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Nations in Transit 2012 - Uzbekistan

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Capital: Tashkent

Population: 28.2 million

GNI/capita, PPP: US\$3,110

Source: The data above were drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2010*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores										
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Electoral Process	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Civil Society	6.50	6.50	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Independent Media	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Governance *	6.25	6.25	n/a							
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	6.50	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75
Democracy Score	6.46	6.46	6.43	6.82	6.82	6.86	6.89	6.93	6.93	6.93

* 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.

2012 Scores

Democracy Score:	6.93
Regime Classification:	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
National Democratic Governance:	7.00
Electoral Process:	7.00
Civil Society:	7.00
Independent Media:	7.00
Local Democratic Governance:	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence:	7.00
Corruption:	6.75

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

Executive Summary:

Since Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, Uzbekistan's authorities have implemented measures aimed at neutralizing political challenges and stifling

criticism in the name of establishing stability in the country. However, instead of building genuine stability through tolerance for pluralism, President Islam Karimov has focused on rooting out any potential opposition that might disrupt his rule. Meanwhile, international criticism of the regime's rights abuses has been muted in recent years, owing to Tashkent's role in supporting Western nations' efforts in Afghanistan. In public statements, former critics now balance condemnation with appreciation, which has effectively relieved pressure on the regime to improve its rights record.

Backed by a formidable Interior Ministry and security forces, Karimov has eliminated nearly all civil society groups that do not embrace state policies. When the office of Human Rights Watch was shut down in June 2011 it marked the departure of the last international rights organization from Uzbekistan. Likewise, there are nearly no independent print or broadcast media inside in the country. The Uzbek government increased its efforts to control the flow of information on the internet by blocking dozens more potentially critical websites in 2011, upping its efforts from previous years. As the Arab Spring unfolded, Uzbek authorities also moved to restrict mobile phone use and requested internet operators broadly follow activities on social network sites.

Previous suspicions about the systemic nature of corruption in Uzbekistan were supported by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks release of U.S diplomatic cables in late 2010 and early 2011, which indicated deal-brokering between Uzbek officials and organized crime figures.

National Democratic Governance. In 2011, the regime neither eased the tight restrictions that have been in place for years, nor introduced any meaningful democratic reforms, despite pledges for change. President Karimov's regime continued its intolerance of opposition and offered no new meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process. *Therefore, Uzbekistan's rating for national democratic governance remains at 7.00.*

Electoral Process. The electorate in Uzbekistan continued to have little say in drafting government policies or in choosing its government representatives and no legislation was introduced to reform this policy. The only changes made to the constitution were procedural, concerning the selection process for prime minister and the president's replacement should he become unfit to carry out his duties. Presidential term limits were reduced back to 5-years, but there is no indication that this change will affect the status quo in electoral process. *Therefore, Uzbekistan's rating for electoral process remains at 7.00.*

Civil Society. As in previous years, only a few rights groups were permitted to carry out limited activities in Uzbekistan. Most civil society organizations and religious groups (other than state-approved Islamic or Russian Orthodox groups) are either denied registration or face harassment, ranging from administrative fines to more serious criminal charges and even physical attacks against members. Meanwhile, Uzbek authorities sponsor counter groups and organizations that promote the government's ideas and values. *Uzbekistan's rating for civil society remains at 7.00.*

Independent Media. Uzbek authorities nearly eradicated independent media in Uzbekistan years ago. A small number of independent Uzbek journalists remain, but those who report on sensitive issues without official approval face significant harassment. The example of Elena Bondar, who was detained and threatened with jail time for merely attending an OSCE-sponsored training seminar in 2011, was a reminder that the government still demands full control over media in Uzbekistan. *Therefore, Uzbekistan's rating for independent media remains at 7.00.*

Local Democratic Governance. Officials at the regional, municipal, and other local levels are chosen by the central government, without input from Uzbek citizens. The loyalty of these officials is to the state and their task is to maintain order. In October, local town council *Mahalla* leaders helped stop the "Mass Complaint" protest in Karshi, which called on citizens to carry complaints about local officials to their superiors, demonstrating once again that local government serves its own interests over the rights of their constituents. *Uzbekistan's rating for local democratic governance remains at 6.75.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. The judiciary of Uzbekistan is entirely subordinate to the executive branch, existing solely to legitimize the decisions of the central government. Reports of arbitrary detentions, beatings, and torture in holding facilities and jails continued in 2011. Courts routinely ignoring claims from visibly abused defendants that they were coerced into making confessions. Groups or individuals targeted by the authorities have virtually no opportunity to prove their innocence in Uzbekistan's courts. The judiciary has been instrumental in shutting down the offices of foreign-based organizations in Uzbekistan, the last of which – Human Rights Watch (HRW) – closed in June 2011 with little deliberation in the Supreme Court and no official explanation. *Uzbekistan's rating for judicial independence and governance remains at 7.00.*

Corruption. Leaked diplomatic cables from the WikiLeaks website confirmed long-held suspicions of connections between the regime and key figures in organized crime. Toward the end of the year a number of local and ministry officials were dismissed for corruption, yet no steps were taken to tighten or introduce legislation aimed at addressing the issue systematically. *Uzbekistan's rating for corruption remains at 6.75.*

Outlook for 2012. The government's rights record will likely remain poor as Uzbekistan's geopolitical significance continues to play in Tashkent's favor. Deteriorating relations between the United States led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition and the Pakistani government made NATO forces operating in Afghanistan nearly wholly dependent on supply lines running through Central Asia, the bulk of which pass through Uzbekistan, the last secure country before Afghanistan. Uzbek authorities are keenly aware of this dependence and have used it to mute Western criticism of Uzbekistan's internal affairs. As a result, opposition groups in Uzbek can expect little meaningful support from foreign governments invested in the war in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, a regime change seems unlikely in the near future as President Karimov neither shows signs of relinquishing power when his term expires in 2014 nor taking steps to reverse 20 years of authoritarian rule. As long as Karimov remains healthy enough to lead Uzbekistan – there is no reason to expect that the country will move toward a democratic system.

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