Freedom House

NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2018

Tajikistan

CONSOLIDATED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

4 /100

Democracy Percentage	3.57 /100
Democracy Score	1.21 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

6 /100 **Consolidated Authoritarian Regime**

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic.

Score Changes

- Civil Society rating declined from 1.75 to 1.50 due to the government's continued harassment of and interference with public associations, and further repression directed at lawyers who take up politically sensitive cases and at LGBT people.
- Independent Media rating declined from 1.75 to 1.50 due to the sustained pressure by the government, including new media registration requirements with the State Committee on National Security (SCNS).
- Corruption rating declined from 1.50 to 1.25 due to evidence of pervasive nepotism and continued state capture by members of the political elite.
- Local Democratic Governance rating declined from 2.25 to 2.00 due to the extension of centralized control over local governance through the appointment of the president's son as mayor of the capital Dushanbe.

Executive Summary

By Edward Lemon

Tajikistan strengthened its authoritarian system in 2017, continuing a widespread crackdown on dissent that has intensified since 2015. Tajikistan functions like a one-party state, with few opportunities to express dissatisfaction with the regime. The ruling elite have strengthened their position, most clearly through constitutional changes in 2016 that made President Emomali Rahmon "Leader of the Nation" and effectively allowed him to rule indefinitely. Meanwhile, the government has banned opposition groups, jailed human rights lawyers, restricted the rights of religious groups, censored the media, and increasingly regulated civil society.

Tajikistan is a "nepotocracy": politics and business are dominated by relatives of the president's family. Corruption is rife. Control of state agencies allows businesses under the authority of the presidential family to avoid following regulations, or paying

taxes and tariffs. At the same time, state agencies are used to drive competitors out of business with fines for breaking regulations and allegations of corruption. Those who challenge the presidential family face severe repercussions. The Rahmon family solidified its grip on power in 2017. President Rahmon's eldest son, Rustam Emomali, was appointed mayor of Dushanbe in January, replacing the powerful Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloev, who had held the post since 1996. [1] The 30-year-old Rustam has rapidly risen through the ranks of government and is widely viewed as the anointed successor of his 65-year-old father, who has ruled since 1992. Rahmon's daughter and presidential chief of staff, Ozoda Emomali, was appointed to the largely ceremonial position of state justice councillor in June. [2] Members of the elite use strategic marriages to solidify their networks and extend control over key parts of the economy. In November, one of Rahmon's granddaughters married the grandson of the governor of Sughd region, Abdurahmon Kodiri. This marriage was the first between the northern elite, which dominated republican politics during the Soviet Union, and the president's family. [3]

While the ruling family has consolidated its position, it has continued to crack down on dissent. Civil society continued to come under pressure from the government in 2017. Following amendments to the Law on Public Associations in 2015, all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must report funding from foreign donors to the Ministry of Justice. In May, the president signed amendments to the Law on the Fight Against Corruption, stipulating that public associations need to report risks of corruption within their organization to the State Agency for Financial Control and Combating Corruption. [4] Frequent inspections by the tax committee, fire department, anticorruption agency, and other bodies hamper the work of civil society organizations. In 2017, the government continued to use the specter of Islamic extremism to legitimize tight controls over religious practices. The State Committee for Religious Affairs claimed to have closed down 1,938 "illegal" mosques in 2017, converting them to "secular" uses. [5] Clothing continues to be at the forefront of this effort, with numerous individuals reporting being forcibly shaved or compelled to remove their hijabs. [6] The president signed amendments to the Law on Observing National Traditions and Rituals in August, compelling citizens to wear "national clothing" at weddings and funerals. In July, the Ministry of Culture announced it was planning to introduce a dress code outlining appropriate national

clothing. [7] In an attempt to control access to information, in April 2017 the Ministry of Culture decreed that no books are allowed in or out of the country without permission from the ministry. [8]

Being a lawyer in Tajikistan is an increasingly dangerous profession. In March and August, courts extended the sentence of human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov, who was jailed based on politically motivated charges in 2016, to 28 years. Torture and other ill-treatment of prisoners remains widespread in Tajikistan. Those reporting on abuses and criticizing the government have faced repercussions. Although the block on some social media sites was lifted in 2017, the State Communications Service continues to block independent news sites. In July, Tajikistan's parliament approved new legislation to give law enforcement the power to legally access data on the online and texting activities of citizens. [9] With such a repressive atmosphere, self-censorship is widely practiced in Tajikistan.

Many opposition activists, independent journalists, academics, and lawyers have fled the country. There have been 3,320 Tajiks who sought asylum in the European Union (EU) in 2017, up from 605 in 2014, and the government has targeted their family members in Tajikistan, taking their passports, seizing their property, and threatening them with violence. [10]

Tajikistan remains the poorest country in post-communist Eurasia. Despite a $500 million bailout of the country's two largest banks in 2016, the banking sector remains in crisis resulting from endemic corruption, mismanagement, and the effects of the economic downturn in Russia. [11] The National Bank revoked the licenses of two banks, Tojprombank and Fononbank, wiping out the savings of many depositors. [12] While the police are pursuing many small debtors to recover $30 million of Tojprombank's outstanding loans, 12 businesses that owe $25 million have not been pursued. [13] Remittances sent back from labor migrants in Russia have declined, with $1.9 billion sent back in 2016, a 50-percent fall from their peak in 2013. [14]

Outlook for 2018: With one eye on succession scenarios, President Rahmon will continue to tighten his grip on power in 2018 in advance of elections in 2020. The space for freedom of speech is already eroded, and lawyers, civil society, and independent media will see further curtailment of the space in which they work.

Fearing for their safety, many will continue to leave the country. Since those who have fled to Europe and elsewhere defy the government from abroad, continued retribution against relatives still residing in Tajikistan is expected. The political elite continue to loot the country's limited resources and extort money from investors, and the country's economic outlook is bleak. Remittances from migrants to Russia, which comprised over half of GDP in 2014, have not reached their pre-crisis levels. For many Tajiks, life will change for the worse rather than the better in 2018.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.	**1.00** / 7.00

- Although opposition parties nominally exist, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) dominates the political field, and President Emomali Rahmon has held power since 1992. Tajikistan is a de facto one-party state. Rahmon relies on a system of patronage, pliant judicial bodies, monopolization of the production of information, and the State National Security Committee (GKNB)—the country's ruthless secret police—to maintain control. The state media and institutions extol the benefits of the current regime, praising Rahmon, who has increasingly cultivated his own cult of personality.
- In 2016, a referendum approved changes to the constitution, declaring President Rahmon to be "leader of the nation" and "founder of peace," rendering him legally immune and allowing him to rule indefinitely. Sixty-five-year-old Rahmon is increasingly thinking towards political succession. The evidence suggests that he aims to keep the government in family hands. The constitutional amendments also included lowering the age limit for running for president from 35 to 30, allowing Rahmon's 30-year-old son, Rustam Emomali, to potentially stand in the next presidential elections in 2020. Rustam has been promoted through the ranks of the government, becoming the former Soviet Union's youngest general in 2013, appointed head of the State Agency for Financial Control and Measures against Corruption in 2015, and becoming mayor of the capital Dushanbe in January 2017.

- Although Rustam appears to be the chosen successor, power struggles take place between leading members of the presidential family, like Rahmon's daughter Ozoda Emomali and her powerful husband, deputy head of the National Bank Jamoliddin Nuraliev, and the president's influential brother-in-law Hasan Asadullozoda. While this elite competition goes on behind closed doors, it occasionally comes to the surface. In October 2016, for example, the Ministry of Finance, still under the influence of Nuraliev, who was deputy minister between 2007 and 2015, accused Talco, the aluminum smelter that is the country's largest export earner, of concealing its income. [15] Observers speculated that this was an attempt by Nuraliev to gain control of the lucrative smelter from Asadullozoda, who has controlled it since 2004. [16] With Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, once widely considered the second-most powerful person in the country, sidelined in 2017, this elite competition will continue to produce the potential for instability in years to come. [17]
- Having blamed the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT) for an attempted "coup" in September 2015, and classified the party as a "terrorist organization" a few weeks later, the government continued its crackdown on members in 2017. Many members of the country's opposition, as well as at least 20 independent journalists and 5 academics, have now left Tajikistan due to the crackdown on political freedoms that has intensified since 2015. [18] Despite having left the country, the government has continued to target exiled dissidents with the aim of forcing them to return to face trial. The government has issued requests, known as Red Notices, to members of Interpol to arrest these individuals on their territory. Party leader Muhiddin Kabiri remains on the organization's wanted list. [19] In October 2017, IRPT member Mirzorakhim Kuzov was detained on an Interpol Red Notice in Greece when traveling back to Iran from a human rights conference in Poland. [20]
- To place further pressure on those who have left the country for political reasons, the government has continued to target their family members still residing in Tajikistan. In July 2017, when the exiled Tajik opposition held a meeting in Germany to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the end of the civil war, the government targeted the relatives of at least 10 participants at the event. [21] Police and security services detained, insulted, and threatened to

confiscate the property of the relatives of the conference attendees. On 10 July, police visited the family home of exiled attorney Jamshed Yorov, brother of jailed human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov, threatening to rape his 15-year-old daughter if his wife did not divorce him. [22]

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.	**1.25** / 7.00

- Emomali Rahmon and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have dominated every presidential and parliamentary election since independence. Although the 1994 constitution and 1999 Law on Elections provide the basis for a multiparty system, elections have been marred by irregularities and allegations of fraud, including widespread ballot stuffing, proxy voting, and intimidation. There is no central voter register. Instead, each local electoral commission compiles voter lists, making elections susceptible to voter fraud. Opposition rallies are not permitted, and the state media campaigns for the ruling PDP. After the 2015 parliamentary election, observers from the OSCE said the vote itself had "significant shortcomings, including multiple voting and ballot box stuffing," repeating their conclusions in the 2010 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections. [23] The next presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2020.
- The PDP controls the Assembly of Representatives (*Majlis Namayandagon*), holding 51 seats in the 63-seat body. Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, five nominally opposition parties hold seats in the assembly. None of these parties offers substantive opposition to government policies. The two most vocal critics of the government—the Islamic Renaissance Party and the Social Democratic Party—do not hold seats in the assembly. The National Assembly (*Majlisi milli*), the upper house, has 33 members, all of whom are appointed. In April 2016, the president's daughter and chief of staff, Ozoda Emomali, became a deputy of the upper house. [24]

- In April 2017, the president's son and newly appointed mayor of Dushanbe, Rustam Emomali, was elected a member of Dushanbe's local legislature in a by-election following the resignation of the previous mayor, Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloev. Standing in electoral district 25, Rustam received 85 percent of the vote. [25] His opponents from the government-aligned Agrarian Party and opposition Democratic Party received 8 percent and 3 percent of the vote, respectively. The 87-percent turnout was high for an election in authoritarian Tajikistan.

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.	**1.25** / 7.00

- The Tajik government has displayed growing hostility toward the country's 2,773 registered public associations in recent years. Officials have frequently accused Western-backed nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of plotting to destabilize the country. [26] Amendments to the Law on Public Associations introduced in 2015 require all NGOs receiving foreign funding to report to the Ministry of Justice, although this is not widely enforced. [27] The Minister of Justice, Rustam Shohmurod, justified the law to "prevent foreign grants from supporting terrorists and extremists." [28]
- The government uses inspections by the Tax Committee and Labor Regulator to pressure NGOs working in politically sensitive fields. [29] In April, a number of local NGO directors reported receiving phone calls from the security services telling them to halt their activities. [30] In May, the president signed amendments to the Law on the Fight against Corruption, stipulating that public associations need to report risks of corruption within their organization to the State Agency for Financial Control and Combating Corruption. [31] The government is discussing a new law on non-commercial entities. No civil society representatives have been involved or consulted in the process. [32] In his final report from his trip to Tajikistan in March 2016, David Kaye, UN Special

Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, concluded that "legal developments and practices put significant pressure on civil society actors, narrowing the space for civil society organizations and peaceful demonstrations in the country." [33]

- Responding to the perceived threat of Islamic extremism, the government has introduced measures to tightly regulate religious expression. The 2009 Law on Religion establishes strict criteria for the registration of religious groups and places of worship. In 2017, the State Committee on Religious Affairs claimed to have closed 1,938 "illegal" mosques, purporting to act on the behest of local residents. [34] The 2012 Law on Parental Responsibility forbids minors from praying in mosques and restricts access to religious education. Since 2014, the government has paid imams a salary, and imams are required to read sermons prepared by the authorities. [35] Officials frequently dissuade citizens from displaying signs of piety, framing this as "foreign" to national culture. [36] Police in Khatlon region claimed to have shaved 13,000 beards and "persuaded" 1,700 women to remove their hijabs in its counter-extremism campaign in 2016, although these practices are not seen all over the country. [37] At the same time, officials promote "national" dress. In July, Minister of Culture Shamsuddin Omurbekzoda announced the establishment of a committee to "help design clothes for men and women." [38] In August, President Rahmon signed amendments to the 2007 Law on Observing National Traditions and Rituals, stipulating that individuals must "wear traditional and national clothes" at "traditional" gatherings such as weddings and funerals. [39] In a seeming contradiction to its policy of promoting "traditional" practices, in September the Committee on Religious Affairs banned loud crying at funerals, a practice tracing its origins to pre-Islamic rituals. [40]
- The government has also disrupted the spread of information about religion, closing down all of the country's madrassas, censoring literature, and blocking websites. In April 2017, the Ministry of Culture decreed that no books are allowed in or out of the country without obtaining permission from the ministry, a move that experts linked to countering perceived extremism given that the majority of confiscated books are written in Arabic. [41] The campaign against extremism has not been restricted to Islam. In July, Protestant Pastor

Bakhrom Kholmatov was sentenced to three years in prison for "singing extremist songs" and "inciting religious hatred" during services at his church in Khujand. [42]

- Tajikistan's LGBT population continues to face discrimination and harassment. In October 2017, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Tajik Prosecutor General's Office announced that they had compiled a list of 370 individuals with "unconventional" sexual orientation. [43] According to the office, the list was compiled based on investigative operations called "Morality" and "Cleaning," both ostensibly aimed at protecting the "vulnerability" of this group. In November, Rozi Zindagi, an organization supporting the LGBT community, ceased operating, citing "pressure from the government." [44]

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.	**1.25** / 7.00

- Tajikistan's government continues to severely curtail freedom of information. While the constitution, Law on Access to Information, Law on Television and Broadcasting, and Law on Periodical Print and Other Mass Media grant freedom of expression, and prohibit censorship and state interference with the media, in reality, the state tightly regulates independent media. Article 137 of the Criminal Code prohibits "slandering" the president, and Article 330 prevents journalists from insulting other officials. Most journalists practice self-censorship, and many of the most critical outlets are now based overseas. Journalists who write critical stories are likely to receive threats from the intelligence services, or face libel charges or even arrest. At least 20 independent journalists have fled the country in recent years. [45] In 2016, the National Association of Independent Media recorded 160 complaints or comments about situations involving free speech and independent media. [46]
- The government controls most printing presses, newsprint supplies, and broadcasting facilities in the country. Tajikistan's media licensing commission

routinely denies licenses to independent outlets, or otherwise obstructs the licensing process. No member of an independent media outlet or civil society is currently a member of the licensing committee. [47] The State Committee on Television and Radio (SCTR), headed by a presidential appointee, regulates and oversees broadcasting at the national and regional level. In August 2016, the government introduced new "guidelines for the production of television and radio programs" after a decree called on journalists to produce work that was in keeping with "national values" and helps to maintain "unity." [48] Although self-censorship is widely practiced by independent journalists, this was the first time the government of Tajikistan legalized the censorship of independent media. New regulations introduced in February 2017 require all new periodicals and printing houses to register with the State Committee on National Security (GKNB). [49]

- As of 1 May 2015, there were 580 registered media outlets in Tajikistan; 378 of these were non-state media, including private, public, independent, and unsubsidized outlets. [50] The independent media operates under both financial and governmental pressure. Although 44 television and radio stations operate in Tajikistan—of which 28 are non-state owned—state-controlled television channels that praise the ruling party are the only media outlets broadcasting nationwide. [51] Most people have access to international, primarily Russian, channels via satellite television. Newspaper circulation is small, with state-owned newspapers having the largest circulation. Most independent agencies print under 4,000 copies per week. State-run newspapers *Minbari Khalq* and *Jumhuriyat* have circulation in excess of 30,000 copies. [52] Similar dynamics are seen with electronic media, where 92 percent of locally registered outlets are government owned. [53]
- An estimated 17 percent of the population uses the internet regularly. [54] As the internet has gained popularity among Tajiks, and became a forum for discussing political issues, the state-run Communications Service, led by Rahmon family member Beg Zukhurov, has routinely blocked websites and social networks that broadcast criticism of the authorities. In February 2017, Prosecutor General Yusuf Rahmon reported that the government blocked over 2,000 "radical" websites in 2016. [55] Although the blocks on YouTube, Facebook, and other

social media, which had been in place since May 2016, were lifted in May 2017, many news sites, including Akhbor, Payom, and Ozodagon, remain blocked. [56] In July, the parliament's upper house approved new legislation allowing law enforcement to legally access data on the online activities and texting of citizens. These changes to the "Law on Operative and Search Activity" were introduced after parliamentarian Jurakhon Majidzoda stated that more than 80 percent of those who go online "visit undesirable sites belonging to extremist and terrorist organizations." [57] In August, the Ministry of Internal Affairs established a new department to combat online extremism, highlighting that this is a priority for the government. [58]

- In December, a local judge sentenced journalist Khayrullo Mirsaidov to two months in detention for embezzlement, forgery, and inciting ethnic and religious hatred. [59] Mirsaidov was arrested after publishing a letter accusing a local official of soliciting a $1,000 bribe from a comedy troupe he leads. Mirsaidov may be sentenced to up to 21 years in prison based on the charges.

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.	**1.75** / 7.00

- Tajikistan's local government bodies serve as an extension of the central government's power. The country is divided into four administrative provinces (*viloyat*) with limited autonomy. These provinces are further divided into 58 districts (*nohiya*) and 406 municipalities (*jamoat*), in addition to numerous towns and villages. Although the 1994 constitution granted Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous status, in reality, the central authorities have curtailed its autonomy.
- In recent years, the central government has brought areas that enjoyed some autonomy, such as the Rasht Valley and Gorno-Badakhshan, more firmly under its control. This process of state consolidation has relied on coercion and co-optation. The authorities have forcibly removed local leaders and their supporters. Many of these local leaders fought with the opposition during the

civil war and were incorporated into the government as part of the 1997 peace deal, but have since been replaced by individuals with greater loyalty to the central authorities. [60] While the 2009 law on local self-governance provided for the devolution of power, the central authorities maintain a tight grip over the regions. The law included a provision by which municipal councils could design their own budgets and elect jamoat leaders, but the government has failed to devise a mechanism to realize this step despite millions of dollars of donor assistance.

- Following the practice of the Soviet Union's central government, President Rahmon appoints the governors of provinces and districts. In January, Rahmon appointed his eldest son, Rustam, as mayor of Dushanbe. Rustam replaced Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloev, who had held the position since 1996 and was once considered by many to be the second-most powerful individual in the country. Ubaydulloev still chairs the upper house of parliament. Shortly after he was forced into retirement, the anticorruption agency launched an official investigation into embezzlement at city hall during his tenure. [61] Since taking over as mayor, Rustam has approved a new General Plan for Dushanbe to 2025, which envisages a 30-percent increase in the city's territory, renovated 50 public spaces, and built a series of new administrative buildings. [62] Not all of his policies have proven popular. His decree to phase out the city's 20,000 collective taxis, or *marshrutkas*, in favor of buses has been met with anger, with one driver slashing his own neck in front of the mayor's office on 12 April. [63] Citizens have also voiced concerns over the demolition of historical buildings and removal of trees along the city's boulevards as a result of the General Plan. [64]
- Approximately 70 percent of Tajikistan's population lives in rural areas. Agricultural production, primarily cotton production, accounts for almost 20 percent of the country's GDP and two-thirds of the domestic labor force. [65] Since 1997, land has slowly been decollectivized. While the state owns all arable land, 83 percent of this is now worked by 108,035 privately owned *dekhan* (peasant) farms. [66] In August 2016, President Rahmon signed a new Law on Dekhan Farms, developed with the support of USAID. [67] The law recognizes dekhan farms as legal entities, and extends shareholder rights to sell products,

set prices, and construct structures on land. [68] Despite this land reform, problems with governance and corruption persist. Although farmers have the right to petition the District Land Committee for an undefined share of land within the collective farm, many dekhan farms have remained only nominally private and are collective in name only. [69] The financial benefits of farming in Tajikistan largely favor the investment-monopoly intermediary firms that act as loan sharks, providing agronomic inputs to the farmers at inflated prices and reserving the right to purchase the year's harvest at low prices. [70]

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.	**1.00** / 7.00

- Tajikistan's justice system remains highly politicized. Trials of political opponents take place behind closed doors, and the proceedings lack transparency. Justice is selectively meted out, with loyal officials enjoying impunity and potential rivals facing punishment. "Extremism" remains loosely defined in the Law on Extremism and Criminal Code, allowing anyone who is perceived as potential competition to ruling elites to be labeled as such.
- Being a lawyer in Tajikistan is an increasingly dangerous profession. Following the introduction of a new licensing system in 2015, lawyers were forced to take exams set by the Ministry of Justice. As a result, the number of registered lawyers fell from 1,500 to just 600 by May 2017. [71] The government continues to implicate criminal defense attorneys in the crimes of their defendants. Since 2014, the government has imprisoned seven human rights lawyers. [72] Buzurgmehr Yorov and Nuriddin Mahkamov, who defended clients accused of extremism, including members of the opposition Group 24 and Islamic Renaissance Party, were tried behind closed doors in October 2016 and sentenced to 23 years and 21 years in prison, respectively. [73] In March, the court extended Yorov's sentence by two years for "contempt of court" after he stated that "society is spoiled by a few ignorant people who believe themselves

the wisest," a quote attributed to eleventh-century Persian poet Avicenna. [74] In August, a court added another three years to Yorov's sentence for "publicly insulting the Leader of the Nation" Emomali Rahmon in violation of a new article of the Criminal Code introduced in October 2016. [75] Numerous lawyers have now fled the country. Muazzama Qodirova, who defended Yorov during his first trial, left Tajikistan in January after being threatened with criminal proceedings for discussing Yorov's case with foreign media. [76]

- Tajikistan employs a confession-based investigative and policing system, and despite an official denial by the Supreme Court, law enforcement bodies often use torture to extract confessions. In the first six months of 2017, the Coalition of Civil Society against Torture and Impunity recorded 38 cases of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement. [77] With many incidents going unrecorded due to fear of reprisals, this is likely an underrepresentation of the scale of the problem. Those detained on politically motivated charges are particularly susceptible to mistreatment. A number of opposition activists have complained of being tortured while in prison. [78] Jailed human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov, for example, has reported being beaten numerous times by his guards in prison. [79]
- Tajikistan's conscription-based army upholds a culture of hazing and abuse. Each fall, the army forces 15,000 young men of conscript age to join the army, often kidnapping them from the street. [80] Numerous recruits die each year as a result of hazing. In recent years, the government has appeared to crack down on such practices, prosecuting those responsible. In March, Yoribek Saidzoda, a platoon commander in the border guards, was sentenced to nine years in prison for extortion and abuse of power following the suicide of one of his soldiers whom Saidzoda had wrongfully accused of stealing. [81]

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.	**1.00** / 7.00

- Nepotism, cronyism, extortion, and bribe seeking by government officials pervade all levels of Tajik society. From small bribes paid to traffic police to families paying bribes to avoid compulsory military service, corruption is part of everyday life in the country. Tajikistan remains a nepotistic kleptocracy, a "nepotocracy." A small group of families close to the president dominate politics, the domestic market, and foreign trade. Business and politics are inextricably intertwined. Control of state agencies allows businesses under the authority of the presidential family to avoid following regulations, or paying taxes and tariffs. At the same time, state agencies are used to drive competitors out of business with fines for breaking regulations and allegations of corruption. [82] Those who challenge the presidential family face severe repercussions. In October, following criticism from President Rahmon, police arrested Rajabali Odinaev, head of the gas station chain Umed 88, accusing him of fraud and tax evasion. [83] With Odinaev detained, Faroz, a company owned by the president's son-in-law Shamsullo Sohibov, now dominates the industry. [84]
- The president has appointed many of his family members to senior government posts. Rahmon's eldest son, Rustam Emomali, who turned 30 in December 2017, was appointed mayor of Dushanbe in January 2017. [85] He had previously held senior positions at the State Agency for Financial Control and Measures against Corruption and the Customs Service, and is viewed by many as a potential presidential successor. In September 2009, Rahmon appointed his then 30-year-old daughter, Ozoda Emomali, as deputy minister of foreign affairs and elevated her to first deputy minister in 2014. In January 2016, Rahmon appointed Ozoda head of the presidential administration, and in June 2017 she became state justice counselor. [86] Ozoda's husband, Jamoliddin Nuraliyev, was appointed first deputy finance minister in 2008, and in 2015 became a deputy to the chairman of the National Bank. [87] Rahmon's brother-in-law, Hasan Asadullozoda, controls Tajikistan's largest private bank, Oriyon, and owns an airline company and a firm that supplies bauxite for Talco, the country's state-owned aluminum company. [88]
- Officials have elevated their positions by marrying into the first family. Rahmon's eldest daughter, Firuza, married into the Sohibov family, which has interests in cement and energy. [89] Another daughter, Parvina, is married to the

son of the former Minister of Energy, Gul Sherali. Rahmon's sixth daughter, Zarina, who became a vice-chairperson at Oriyon Bank in July 2017, is married to Sievush Zuhurov, son of the head of the communications service. [90] In November, one of Rahmon's granddaughters married the grandson of the governor of Sughd region, Abdurahmon Kodiri. This marriage was the first between the northern elite, who dominated republican politics during the Soviet Union, and the president's family. [91] Other relatives hold senior positions in the tax service, diplomatic service, and local government.

- Relatives of the president control the key industries, including cotton, cement, aluminum, and energy. Corrupt officials have used offshore accounts to siphon billions of dollars from state-owned banks and enterprises. The state-controlled Talco aluminum smelter, for example, is owned by companies based in the British Virgin Islands. [92] Instead of being reinvested into the state budget, the revenue raised by Talco has been used as a slush fund for leading officials to spend on themselves. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has previously estimated that around $3.5 billion, or more than a third of the country's annual GDP, has been transferred to offshore accounts. [93]
- Fatigued by the conditionality of external support for investment projects by international financial institutions, like the World Bank and IMF, the government is turning to the bond market, raising money from investors without intermediaries. Having gained a rating from S&P Global Ratings, in August the government issued $500 million in Eurobonds to finance the Rogun hydroelectric plant, attracting $4 billion in bids. [94] The success of the sale sets a concerning precedent. Raising money in this way could allow the government to bypass the conditions on lending required by many donors, and continue its corrupt practices with impunity.
- A United Nations report in 2012 indicated that revenues from the trafficking of heroin across the country's 1,350-kilometer border with Afghanistan were equivalent to roughly one-third of Tajikistan's licit GDP. [95] Other experts have given a more circumspect estimate of 20 to 30 percent. [96] Whereas approximately 100 to 115 tons of heroin and opium transits the border each year, law enforcement officers seized just 3.43 tons of all illicit drug types in

2016, a 27-percent decline from 2015. [97] Low public sector salaries and a culture of corruption help explain these low seizure rates.

- While corrupt officials are plundering the state, the government claims to be fighting corruption. In April, police arrested 17 employees of the State Agency for Financial Control and Measures against Corruption, including the agency's deputy head. [98] Following an investigation, in July–September the employees were sentenced to between 7 and 15 years in prison. [99] In October, a senior official from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade was detained on suspicion of taking a $490,000 bribe. [100]

Author: Edward Lemon is a Mellon Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at the Department of Political Science, Columbia University.

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 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic.

Footnotes

1. "The Eldest son of the President Became the Mayor of Tajik Capital," Asia Plus, 12 January 2017, https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/power/20170112/the-eldest-son-of-the...
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1850 M St. NW Floor 11
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