9 /100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



Overview

The authoritarian regime of President Emomali Rahmon, who has ruled since 1992, severely restricts political rights and civil liberties. The political opposition has been devastated by a sustained campaign of repression in recent years, and the government exerts tight control over religious expression and activity. Wealth and authority are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the president and his family.

Key Developments in 2019

- In February, Tajik security service agents kidnapped Europe-based opposition activist Sharofiddin Gadoev while he was in Moscow, holding him for two weeks in Tajikistan before pressure from international organizations prompted his release.
- In May, a deadly prison riot which authorities linked to the Islamic State (IS) left 3 guards and 29 inmates dead, including three prominent opposition members.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

The president is chief of state and is elected for up to two seven-year terms under current rules, but constitutional amendments ratified in 2016 removed presidential term limits specifically for Rahmon, who holds the official status of “leader of the nation.” In the last presidential election in 2013, Rahmon won a fourth term with 83.6 percent of the vote, defeating five little-known challengers who did not represent genuine opposition parties; the opposition’s favored candidate was disqualified.

Observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) found that the election lacked “genuine choice and meaningful pluralism” and featured biased media and voting irregularities.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?	0/4
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The bicameral Supreme Assembly is composed of an upper house, the National Assembly, and a lower house, the Assembly of Representatives. The National Assembly comprises 25 members chosen by local assemblies and 8 appointed by the president; former presidents are also entitled to a seat in the chamber. The 63-member Assembly of Representatives is elected by popular vote through a mixed system of 41 single-member constituencies and 22 proportional-representation seats. Members of each body serve five-year terms.

Ahead of the 2015 elections, the government carried out an extensive campaign of repression against the opposition through state media and the persecution of many candidates, particularly those of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), leading to the disenfranchisement of the country’s most significant opposition force. The ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) won 51 of the 63 lower-house seats, and four small, mostly progovernment parties divided the remainder. According to OSCE monitors, the elections were marred by serious violations and failed to meet democratic standards.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	0/4
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The Central Commission for Elections and Referendums is subservient to the government and enforces electoral laws in an inconsistent and nontransparent manner. Shortly before the 2015 parliamentary elections, the IRPT representative on

the commission was arrested. Despite reforms prior to those elections, constituencies still vary considerably in population, undermining equal suffrage.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	0 / 4
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The government consistently marginalizes independent or opposition parties, which have become completely excluded from the political process. In the second half of 2015, the Justice Ministry revoked the IRPT’s legal registration based on a technicality, and the Supreme Court declared the party a terrorist organization, criminalizing membership in or expression of support for the group. The constitutional amendments passed in a 2016 referendum banned faith-based political parties, effectively preventing the IRPT from reforming.

The authorities continued throughout 2019 to harass and arrest former members of the IRPT, the political movement Group 24, the Europe-based National Alliance of Tajikistan (a refugee opposition coalition), and members’ extended families. Sharofiddin Gadoev, who is protected by political asylum in the EU and lives in the Netherlands, was kidnapped while visiting Moscow in February 2019. His release two weeks later came only after harsh international condemnation. He reported that during his captivity, security services attempted to extort him into publicly supporting President Rahmon’s son, Rustam Emomali, in the 2020 election.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	0 / 4
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Tajikistan has no record of peaceful transfers of power between rival parties. Rahmon first became chief executive in 1992, during Tajikistan’s 1992–97 civil war, and has held the presidency since the office’s creation in 1994. Under the 2016 constitutional revisions, he is entitled to run for reelection indefinitely and to overrule cabinet decisions even after leaving office as president. The amendments also lowered the minimum age for presidents from 35 to 30 years, allowing Rahmon’s son to seek the post in 2020.

Years of unrelenting repression of independent political activity have left opposition parties unable to compete in elections. The administration exerts complete control over the electoral process and prevents any substantial competition for the presidency and control of parliament. Many IRPT members and their relatives were beaten, harassed, and imprisoned before the 2015 elections, with some reportedly tortured in custody. In October 2019, authorities declared the National Alliance of Tajikistan a terrorist organization.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	0 / 4
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Political affairs in Tajikistan are controlled almost exclusively by Rahmon and his extended family, leaving citizens with few avenues to exercise meaningful political choices or participate in the political process. Presidential family members hold numerous public positions and control key sectors of the private economy.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	0 / 4
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No segment of the population enjoys full political rights or electoral opportunities in practice. The regime, which generally seeks to suppress any genuine dissent, does not permit women or minorities to organize independently to advance their political interests. Women remain underrepresented in the political system, both as voters and in elected positions.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?	0/4
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The president, who is not freely elected, and his inner circle are virtually unopposed in determining and implementing policy. The PDP-controlled legislature does not offer a meaningful check on the executive's expansive constitutional authority. Officials from the president's native Kulob District are dominant within government. In 2017, Rahmon strengthened his family's grip on power by installing his son, Rustam Emomali, as Dushanbe's mayor.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	0/4
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Patronage networks and regional affiliations are central to political life, corruption is pervasive, and laws designed to prevent it are routinely ignored. Major irregularities have been reported at the National Bank of Tajikistan and the country's largest industrial firm, the state-owned Tajik Aluminum Company (TALCO).

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	0/4
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Government decision-making and budgetary processes lack transparency, and public officials are not required to disclose financial information. Crackdowns on the media, the opposition, and civil society have further reduced independent scrutiny of state operations. In recent years the government has concluded extensive infrastructure and resource-extraction agreements with the Chinese government and Chinese companies, with little consultation or transparency on the terms of the deals or accountability for their implementation. The pattern has added to concerns about corruption and public debt, among other possible ramifications.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	0/4
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The government controls most printing presses, newsprint supplies, and broadcasting facilities, and they deny independent media access to these resources. The state shuts out independent outlets and encourages self-censorship. Independent journalists face harassment and intimidation. Civil libel charges have been used to cripple outlets that criticize the government. Authorities routinely block critical websites, news portals, and entire social media platforms, and use periodic wholesale blackouts of internet and messaging services to suppress criticism.

Independent investigations by Eurasianet, the Columbia Journalism Review, and the *Wall Street Journal* in April 2019 reported that the US State Department was investigating inappropriate conduct of officials of US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Tajik Service—known locally as Radio Ozodi. They concluded the Tajik government had undermined the last remaining credible media outlet by co-opting

and threatening its journalists. The news outlet's more critical coverage of Tajik authorities took place again after significant editorial, management, and staff changes. However, the Tajik government threatened to cancel the accreditation of many of Ozodi's Dushanbe staff, accusing the outlet of supporting terrorism.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	0 / 4
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The government imposes severe restrictions on religious freedom, in part by limiting religious activities to state-approved venues and registered organizations. Authorities continue to prosecute individuals for alleged membership in banned religious organizations, including Christian and Muslim groups. Minors are generally barred from attending religious services in mosques, as are women in most cases.

Laws to discourage religious clothing (like the hijab) as well as an unofficial ban on beards for men continue to be arbitrarily enforced. The government published a "guidebook" in 2018, detailing recommended dress for women that officially excluded the hijab and other such garments, in favor of "traditional" or "national" alternatives. The government has pressured students to adhere to these dress codes, establishing roadblocks in some areas to search cars for women in hijabs and men with beards.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	1 / 4
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The government exerts significant political pressure on universities and academic personnel. In recent years, international scholars have noted the self-exile of Tajikistani academics who faced harassment from security services, surveillance and self-censorship within institutions of higher education, scrutiny of scholars who cooperate with foreign colleagues, and the appointment of officials backed by the security services to senior academic posts. Opportunities to study abroad, especially for religious education, are tightly restricted.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1/4

Restrictive laws and government surveillance serve as deterrents to open discussion of sensitive topics, including criticism of the country's leadership. A 2017 law allows authorities to monitor citizens' online behavior and prescribes fines and prison sentences for those who visit "undesirable websites," among other provisions. In 2018, a Tajikistani man was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for insulting the president by reposting and promoting critical videos on social media while living and working in Russia.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0/4

The government strictly limits freedom of assembly. Local government approval is required to hold demonstrations, and officials often refuse to grant permission. Protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan region in November 2018 reportedly triggered localized internet blackouts. Authorities there had warned the previous month that participation in unauthorized gatherings would result in criminal charges.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

1/4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Justice Ministry and are vulnerable to closure for minor technical violations. NGOs must disclose funding from foreign sources. Foreign funds must be logged in a state registry before organizations can access them, and the government oversees operations supported by the funds. Under legislation passed in 2018 and implemented in January 2019, NGOs are now obliged to maintain their own websites and publish reports that comply with more expansive and vaguely worded financial reporting to prove they have no links to “terrorist financing” or “money laundering.”

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	1/4
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Citizens have the legal right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively, but these rights and the right to strike are undermined by general legal restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association. There are no laws against antiunion discrimination by employers, and the country’s trade union federation is controlled by the government.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	0/4
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The judiciary lacks independence. Many judges are poorly trained and inexperienced, and bribery is widespread. The 2016 constitutional amendments abolished the Council of Justice, transferring the authority for most judicial nomination and oversight functions to the Supreme Court instead. However, these powers remain under executive control in practice. The courts’ opaque and biased adjudication of numerous cases against opposition figures and other dissidents, particularly since 2015, has further demonstrated their subordination to the political leadership.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0/4
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Arbitrary arrests and detentions are common, as is corruption among law enforcement agencies. Defendants are often denied timely access to an attorney, and politically fraught trials are frequently closed to the public. Nearly all defendants are found guilty.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	0/4
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Civilians are subject to physical abuse by security forces and have no meaningful opportunity to seek justice for such violations. Detainees are reportedly beaten in custody to extract confessions. Overcrowding and disease contribute to often life-threatening conditions in prisons.

Prison conditions worsened in 2019 and became more opaque following a riot in May: the government claimed IS prisoners murdered three guards and three prominent IRPT members, Sattor Karimov, Saeed Qiyomiddin Khozi, and Jomahmad Boev, along with several other inmates. Authorities did not fully explain how at least 20 other inmates died, but some reports indicate they were shot by guards, raising serious questions about the use of disproportionate or excessive lethal force and the arbitrary killing of prisoners by Tajik authorities. Similarly, the government attributed the 14 deaths that occurred during a July prison transfer to food poisoning, despite evidence of physical abuse on the bodies of the deceased. The state's refusal to allow international organizations to help investigate causes of any of these events, or to make meaningful reforms, suggests that Tajikistan's prison system is likely to remain in a state of crisis.

F4 0-4 pts

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Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

1/4

Discrimination against ethnic minorities is not a major problem. However, women face bias and disparate treatment in the workplace, and discrimination or violence against LGBT+ people is common. There is no legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT+ people frequently face abuse by security forces.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1/4

Most citizens can travel within the country, but they must register their permanent residence with local authorities. Students interested in studying Islamic theology are forbidden from seeking education abroad. Some areas, particularly Gorno-Badakhshan, feature a heavier security presence that includes police checkpoints, which hamper travel and provide opportunities for extortion and other abuses.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1/4

By law, all land belongs to the state. Corruption and regulatory dysfunction affect enterprises ranging from peasant farms to large companies. The president's extended family and others from his native Kulob District maintain extensive business interests

in the country and dominate key sectors of the economy, impeding business activity by those without such political connections.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	1/4
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Although forced marriage and polygamy are legally prohibited, marriages arranged by parents and religious marriages that allow polygamy are both common in practice. Because of local interpretations of Sharia (Islamic law), women are often unable to exercise their rights to divorce. Domestic violence is widespread, but cases are underreported and seldom investigated adequately.

Reports indicate that women sometimes face societal pressure to wear headscarves. Meanwhile, in addition to restricting hijabs for women and beards for men, the government interferes more broadly in matters of personal appearance. A 2018 guidebook outlined acceptable and unacceptable styles of dress for women, barring clothing that could be deemed immodest or “foreign” in origin.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	1/4
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According to the 2019 US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons* report, the Tajik government has made significant efforts to improve enforcement of laws against forced labor, trafficking, and especially child labor during the cotton harvest season, though such practices have persisted to some extent. Safeguards against other forms of labor exploitation and hazardous working conditions are not well enforced. The scarcity of economic opportunity has compelled citizens to seek work abroad in large numbers, and these migrant workers are at risk of exploitation by human traffickers.



On Tajikistan

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

9/100 Not Free

Other Years

2019

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