



FREEDOM
FOR
EURASIA

CENTRAL ASIA HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT 2025

JANUARY
JUNE

OCTOBER 2025



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About Freedom for Eurasia

Freedom for Eurasia is a nonpartisan international human rights organization established in 2021 in Vienna, Austria. Freedom for Eurasia documents and reports on human rights and corruption abuses in Eurasia (the former Soviet Republics of Eastern Europe and Central Asia). Our major reports 'Who Enabled the Uzbek Princess', 'Bad Connection' and 'Napoleon Complex' cover high-level corruption in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. To learn more about our projects and other activities, please visit our website: <https://freedomforeurasia.org/>

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This report aims to highlight the severe and worsening human rights situation across all five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the first half of 2025. Perhaps more than ever before, the region’s political life is characterized by systematic suppression of freedom of expression and media through legislative control and harassment, pervasive political repression involving surveillance and arbitrary detention, and a breakdown of the rule of law wherein judicial systems serve as tools of political control. Governments also severely restrict freedom of movement and association, with tactics ranging from politically motivated extraditions to “foreign agents” laws. The most serious violations include fabricated charges and secret trials for critics, widespread torture in detention, and the growing trend of transnational repression.

In Central Asia, rule of law remains largely nominal, with courts often serving as instruments of political control rather than independent arbiters. In cases involving activists, human rights defenders, political opponents, and journalists, judges repeatedly side with authorities to regularly deliver politically biased rulings, restrict access to defense lawyers, and hold closed or opaque hearings. Accountability for law enforcement abuse is virtually nonexistent, as investigations into police or security service misconduct rarely progress, if they are opened at all.

In 2025, all five Central Asian countries were classified as “Not Free” in the Freedom in the World index published annually by Freedom House.¹ The index assesses political rights and civil liberties around the world based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Countries are rated on a 100-point scale, with a higher score indicating greater freedom.

Table 1: “Freedom in the World 2025” Ranking for Central Asian Countries

Country	Overall Score (out of 100)	Political Rights (score)	Civil Liberties (score)
Kazakhstan	23	5	18
Kyrgyzstan	26	4	22
Tajikistan	5	0	5
Turkmenistan	1	0	1
Uzbekistan	12	2	10

Every Central Asian country also scored below 40 in the Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index in 2024, the latest index published to date. Countries scoring between 0 and 50 points on the index’s 100-point scale are classified as “highly corrupt”. Several of these nations are rich in oil, gas and minerals, producing an elite who lead extravagant lifestyles, with both government and private events displaying astonishing opulence. Historically, however, these countries have had high levels of poverty, weak infrastructure, and limited social protections. This disparity is a direct result of all Central Asian nations possessing “kleptocratic” political economies where the ruling elite siphon off resources and

1 Central Asia Ranks Among Least Free in Freedom House’s 2025 Report, March 3, 2025, Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/central-asia-ranks-among-least-free-in-freedom-houses-2025-report/>

control major assets at the expense of the general populace. In such economies, corruption is systemic, with the dividing line between public and private business obliterated. Furthermore, with minimal state support, cuts in almost all USAID programs in Central Asia have had a devastating impact on most vulnerable local communities across the region.

In assessing the state of human rights in the first half of 2025, we examined seven key areas where restrictions have tightened across different countries. These areas reflect fundamental freedoms and protections that are essential to democratic societies and the rule of law. Our analysis focused on: suppression of freedom of expression and the media; political repression, surveillance, and arbitrary detention; rule of law and access to justice; equality and non-discrimination; restrictions on freedom of movement, assembly, and association; corruption. By tracking developments in these categories, we identified patterns of shrinking civic space and increasing authoritarian control.

Kazakhstan

Photo by Aibek Skakov

KAZAKHSTAN

Suppression of Freedom of Expression and Media

In 2024 and the first half of 2025, Kazakhstan continued to put pressure on online expression and digital freedoms, through legislative measures, direct suppression of critical voices, and various forms of harassment. The aim of these actions is to control the digital field, leading to a chilling effect on independent reporting and public discourse.

On 13 January 2025, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed a new law designed to enhance the transparency of government agencies.² While the law promotes the presumption of openness for public information, it includes provisions that limit access to certain information for specified periods to protect national security, public order, human rights, and other critical concerns (Article 5). Additionally, the law allows the government to restrict access to information by conducting closed meetings, wherein the public is excluded from participation, and public notification of their occurrence is restricted to the bare minimum.³ This suggests a selective approach to transparency, whereby the state can still control information that it categorizes as sensitive.

In addition, updated rules for the accreditation of foreign media representatives and their journalists came into effect on 19 January 2025, which established further hindrances for international journalists.⁴ These new rules expanded the required documentation and introduced additional grounds for denying accreditation, such as submitting false information or violating Kazakhstani legislation.⁵ This broadens authorities' powers to restrict foreign reporting, effectively transforming accreditation into a censoring tool.⁶

On 23 January local journalists filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Justice, challenging accreditation rules, arguing that they violate constitutional rights. However, Astana City Court rejected their appeal.

In April, the Tirek Alliance added five activists detained in Almaty ahead of the September 2024 referendum on constructing a nuclear power plant to its list of political prisoners. Nurlan Zhaulibayev, Zhanat Kazakbay, Fazylzhan Syzdykov, Nurlan Temirgaliyev, and Aidar Mubarakov remain in detention, charged under Article 272(1) and Article 24(3) of the Criminal Code.⁷

2 Tokayev signs law decentralizing powers between government levels, 17 July 2025, Kazinform International News Agency, <https://qazinform.com/news/tokayev-signs-law-decentralizing-powers-between-government-levels-3496e6>

3 Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Access to Information", 16 November 2015, Information-Legal System "Әділет" (Adilet), <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z1500000401>

4 On Approval of the Rules for Accreditation of Representative Offices of Foreign Mass Media and Journalists, 18 May 2016, Information-Legal System "Әділет" (Adilet), <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1600013781>

5 Ibid.

6 Violations of Freedom of Speech in Kazakhstan: January 2025, 21 February 2025, Adil Soz, <https://adilsoz.kz/en/262-violations/violations-of-freedom-of-speech-in-kazakhstan-january-2025.html>

7 Expansion of the List of Political Prisoners in Kazakhstan, 23 April 2025, Tirek, <https://tirek.info/rasshirenje-spiska-politicheskikh-zaklyuchyonnyh-kazahstana-10/>

During the reporting period Kazakhstan government took actions against multiple independent journalists and bloggers. On 17 January, satirical blogger Temirlan Ensebek, was detained in Almaty and charged under Article 174 of Kazakhstan’s Criminal Code for “inciting interethnic discord” due to a January 2024 Instagram post featuring a Kazakh song. The disputed content included a 20-year-old rap track titled “Yo, Orystar” (“Yo, Russians”) accompanying footage mocking the Russian TV presenter Tina Kandelaki, who had recently made remarks concerning the status of the Russian language in Kazakhstan. On April 11, 2025, an Almaty court found him guilty and sentenced him to five years of restricted liberty, a punishment that included a ban on engaging in journalistic or public activities, confiscation of his electronic devices, and the imposition of financial penalties.⁸

Another pertinent case is that of independent journalist Lukpan Akhmedyarov, who was detained for questioning in April 2025 on charges of spreading “false information”.⁹ The charges were brought after his report about Kazakh citizens allegedly being coerced into fighting for Russia in Ukraine.¹⁰ Akhmedyarov’s case demonstrates how authorities use vague legal provisions on “fake news” to suppress critical journalism and intimidate those who cover politically sensitive topics.

Beyond legal pressure, online critics in Kazakhstan faced various forms of harassment too. On 4 January 2025, journalist Vadim Boreiko reported a series of cyberattacks, including a fake traffic fine notice, the blocking of his Instagram account (which had 113,000 followers), and multiple attempts to add him to WhatsApp groups, ultimately leading to his WhatsApp account being completely blocked.¹¹

Overall, the first half of 2025 in Kazakhstan demonstrates a persistent and evolving strategy on the part of the government to control online information and suppress critical voices. New laws and their enforcement, coupled with other forms of harassment, continue to restrict fundamental freedoms, creating a challenging environment for independent media and civil society.

Political Repression, Surveillance, and Arbitrary Detention

In Kazakhstan, politically motivated charges, administrative pressure, and arbitrary detention have become common tactics to silence critics. In April 2025, a blogger received a five-year sentence for a satirical post in a case that was widely believed to be politically motivated. Additionally, five activists who protested against a planned nuclear power plant were charged with “preparing mass riots” and remained in pretrial detention as of June 2025. The government also actively targets critics abroad; for instance, a women’s rights activist Dina Smailova who fled Kazakhstan in 2021 was detained in Montenegro in April 2025 on an extradition request and has reported suspicious surveillance.¹²

- 8 Kazakh journalist Temirlan Yensebek sentenced to 5 years of restricted freedom, April 17, 2025, Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2025/04/kazakh-journalist-temirlan-yensebek-sentenced-to-5-years-of-restricted-freedom/>
- 9 Renewed Attacks on Foreign-Funded NGOs, Protest Restrictions Despite Protective Court Ruling, and Ongoing Prosecution of Critics, 14 July 2025, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Bureau.kz), https://bureau.kz/en/?post_type=post&p=61157
- 10 Journalist Lukpan Akhmedyarov Shares Details About Case, 16 April 2025, Orda English, <https://en.orda.kz/journalist-lukpan-akhmedyarov-shares-details-about-case-5995/>
- 11 Violations of Freedom of Speech in Kazakhstan: January 2025, 21 February 2025, Adil Soz, <https://adilsoz.kz/en/262-violations/violations-of-freedom-of-speech-in-kazakhstan-january-2025.html>
- 12 Montenegro Releases Kazakh Rights Activist Smailova Awaiting Extradition Ruling, 15 April 2025, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <https://www.rferl.org/a/dinara-smailova-kazakhstan-human-rights-montenegro-release/33385740.html>

The government has expanded its methods of control to include sophisticated digital surveillance. Human rights defender Murat Adam testified before the UN Human Rights Committee in June 2025 on serious rights violations, including the illegal creation of unofficial databases of activists by state actors. He cited the case of a blogger listed in a wanted persons database after being identified by facial recognition technology, who has been subjected to illegal surveillance and wiretapping.¹³

What begins as digital surveillance inside the country escalates into transnational harassment, as seen in the targeting of exiled journalists. The case of Kazakh journalists and founders of the Ukraine-based opposition media BASE (БАСЕ) Natalia Sadykova and Aidos Sadykov who had complained that men of Kazakh appearance watched their house, followed their car, and showed up at places where they met people long before Sadykov was assassinated in Kyiv in 2024. Following Sadykov's death, surveillance of Natalia Sadykova continued. Natalia Sadykova reported that she was also being followed during a work trip to the European Union. Ukrainian law enforcement identified Sadykov's killers as Kazakh citizens who returned to Kazakhstan immediately after the assassination. Kazakh authorities have refused to cooperate with their Ukrainian counterparts in investigating this case. Ukrainian authorities issued an Interpol arrest warrant for both assailants and suspended the investigation.¹⁴

Rule of Law and Access to Justice

In 2025, Kazakhstan continued to demonstrate a conflicted approach to justice reform: on the one hand, the government touted changes to the system: in January 2025, during Kazakhstan's Universal Periodic Review cycle, the government stated it was "implementing sweeping democratic reforms and protecting human rights in full compliance with its international obligations".¹⁵ However, pressure on civil society and independent media instead intensified, while the judicial system failed to ensure justice.

The persecution of activists was a key trend in Kazakhstan in 2025. Temirlan Yensebek was sentenced to five years of restricted freedom with a ban on publishing on social media and communicating with journalists. Esenbek's supporters argued that the charges were concocted as a pretext to punish him for his critical satirical posts targeting politicians, including President Tokayev.

Throughout the reporting period, the detention of opposition activists Marat Zhylanbaev and Duman Mukhamedkarim, convicted on dubious "extremism"-related charges, continued. In spring 2025, their names were included in a list of political prisoners that grew to 31 people. New charges of "preparing mass riots" were also brought against five activists who protested the construction of a nuclear power plant.¹⁶

13 Growing Pressure on Freedom of Expression in Kazakhstan: Murat Adam Raises Alarm at the UN, 26 June 2025, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Bureau.kz), <https://bureau.kz/en/sobstvennaya-informatsiya-po-angl/growing-pressure-on-freedom/>

14 A journalist shot dead, a state cloaked in silence: when will Kazakhstan respond to the murder of Aydos Sadykov?, 1 July 2025, RSF, <https://rsf.org/en/journalist-shot-Kazakhstan>; Kazakhstan: Act on UN Rights Review Recommendations, 30 January 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/30/kazakhstan-act-un-rights-review-recommendations-dead-state-cloaked-silence-when-will-kazakhstan-respond-murder-aydos-sadykov>

15 Kazakhstan: Act on UN Rights Review Recommendations, 30 January 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/30/kazakhstan-act-un-rights-review-recommendations>

16 Renewed Attacks on Foreign-Funded NGOs, Protest Restrictions Despite Protective Court Ruling, and Ongoing Prosecution of Critics, 14 July 2025, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Bureau.kz), https://bureau.kz/en/?post_type=post&p=61157

Another case demonstrating the failure of the judicial system was one wherein six officials charged with torturing dozens of detainees arrested after protests in January 2022 received lenient sentences. This is a direct violation of the principle of accountability and contributes to the preservation of impunity in connection with serious human rights violations.

Events in Kazakhstan in 2025 also highlight the regional trend of adopting repressive legal tools used by other autocratic regimes. In February 2025, Deputy Irina Smirnova proposed introducing a “foreign agents” law in Kazakhstan. A similar law, which Amnesty International described as repressive and leading to the closure of NGOs, was adopted in Kyrgyzstan in 2024.

Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association

Kazakhstan did not impose a blanket ban on public assemblies during the reporting period, but significant restrictions remain in place in terms of organizing mass gatherings. On 20 January 2025, Kazakhstan’s Constitutional Court issued a landmark ruling¹⁷ in response to a petition by human rights lawyers challenging provisions of the Law on the Procedure for Organizing and Holding Peaceful Assemblies. The contested provisions had allowed local authorities to deny assemblies on the grounds that another event was scheduled at the same time and place, enabling arbitrary restrictions. The Court found such practices unconstitutional and reaffirmed citizens’ right to freedom of assembly. Under the revised interpretation, authorities may no longer reject notifications on this basis and are required to propose an alternative, equivalent venue; only if organizers decline this option may the application be lawfully rejected.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in practice, local authorities continue to use other pretexts to restrict rallies and protests.

In Almaty, authorities repeatedly refused permission for peaceful demonstrations, most notably the Women’s Day March. Despite activists proposing multiple alternative dates to meet official requirements, their requests were consistently denied on the grounds of potential threats to public order. Since the last rally in 2023, activists reported receiving around 40 refusals.¹⁹ The only time the City Hall authorized the march was in 2021.²⁰ In response to and in protest of these refusals, activists held a series of single pickets. Similarly, authorities across several Kazakhstani cities, including Astana, Shymkent, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, and Ust-Kamenogorsk, denied applications from civil society groups to hold peaceful gatherings on 31 May, the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repressions. Officials justified the refusals with varying reasons, such as overlapping events, incomplete information from organizers, or alleged submission of inaccurate documents.²¹

17 Resolution No. 61-NP of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated January 20, 2025, 21 January 2025, GOV.KZ, <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/ksrk/documents/details/783466?lang=ru>

18 Andrey Sviridov, Akimats Will No Longer Be Able to Prohibit Rallies on the Pretext of Venue Occupancy, 21 January 2025, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, <https://bureau.kz/goryachee/akimaty-ne-smogut-zapreshhat/>

19 Organizers of rally for March 8 were banned to hold planned events, 20 January 2025, KazTAG, <https://kaztag.kz/en/news/organizers-of-rally-for-march-8-were-banned-to-hold-planned-events/>

20 Women’s March in Kazakhstan: Feminists vs the Mayor of Almaty, 5 February 2024, Caspian Post, <https://caspianpost.com/stories/womens-march-in-kazakhstan-feminists-vs-the-mayor-of-almaty>

21 In Kazakh cities, authorities massively refuse to allow rallies on the Memorial Day for Victims of Political Repressions. What are they afraid of?, 21 May 2025, Current Time, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-gorodah-kazahstana-vlasti-massovo-otkazivyayut-v-provedenii-mitingov-v-den-pamyati-zhertv-politicheskikh-repressiy-chego-boyatsya-vlasti-/33-419156.html>

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Kazakhstan has taken notable legislative steps in recent years to strengthen protections against gender-based violence and discrimination. Since the enactment of the so-called “Saltanat’s Law,” which criminalized domestic violence, officials reported a 20.5 percent decrease in domestic violence cases in the first five months of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, with serious and particularly grave offenses dropping by 29 and 44 percent, respectively.²² Additional reforms include measures to introduce penalties for workplace sexual harassment, signaling an effort to expand safeguards for women’s rights.²³

Kazakhstan secured its first representation on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for 2025–2028 through the election of Madina Dzharbusynova, a distinguished diplomat and Senior Adviser to UN Women Kazakhstan.²⁴ Her appointment represents an important step not only for Kazakhstan but also for the broader Central Asian region, signaling greater visibility for women’s rights issues at the international level.

At the same time, challenges in terms of discrimination continued at home. In July 2025, Dina Tansari (Dinara Smailova), founder of the NeMolchiKz Foundation, was granted refugee status in Montenegro. Since 2017, she and her organization have provided support to survivors of gender-based violence and exposed systemic police inaction. Her forced departure from Kazakhstan, following criminal prosecution and ongoing harassment, underscores the risks faced by women human rights defenders and the lack of protection for activists challenging gender-based discrimination.

The continuous persecution of Elvira Erkebayeva, 41, is a striking example of the state’s failure to protect and willingness to punish a victim of gender-based violence. Erkebayeva was prosecuted for allegedly attempting to purchase a firearm with the intention to kill her former husband.²⁵ Despite recent legislative reforms, the state consistently failed to protect her from abuse. Instead of holding her former husband—a long-term abuser—accountable, the authorities arrested Erkebayeva for attempting to protect herself and her children. According to the NeMolchiKz Foundation Erkebayeva sought police protection in mid-2023, making at least two written requests for protection orders in January and February 2024. While police granted the orders they failed to follow through with enforcement when her former husband violated them. They also did not pursue charges against him in connection with his physical abuse of Erkebayeva or refer her to services for people experiencing domestic violence, such as a women’s shelter. She was detained in February 2024 and remains in custody as of the end of the first half of 2025. The court proceedings have been marked by violations, with judges dismissing multiple motions submitted by her legal team. On 19 May 2025, the judge dismissed the

22 Kazakhstan’s Domestic Violence Law Brings Progress Amid Ongoing Challenges, 29 August 2025, Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/kazakhstans-domestic-violence-law-brings-progress-amid-ongoing-challenges/>

23 Kazakhstan to Introduce Penalties for Workplace Harassment, 24 April 2025, Tengrinews.kz, https://en.tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kazakhstan-to-introduce-penalties-for-workplace-harassment-267723/

24 Dana Omirgazy, Kazakh Diplomat Elected to UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 8 June 2024, The Astana Times, <https://astanatimes.com/2024/06/kazakh-diplomat-elected-to-un-committee-on-elimination-of-discrimination-against-women/>

25 Azamat Akhmetov, The Case of Elvira Erkebaeva: Contract Killing Allegation or Police Fabrication?, 25 June 2025, Mediazona. Central Asia, <https://mediazona.ca/article/2025/06/25/kz-Erkebaeva>

jury on the grounds that several members had experienced domestic violence and might therefore lack impartiality.²⁶ The case exemplifies state persecution: Elvira remains in custody, unable to reunite with her two children, while her former husband has so far gone unpunished for years of abuse.

The campaign against LGBT rights in Kazakhstan intensified following the closure of the country's first LGBT youth website, SelfTanu. In early 2024, a controversial organization called the "Parents' Union" launched a petition to ban or restrict the site on the grounds that it conflicted with "Kazakhstan's cultural and traditional values."²⁷ Shortly afterward, the Ministry of Culture and Information formally blocked SelfTanu, and its creators reported receiving numerous threats.²⁸ In May, the Parents' Union initiated a broader petition to ban so-called "LGBT propaganda", which gathered the 50,000 signatures required for state consideration. The Ministry of Culture and Information subsequently expressed partial support for the proposal, drawing criticism from domestic rights groups and international watchdogs.²⁹

Building on this restrictive trend, the government commissioned a study on the alleged impact of LGBT content on children and adolescents. In his National Quryltai address in March 2025, President Tokayev characterized LGBT rights as "imposed democratic values". Earlier that month, Mazhilis deputy Magerram Magerramov had proposed banning gender transition in Kazakhstan, framing his initiative as part of the "fight against LGBT".³⁰ This development is inconsistent with Kazakhstan's obligations under the ICCPR to protect freedom of expression and the right to non-discrimination, as well as international standards prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

In May 2025, the grassroots queer-feminist human rights organization Feminita submitted a civil society report to the Human Rights Committee, providing an alternative perspective to the state's official report and documenting systemic discrimination against LGBT people in the country. The report underscored the absence of anti-discrimination legislation explicitly covering sexual orientation and gender identity, the prevalence of hate speech by public officials, restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, and persistent barriers to political participation. It concluded that Kazakhstan has failed to implement previous UN recommendations and that discriminatory practices are worsening.³¹

26 Kazakhstan: Abused Woman Facing Murder Conspiracy Retrial, 24 June 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/24/kazakhstan-abused-woman-facing-murder-conspiracy-retrial>

27 Sultan Temirhan, Kazakhstan Parents' Union: Misinformation or concern for children? An organization that opposed the law on SBN and measles vaccination, 22 February, 2024, the Village, <https://www.the-village-kz.com/village/city/asking-question/34601-kazhastanskiy-soyuz-roditeley-dezinformatsiya-ili-zabota-o-detyah>

28 Olga Loginova, "Anti-LGBT+ Rhetoric in Kazakhstan Is a Product of Colonialism", 18 March 2024, Vlast English, <https://vlast.kz/english/59356-anti-lgbt-rhetoric-in-kazakhstan-is-a-product-of-colonialism.html>

29 Accumulating 50,000 Signatures, Petition Spurs the Government of Kazakhstan to Move Against "LGBT Propaganda", 9 August 2024, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Bureau.kz), <https://bureau.kz/en/hot/petition-spurs-the-government/>

30 Tokayev Claims Many Countries Have Been Imposed With "So-Called Democratic Values, Including LGBT", 14 March 2025, Current Time, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/tokayev-zayavil-o-navyazyvani-mnogim-stranam-tak-nazyvaemyh-demokraticeskikh-tsennostey-vklyuchaya-lgbt-/33348020.html>

31 Contribution under the UN Human Rights Committee's List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR for Kazakhstan – Submission No. 63261, 2025, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FSS%2FKAZ%2F63261&Lang=en

In February 2025, Feminita documented two consecutive attacks against the organization and its partners. The first occurred when a group of anti-gender activists led by Bagila Baltabayeva disrupted a School of Human Rights event, accusing organizers and participants of “violating the law”. Instead of protecting the event, police detained Feminita’s co-founders, Gulzada Serzhan and Zhanar Sekerbayeva, for several hours. The following day, on 14 February, another group led by Bibinur Sheraliyeva of the “Rakhym” public foundation and Dilnar Insanova attempted to force entry into a Feminita venue, shouting, banging on the doors, and playing loud music.³² On that occasion too, police failed to protect Feminita members and took no action against the attackers, effectively endorsing their actions. That same month, Gulzada Serzhan and Zhanar Sekerbayeva, were fined for leading an unregistered public association, after the Ministry of Justice had repeatedly denied the organization registration.³³

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Kazakhstan maintains several laws that, while framed as legal or administrative measures, can be abused to restrict citizens’ ability to leave the country.³⁴ For example, under the Law on Enforcement Proceedings, individuals with unpaid debts or administrative obligations can be placed under a temporary travel ban, a measure that could be selectively applied to silence critics or activists. Similarly, citizens who are under investigation, trial, or serving probationary sentences are legally barred from leaving the country, giving authorities broad discretion to initiate proceedings for political purposes. Even non-custodial sentences under the Penal Execution Code can include restrictions on movement that effectively block international travel.

Though the constitution guarantees freedom of movement and exit, these legal tools create loopholes that enable selective enforcement. In practice, such mechanisms can be used to trap political opponents, journalists, or human rights defenders inside the country, preventing them from seeking asylum, engaging with international institutions, or drawing international attention to rights abuses. This duality – formal legal compliance alongside discretionary enforcement – illustrates how Kazakhstan’s legal framework on movement can serve administrative convenience and reinforce political control.

Corruption

Legislation aimed at combating corruption among public officials includes Articles 366 to 368 of the Criminal Code, Articles 676 to 681 of the Administrative Code, the Law on State Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Law on Countering Corruption.

32 “‘They Were Breaking the Door, Cursing Loudly.’ Feminita Reported Another Disruption of Their Event”, 14 February 2025, Current Time, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/feminita-soobschila-o-vzlome-dveri-v-otele-vo-vremya-meropriyatiya-/33314951.html>

33 In Almaty, Feminita activist fined for leading an unregistered association — authorities denied its registration three times, 20 February 2025, Current Time, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/kazakhstan-feminita/33322079.html>

34 Zhuman Kiikov, Kazakhstan to ban foreign travel for tax debtors starting 2026, 12 May 2025, Kursiv Media, <https://kz.kursiv.media/en/2025-05-12/engk-nknk-kazakhstan-to-ban-foreign-travel-for-tax-debtors-starting-2026/>

Although the law stipulates criminal penalties for official corruption, its implementation by the government was weak and inefficient. Throughout the year, numerous instances of government corruption were reported. Some non-governmental observers noted successful and appropriate prosecutions of mid-level government officials for corrupt activities. Despite these efforts, however, impunity persisted, particularly in cases where corruption involved personal connections with government officials. Investigative journalists stressed that their efforts to report on government corruption were hampered by instances of political persecution and the manipulation of legal provisions concerning “false information” by authorities to stifle their investigations and publications.

Kazakhstan participates in the OECD Anti-corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, established in 1998, and in the Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asian and the Pacific, established by the OECD and the Asian Development Bank in 1999. Kazakhstan is not a signatory to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention but has submitted a letter stating its intention to join the OECD Anti-Bribery Working Group. Kazakhstan acceded to the UN Convention Against Corruption in 2008. Kazakhstan also participates in the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan of the OECD Anti-Corruption Network, the International Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies, and the International Counter-Corruption Council of CIS member-states. Kazakhstan is a member of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

Kazakhstan is also a member of EAG – the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG) – a regional group similar to the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) which implements FATF standards at the national level.³⁵ Kazakhstan’s implementation of FATF Recommendation 8 has had negative consequences for its civil society and media landscape, including in terms of the promotion of restrictive regulations on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and limitations on press freedom.³⁶

There were numerous reports of government corruption during the reporting period. The government selectively pursued legal action against officials involved in misconduct, particularly in prominent corruption cases. NGOs reported several cases in which mid-level government officials were effectively and appropriately prosecuted for corruption. Nonetheless, corruption continued to be pervasive, with many individuals in positions of authority and law enforcement agencies still enjoying impunity. While the law establishes criminal penalties for official corruption, the government did not enforce or implement these regulations effectively. According to human rights NGOs, corruption was prevalent across the executive branch, law enforcement agencies, local government administrations, the education sector, and the judiciary. Journalists and advocates promoting fiscal transparency typically faced harassment and administrative pressure.

Kazakhstan’s rating in Transparency International’s 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index is 40/100, where 0 is very transparent and 100 is highly corrupt,³⁷ ranking it 88 out of 180 countries, an im-

35 Official website of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) - the global money laundering and terrorist financing inter-governmental body, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Mutualevaluations/Mutualevaluationofkazakhstan.html>

36 Why FATF Compliance Is Undermining Kazakhstan’s Civil Society, Not Terrorism, n.d., CAPS Unlock, <https://capsunlock.org/why-fatf-compliance-is-undermining-kazakhstans-civil-society-not-terrorism/>

37 Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Kazakhstan, 2025, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/kaz>

provement from 2014 where Kazakhstan was ranked 126 out of 175.³⁸ However, corruption remains evident across almost all sectors, including in the extractive industries, infrastructure development, government procurement, and the banking system.

Following the crackdown on the January 2022 protests, Kazakh authorities acknowledged that the events that left more than 230 people dead were made possible by social inequality and the concentration of wealth among a small elite. The government subsequently initiated a process to recover illegally withdrawn assets from overseas and return them to the state. Over three years have passed since then, and government agencies regularly report that they have recovered significant sums—over one trillion tenge, or \$1.9 billion—to date. However, critics argue that the process remains opaque, lacking transparency and raising concerns about potential misuse and selective asset recovery.³⁹

Bloomberg has reported that Timur Kulibayev, a former top energy sector official married to Nazarbayev's second daughter, Dinara, is negotiating a deal that is part of an investigation into wealth accumulated during his father-in-law's rule. Under such an agreement, Kulibayev would make a combination of payments and investments reportedly worth about \$1 billion, Bloomberg said, quoting two unnamed sources, while adding that the deal would not include any admission of wrongdoing.⁴⁰ There has been no official comment on this issue since the article in February 2025, highlighting the opacity of the process.

In early July, the Anti-Corruption Agency reported⁴¹ that since 2022, it had ensured “the return of property assets and cash worth more than 1.1 trillion tenge (approx. \$ 2.3 billion) to the state and quasi-state entities”, but details on specific assets and individuals remain undisclosed, contradicting President Tokayev's pledge for transparency. Despite Tokayev's promises to improve transparency and reduce resource concentration, the legal framework created multiple commissions to manage asset return, with little public detail. The law “On the Return of Illegally Acquired Assets to the State” was adopted without giving civil society the opportunity to submit comments and proposals on this bill, and its development and adoption were rushed. Experts warn that the new law could further facilitate opaque and selective asset grabs.⁴²

In 2025, Kazakhstan officially abolished the anti-corruption agency created in the 1990s and merged it into a powerful and secretive structure—the National Security Committee (NSC).⁴³ This reorgani-

38 Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Kazakhstan, 2014, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2014>

39 “A smokescreen.” What is happening with the campaign to return assets to Kazakhstan?, 14 July 2025, Azattyk Asia, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/dlya-otvoda-glaz-cto-ne-tak-s-kampaniey-po-vozvratu-aktivov-v-kazahstan-/33473537.html>

40 Nariman Gitzidinov, Kazakh Tycoon in Talks on Making \$1 billion Payout to the State, 5 February 2025, Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-02-05/kazakh-tycoon-in-talks-on-making-1-billion-payout-to-the-state>.

41 Aset Kalymov, Asset recovery: schools built, 2 July 2025, Kazakhstanskaya pravda <https://kazpravda.kz/n/vozvrat-aktivov-postroeny-shkoly/>

42 Asset Return Could Become an Opaque and Expensive Venture in Kazakhstan. The government says the amount of returned assets is growing but fails to produce a comprehensive list, 31 August 2023, Vlast.KZ, <https://vlast.kz/english/56532-asset-return-could-become-an-opaque-and-expensive-venture-in-kazakhstan.html>

43 “Strengthening and consolidating control. Why was the anti-corruption service merged with the National Security Committee in Kazakhstan?”, Manshuk Asautay, 4 July 2025, Azattyk Asia, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/usilenie-i-ukreplenie-kontrolya-zachem-v-kazahstane-antikorrupsionnyu-službu-prisoedinili-k-knb-/33463144.html>

zation – ostensibly to modernize and streamline public administration⁴⁴ – raised serious concerns among experts, as the NSC is an agency known for its high level of secrecy, lack of transparency, and rich history of corruption and abuse scandals. Since the bloody events of 2022, when the NSC leadership was accused of attempting a coup d'état – leading to the jailing of NSC chief and former prime minister Karim Massimov for treason⁴⁵ – the powers and influence of this security agency have grown significantly. Analysts believe that such changes could lead to increased control and concentration of power in the hands of the NSC, which would hinder transparent investigation and the fight against corruption. Political scientist Shalkar Nursait notes that after the agency's merger with the NSC, all information on the fight against corruption will most likely be classified, and the structure itself will be under the close control of the president, which does not contribute to independent and effective anti-corruption efforts.

44 Dmitry Pokidaev, Kazakhstan Transfers Anti-Corruption Authority to National Security Committee, 1 July 2025, Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/kazakhstan-transfers-anti-corruption-authority-to-national-security-committee/>.

45 Saniya Saknova, Former Security Chief Massimov Sentenced to 18 Years in Prison, 25 April 2023, The Astana Times, <https://astanatimes.com/2023/04/former-security-chief-massimov-sentenced-to-18-years-in-prison/>.



Kyrgyzstan

Photo by Emil Akhmatbekov

Suppression of Freedom of Expression and Media

One of the most striking examples of suppression of media freedoms in Kyrgyzstan is the ongoing campaign against the investigative outlet Temirov Live. Founded in August 2020 by investigative journalist Bolot Temirov, Temirov Live is a YouTube-based independent media outlet in Kyrgyzstan that uncovers high-level corruption. The journalists publish in-depth reports which have exposed illicit enrichment among senior officials and other figures in the orbit of President Sadyr Japarov, prompting an aggressive backlash from the state. Authorities first raided the outlet's office after Temirov Live published an investigation about national security chief Kamchibek Tashiyev's relatives and their interests in the state oil refining business in January 2022. Temirov was arrested on fabricated drug charges during the raid, which were later dismissed. But in November 2022 he was convicted of forging his passport and was stripped of his citizenship and expelled from Kyrgyzstan. On the night of 15-16 January 2024, law enforcement from the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) and police raided and sealed the homes and offices of Temirov Live and arrested eleven current or former journalists, accusing them of "inciting mass unrest" under Article 278.3 of the Criminal Code. Six of the journalists were released into house arrest and one was subjected to a travel ban, with four remaining in detention.⁴⁶ In March 2025, the Kyrgyz ombudsman confirmed that one of the detained journalists Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy and her two female cellmates had been assaulted by prison guards, raising concerns about abuse in custody.⁴⁷

On 10 October 2024, a court in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan sentenced Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy to six years and Azamat Ishenbekov to five years in prison for alleged "calls for mass unrest." Two others, Aktilek Kaparov and Ayke Beyshekeeva, received 3 years of probation. The trial was held behind closed doors, and the verdict was considered as an attack on independent and critical media.⁴⁸ On 25 February 2025, Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court upheld prison sentences for Temirov Live journalists: six years for director Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy, five years for presenter Azamat Ishenbekov, and a five-year suspended sentence for reporter Aike Beishekeyeva.⁴⁹ By late February, reports had emerged that Makhabat was receiving death threats from a fellow inmate.⁵⁰

46 Kyrgyzstan: Drop charges against 11 journalists and human rights defenders, 9 October 2024, Civil Rights Defenders (CRD), <https://crd.org/2024/10/09/kyrgyzstan-drop-charges-against-11-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

47 Ombudsman Confirms Jail Guards Physically Attacked Journalist Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Two Cellmates, 8 April 2024, RFE/RL, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-temirov-wife-beaten-jail/32896267.html>

48 Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy and Azamat Ishembekov Sentenced to Prison Time, 10 October 2024, Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/makhabat-tazhibek-kyzy-and-azamat-ishembekov-sentenced-prison-time-0>

49 Kyrgyzstan Supreme Court Upholds Lengthy Prison Terms for Temirov Live Journalists, 25 February 2025, Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2025/02/kyrgyzstan-supreme-court-upholds-lengthy-prison-terms-for-temirov-live-journalists/>

50 Kyrgyzstan: Address Death Threats Against Imprisoned Journalist, 21 February 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/21/kyrgyzstan-address-death-threats-against-imprisoned-journalist>

On 6 December 2024, the lawyer of the journalists, Samat Matsakov, was accused of fraud and document forgery and arrested. As with the arrests of the journalists, the arrest was seen as politically motivated and an act of retaliation for his professional activities. On 4 March 2025, he was released from pre-trial detention after three months but remained under a travel ban. The trial is ongoing.⁵¹

In spring 2025, there were several high-profile cases demonstrating direct suppression of dissent. In late May 2025, a large-scale security service operation was conducted, during which at least eight employees of the leading independent media platform Kloop were detained.⁵² Two journalists, Aleksander Aleksandrov and Joomart Duulatov, were charged with “public calls for mass unrest”—a vague and overly broad provision of the criminal code that is often used to silence dissent.⁵³ The authorities accused Kloop of spreading “negative” and “distorted” content with the aim of “manipulating” public opinion, in a direct continuation of the pressure that began in 2024 when a court ordered the liquidation of the Kloop Media Public Foundation.⁵⁴

Kyrgyzstan’s sharp drop of 24 points in the World Press Freedom Index in 2025 is a direct consequence of two interconnected processes. Firstly, the country passed a repressive law on “foreign representatives”, establishing the basis for systemic control over NGOs and media. The law was followed by the aggressive application of vague criminal charges, such as “mass unrest”, against key figures of civil society. Such actions are evidence of a systematic attempt by the authorities to dismantle independent journalism and suppress open debate on issues of public interest, creating an atmosphere of fear and self censorship amid a continuing departure from democratic principles.

Political Repression, Surveillance, and Arbitrary Detention

Between January and June 2025, Kyrgyzstan saw a significant deterioration in human rights protections, characterized by politically motivated prosecutions, restrictive laws that limit dissent, and targeted persecution of journalists, human rights defenders, and members of the legal profession. Authorities relied increasingly on broad criminal charges such as “calling for the violent seizure of power” and “inciting mass riots” to suppress critics.

In March 2025, journalist Kanyshai Mamyrkulova was arrested at her home over Facebook posts criticizing the Kyrgyz–Tajik border demarcation agreement. She was charged with “calling for mass riots” and “inciting interethnic discord,” and her trial opened in May. Rights groups denounced her prosecution as politically motivated retaliation against online criticism of government policies.⁵⁵

51 Human Rights Defender and Lawyer Samat Matsakov Released from Pre-Trial Detention, 24 February 2025, Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-and-lawyer-samat-matsakov-released-pre-trial-detention>

52 Ariadna Mañé & Thijs Korsten, What the Arrest of a Prominent Karakalpak Activist Tells Us about Not-So-New Uzbekistan’s Transnational Repression, 28 March 2024, Lossi 36, <https://lossi36.com/2024/03/28/what-the-arrest-of-a-prominent-karakalpak-activist-tells-us-about-not-so-new-uzbekistans-transnational-repression/>

53 Ibid.

54 Kyrgyzstan: End renewed crackdown on independent Kloop media platform, 3 June 2025, Civil Rights Defenders, <https://crd.org/2025/06/03/crackdown-on-independent-media-platform/>

55 Kyrgyzstan: Release Journalist Kanyshay Mamyrkulova and Drop Retaliatory Charges, 2025 (n.d.), IPHR, <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-release-journalist-kanyshay-mamyrkulova-and-drop-retaliatory-charges>

In April, human rights defender Rita Karasartova was detained after sharing a letter written by opposition activist Tilekmat Kurenov, who had disappeared in Dubai on 10 April and was forcibly returned to Kyrgyzstan within ten days.⁵⁶ On 21 April, a Bishkek court ordered his pre-trial detention on charges of “public calls for the violent seizure of power” that were based on his social media activity. Karasartova herself was charged with “organizing mass riots” and “public calls for the violent seizure of power.” Human rights groups condemned both cases as emblematic of the authorities’ campaign to intimidate government critics and punish expressions of solidarity with the opposition.⁵⁷

The Kempir-Abad case, in which more than 20 activists were prosecuted for protesting a 2022 border agreement with Uzbekistan, formally concluded in a series of acquittals in June 2024. However, as of mid-2025 the prosecution’s appeal remained pending, prolonging uncertainty and leaving the activists exposed to continuing judicial harassment.⁵⁸

Lawyer Samat Matsakov, known for his work defending government critics, also faced persecution. Arrested in late 2024 on charges of fraud and forgery widely believed to be retaliatory, he was released from pre-trial detention in February 2025, but remained under trial and subject to a travel ban. Observers reported procedural violations, including interference with attorney–client privilege, which reinforced concerns that the prosecution was politically motivated and linked to his history defending activists and journalists.⁵⁹

In May 2025, a Kyrgyz court convicted linguistics expert and whistleblower Zhoomart Karabaev on charges of “incitement of mass disorder” and “calling for disobedience,” imposing a three-year probation term. He had been detained in July 2024 after publishing posts on Facebook exposing the systematic fabrication of expert testimony in trials of government critics, with prosecutors initially demanding a seven-year prison sentence.⁶⁰

Multiple journalists faced politically motivated prosecution. In May 2025, authorities arbitrarily detained eight current and former employees of the independent media outlet Kloop and searched their homes without warrants. The same month, April TV was forced off the air on accusations of “discrediting” the government. Human rights groups denounced these actions as attempts to dismantle independent journalism and prevent coverage of corruption and abuse of power.⁶¹

56 Court orders for Rita Karasartova to remain in pre-trial detention for over three weeks, 18 April 2025, Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/court-orders-rita-karasartova-remain-pre-trial-detention-over-three-weeks>

57 Kyrgyzstan: Politically Motivated Prosecutions Amid Declining Media and Civic Space, 28 May 2025, IPHR, <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-politically-motivated-prosecutions-amid-declining-media-and-civic-space/>

58 Kamchybek Tashiev explained why the defendants in the Kempir-Abad case were punished, 25 June 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/vlast/330504_kamchybek_tashiev_rasskazal_pochemu_nakazanyi_figurantyi_kempir-abadskogo_dela/

59 Human Rights Defender and Lawyer Samat Matsakov Released from Pre-Trial Detention, 24 February 2025, Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-and-lawyer-samat-matsakov-released-pre-trial-detention>

60 Kyrgyzstan: Whistleblower Convicted for Exposing Corruption in Court System, 30 May 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/30/kyrgyzstan-whistleblower-convicted-exposing-corruption-court-system>

61 Kyrgyz Authorities Raid Homes, Offices of Kloop News Staff, Arrest 8, 30 May 2025, Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/kyrgyz-authorities-raid-homes-offices-of-kloop-news-staff-arrest-8/>

These developments underscored a worsening human rights environment in Kyrgyzstan during the first half of 2025. The detention of activists and defenders such as Mamyrkulova, Karasartova, and Kurenov, the judicial harassment of lawyer Matsakov, and the persecution of independent media highlighted the government's systematic use of prosecutions and restrictive laws to dismantle civic space. The unresolved appeal in the Kempir-Abad case further demonstrated how legal uncertainty is weaponized to intimidate civil society. Collectively, these actions deepened the country's authoritarian trajectory and eroded fundamental freedoms.

Rule of Law and Access to Justice

The “foreign representatives” law, which came into force in 2024, has become the linchpin of the government's offensive against civil society.⁶² Modeled after the draconian law on “foreign agents” enacted in Russia in 2012, the law imposes burdensome requirements on NGOs and media outlets that receive foreign funding.⁶³ In Kyrgyzstan, as in Russia, the law precipitated the immediate closure of many organizations and caused mass self-censorship. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed serious concern, stating that the new law poses a “serious threat” to the work of civil society organizations and violates the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association. Charges of “organizing mass riots” and “public calls for the violent seizure of power” are systematically abused by the government as a tool to crush civil society. These vaguely defined offenses are strategically deployed to target activists, journalists, and dissenting voices, effectively silencing criticism and stifling freedom of expression.

In high-profile cases that demonstrate direct suppression of dissent involving human rights defenders, journalists, and even ordinary citizens who dared to criticize the authorities, courts have consistently fallen short of upholding fair trial standards. A recurring concern is the reliance on expert witnesses whose qualifications are questionable; in almost all cases over the reporting period, authorities presented “expert” testimony from individuals who demonstrably lacked the requisite skills, degrees, or professional knowledge of the subject matter. These so-called experts provided opinions specifically ordered by the authorities, offering testimony that conveniently supported the charges and appeared to be predetermined, further undermining the integrity and fairness of the proceedings.

Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association

During the reporting period, Kyrgyzstan experienced yet another wave of restrictions, repressive legislation, and a further shrinking of civic space. In February 2025, the state enacted a new Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations, in clear contradiction to the country's obligations to uphold freedom of religion or belief, as well as the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The law was widely criticized by human rights defenders for imposing onerous

62 EU/Central Asia: Authorities must safeguard civil society space for genuine progress, 31 March 2025, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/eu-central-asia-authorities-must-safeguard-civil-society-space-for-genuine-progress/>

63 World Report 2025: Kyrgyzstan, 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan>

registration requirements, intrusive reporting obligations, and granting the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) sweeping oversight powers.⁶⁴ In particular, amendments ban door-to-door proselytism and make individuals liable to fines for wearing clothing that obscures their identity, a regulation with obvious implications for religious minorities.⁶⁵ In June 2025, a delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) visited Kyrgyzstan to assess the situation following the adoption of the law. In its annual report, USCIRF placed Kyrgyzstan on its Special Watch List, citing serious violations of religious freedom.⁶⁶

A blanket court-sanctioned ban on protests in the Pervomaysky district of Bishkek was once again extended until 30 September 2025, confining peaceful assemblies to remote locations far from government buildings and thereby diminishing their visibility and impact. First introduced in spring 2022, authorities continue to justify the ban on the grounds of preventing potential unrest.

In March 2025, a presidential administration official attributed the decline in protests near government buildings to improved responsiveness of local authorities to citizens' concerns, claiming demonstrations had decreased by 80 percent compared to previous years.⁶⁷ Around the same time, the Bishkek City Court rejected an appeal against the restrictions on assemblies that was prepared by the human rights organization Bir Duino – Kyrgyzstan.

For several years in a row, the March 8 demonstration for women's rights has been forced to take an alternative route: instead of starting at the Rossiya cinema and ending at the central square, it is diverted along parallel side streets and concludes at Maxim Gorky Park. As a result, the march remains largely invisible to the public and attracts little attention, even though the authorities formally issue permission for it.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Kyrgyzstan's Constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including race, ethnic origin, gender, and nationality. Some progress has been made in advancing gender equality. The country adopted the National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030 through Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 513 of 16 September 2022. Since January 2025, Article 303 of the Labour Code, which contained a list of professions prohibited for women, was abolished. Previously, women were barred from driving intercity buses with more than 14 passengers, working as loaders handling raw materials

64 Nurzada Tynaeva, Violation of Rights or Fight against Radicalization? Kyrgyzstan Passes New Law on Freedom of Religion, 28 January 2025, CABAR.asia, <https://cabar.asia/en/violation-of-rights-or-fight-against-radicalization-kyrgyzstan-passes-new-law-on-freedom-of-religion>

65 Kyrgyzstan: UN rights experts dismayed by new restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, 27 February 2025, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/kyrgyzstan-un-rights-experts-dismayed-new-restrictions-freedom-religion-or#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20regret%20that%20despite%20repeated,obligations%2C%E2%80%9D%20the%20experts%20said>

66 Turdubek Alymbaev, US Places Kyrgyzstan on Special Watch List Over Religious Freedom Concerns, 21 July 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/english/336969_US_places_Kyrgyzstan_on_Special_Watch_List_over_religious_freedom_concerns/

67 Gulmira Makanbay kyzy, The President's Administration, explains why protests in Kyrgyzstan have decreased, 13 February 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/obschestvo/319813_vadministratsii_prezidenta_rasskazali_pochemu_vkyrgyzstane_sokratilis_mitingi/

or fuel, or operating certain specialized vehicles as machinists.⁶⁸ Under the new framework, restrictions apply only to pregnant and breastfeeding women. In February 2025, the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Migration, in partnership with UN Women and the European Union (EU), presented the preliminary findings and recommendations of the Country Gender Equality Profile during a High-Level Dialogue. Despite this positive development, systemic barriers to gender equality are still deeply entrenched in practice.

In June 2025, the Jogorku Kenesh adopted a draft law to abolish criminal liability for polygamy by repealing Article 176 of the Criminal Code. The initiative was passed without public debate and became known only after President Sadyr Japarov returned it with objections. If it had been adopted, the law would have contradicted Kyrgyzstan's international obligations under CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, legitimizing a practice that discriminates against women by reinforcing unequal family relations, undermining gender equality, and exposing women and children to greater legal and social vulnerability. Despite the existing provision, there are no known cases of prosecution for polygamy under Article 176. Religious marriages involving second and subsequent wives are widespread in the country. Previously, the former Grand Mufti of Kyrgyzstan publicly admitted to having two wives and even encouraged others to follow his example.⁶⁹

Gender-based violence remains widespread. The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security ranked Kyrgyzstan as the most dangerous country in Central Asia for women for two consecutive years (2023 and 2024) in its Women, Peace, and Security Index, with the 2025 report expected in October. According to the Ministry of Interior, 6,536 cases of domestic violence were reported between January and April 2025—an increase of 36 percent compared to the same period in 2024. In total, 17,316 cases of domestic violence were registered throughout 2024.

Women with disabilities are among the most vulnerable to rights violations, particularly gender-based violence. Such cases demand greater efforts, specialized skills, and sensitivity from first responders and law enforcement. On 19 February 2025, Kyrgyzstan adopted amendments introducing harsher penalties for sexual violence against persons with disabilities, marking progress in recognizing the seriousness of the harm in such crimes. Disability is now formally recognized as an aggravating circumstance, allowing for sentences of between 15 years to life imprisonment, including for offenders over 60. Moreover, parole eligibility has been removed for anybody convicted of such crimes.⁷⁰

However, the endorsement remains inadequate. In April 2025, a young woman with a disability reported being gang-raped in Bishkek by six foreign nationals employed by a construction company. Despite medical and biological evidence, as well as detailed testimony, the police failed to open a criminal case during the reporting period, with one of the suspects no longer located inside the country. Instead, investigators

68 Asel Sultan, The List of Professions Banned for Women in Central Asia: Where Did It Come From and Why Is It Needed, 20 October 2020, CABAR.asia, <https://cabar.asia/en/the-list-of-professions-banned-for-women-in-central-asia-where-did-it-come-from-and-why-is-it-needed/>

69 Scandal in Kyrgyzstan: Parliament secretly repealed punishment for polygamy — now deputies say they didn't vote for it, 14 August 2025, Current Time, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/kyrgyzstan-parliament-tayno-otmenil-nakazanie-zamnogozhenstvo/33501898.html>

70 Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 42, On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Kyrgyz Republic (to the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Criminal Procedure Code of the Kyrgyz Republic), 19 February 2025, Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/4-5488/edition/27498/ru>

insisted on a psychiatric examination of the victim.⁷¹ Human rights defenders condemned the authorities' inaction as discriminatory on the grounds of disability and a violation of the right to an effective investigation. The Ombudsperson of Kyrgyzstan took the case under review. She requested information from the Prosecutor General's Office and urged the Ministry of Interior to assess the actions and inaction of police officials and apply disciplinary measures if misconduct is confirmed.⁷²

In the period covering the first half of 2025, LGBT individuals continued to face serious challenges, including discrimination, stigma, and abuse. In July, the State Committee on National Security intensified its persecution of LGBT expression by raiding and shuttering three nightclubs in Bishkek on accusations of “involving youth in LGBT and drugs,” a pretext used to silence queer social spaces and stigmatize the community. They justified the closures by claiming the venues were “promoting non-traditional family values,” as well as “creating conditions for prostitution” and potential unrest.⁷³ These acts not only eliminate spaces of community and expression, but also fuel public hostility and provide a legal veneer for harassment by security agencies against LGBT community. NGOs that advocate for LGBT rights or provide related services have been negatively affected by broader restrictions on civil society. A “so-called anti LGBT propaganda” law passed before 2025 continues to suppress public awareness and educational efforts around LGBT issues. Transgender rights have been increasingly restricted: recent legal amendments have raised the minimum age for accessing gender-affirming medical care to 25, further limiting access to healthcare and bodily autonomy for transgender people.

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Judicial measures were also employed to selectively restrict the movement of activists, journalists, and opposition figures. Human rights lawyer Samat Matsakov, released from pretrial detention in February 2025, remains under a travel ban despite no conviction.⁷⁴ In March, journalist Kanyshai Mamyrkulova was detained for publishing Facebook posts critical of the government and in July she was subjected to a travel ban.⁷⁵

In May, Kadyr Atambaev, a member and one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party and son of the former president Almazbek Atambaev, was prevented from boarding a flight to Istanbul due to a ban on leaving the country. He was also detained in the police room at Manas Airport for several hours.⁷⁶ No reasons were given for the apparent travel ban.

71 Akmoor Aitbekova, A Disabled Girl Rape Case: Victim Seeks Help from Authorities, 23 July 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/obschestvo/337198_delo_obiznasilovanii_devushki-invalida_postradavshaya_prosit_pomoschi_uvlastey/

72 Akmoor Aitbekova, Ombudsperson Urged to Thoroughly Investigate the Rape of a Woman with a Disability, 29 July 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/obschestvo/337852_ombudsmen_prizvala_tschatelno_rassledovat_iznasilovanie_devushki_sinvalidnostyu/

73 Three Nightclubs in Kyrgyzstan Closed Over Alleged Involvement of Youth in LGBT and Drugs, 8 July 2025, RFE/RL, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/v-kyrgyzstane-zakryli-tri-nochnyh-kluba-za-vovlechenie-molodezhi-v-lgbt-i-narkotiki-/33467076.html>

74 Human Rights Defender and Lawyer Samat Matsakov Released from Pre-Trial Detention, 24 February 2025, Front Line Defenders, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-and-lawyer-samat-matsakov-released-pre-trial-detention>

75 Freedom of Expression Eroding in Kyrgyzstan, 4 July 2025, Civil Rights Defenders, <https://crd.org/2025/07/04/freedom-of-expression-eroding-in-kyrgyzstan/>

76 Kadyrbek Atambayev detained at Manas Airport, 23 May 2025, 24.kg, https://24.kg/english/330181_Kadyrbek_Atambayev_detained_at_Manas_Airport/

Corruption

The Kyrgyz Republic is a signatory of the UN Convention against corruption, dated 10 December 2003, ratified by the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on 6 August 2005 but is not a party to the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

The main regulations governing the fight against corruption in Kyrgyzstan are the Criminal Code and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Combating Corruption.” Anti-corruption provisions are also included in other laws, such as the Laws “On Public Service,” “On Municipal Service,” “On Public Procurement,” and “On Combating Financing of Terrorism and Legalization of Illegally Generated Revenues (Money Laundering).”

Although the legislation stipulates criminal penalties for public officials found guilty of corruption, the government has repeatedly failed to enforce it effectively, allowing many officials to engage in corrupt practices with impunity. The law, though ostensibly designed to penalize official corruption, is widely seen as being employed to neutralize political rivals and groups that could potentially support future political opponents. This assessment is supported by OECD 2024 report which noted “the hypertrophied role of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) in the fight against corruption, as well as the influence of the SCNS on the criminal justice system and the judiciary. In particular, there were cases of detention of business representatives who, after “compensation of losses”, were exempted from criminal liability. In addition, given the close ties between the head of the GKNB and the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, attention was drawn to the selective application of measures of criminal repression.”⁷⁷

Kyrgyzstan has built a strong legal framework for asset declaration, encompassing a wide range of officials required to comply and ensuring comprehensive coverage. Civil servants are required to submit their asset declarations annually to the State Tax Agency through an online platform. However, in 2023 the government passed legislation to legalize illicit assets, including those obtained through corruption. The deadline for voluntary asset declarations has been extended to 31 December 2024. After the law came into force, the authorities destroyed more than 2,377,000 tax declarations filed by individuals, including those filed by persons who hold state or municipal positions.

Transparency International 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index rated Kyrgyzstan at 25/100 – where 100 is very transparent and 0 is highly corrupt – lower than Nigeria and Iraq, and ranking and scoring lower than the country did 10 years ago.⁷⁸ Kyrgyzstan’s persistent corruption problems have been abetted by the consolidation of autocratic power in the hands of President Japarov and his de facto co-ruler Tashiyev. Constitutional changes significantly expanding presidential authority, weakening parliamentary oversight, and enabling unchecked corruption were passed by referendum in 2021 and have confirmed the worst fears of politicians and activists opposed to the changes in the years since.

77 Baseline report of the fifth round of monitoring of anti-corruption reforms in Kyrgyzstan, The Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, 2024, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/11/baseline-report-of-the-fifth-round-of-monitoring-of-anti-corruption-reforms-in-kyrgyzstan_9180017b/187f45b3-en.pdf

78 Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 — Kyrgyzstan, 2025, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/kgz>; Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 — Kyrgyzstan, 2014, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2014/index/kgz>. The country was ranked 146/180 countries in 2024 with a score of 25, and 136/175 countries in 2014 with a score of 27.

Corruption manifests across various sectors, including in government institutions, law enforcement agencies, and natural resource management, exacerbating long-standing weaknesses. The opaque and unaccountable control of valuable resources provides Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian leaders with the financial means to cement their power, suppress dissent, and resist all efforts at reform. Critical observers view the ruling regime as engaging regularly in practices such as embezzlement, nepotism, and abuse of power, further undermining democracy and weakening the rule of law.

Anti-corruption campaigners and Kyrgyz journalists involved in investigating corruption have been subjected to intimidation and physical assault. Investigative journalism inside the country has been nearly eradicated by the current administration, with Kloop journalists and Temirov Live reporters forced to shut down, arrested or exiled, leaving no local press to scrutinize or report on corruption. Exiled anti-corruption advocates and journalists continue to report from abroad, providing crucial insights into corruption and governance issues despite their displacement.

During the reporting period, the government deployed anti-corruption laws and charges related to the financing of organized criminal groups to imprison businessmen and confiscate their assets, which in many cases were subsequently transferred into the hands of relatives and associates of the ruling elite.^{79,80} Many businessmen were released following payoffs, often disguised as the payment of fines. These actions were part of a broader scheme by the authorities to fleece the country's richest individuals, extracting their wealth to ensure their compliance and prevent opposition to the ruling regime.

The participation of high-level Kyrgyz actors in corruption has traditionally been international in scale. Cross-border smuggling has long been a key source of enrichment for the political elite, with figures close to Japarov-Tashiyev tandem reportedly monopolizing rent extraction in the customs sector after security services gunned down the country's leading crime kingpin, Kamchybek Kolbaev, in 2023. (Another convicted felon, Raimbek Matraimov, who allegedly controlled flows of contraband through the country, has been politically sidelined but is not currently in jail). Since Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, however, it is the financial sector that has come under international scrutiny over its close connection to Russia and alleged role in promoting sanctions evasion and laundering illicit funds.

In January 2025, the US Department of the Treasury sanctioned one of Kyrgyzstan's top five largest banks in terms of authorized capital and profit growth rates, Keremet Bank for creating a hub for trade payments and helping Moscow to evade restrictions.⁸¹ The UK introduced sanctions targeting the infrastructure behind A7A5, a Russian ruble-pegged stablecoin launched in Kyrgyzstan which the UK said has moved \$9.3 billion in four months of 2025. A Luxembourg-based firm and four Kyrgyz entities including Grinex LLC and Old Vector LLC (linked to the infrastructure behind A7A5), and

79 The Sewing Kings: How the President's Friends and Relatives Took Over the Madina Market, 31 October 2024, Kloop.kg, <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/10/31/shvejnye-koroli-kak-druzya-i-blizkie-prezidenta-zavladeli-ryнком-madina/>,

80 "How the president's friends pocketed another factory", The Karabaltinsky construction products factory, which was part of the business empire of former alcohol magnate and owner of the AYU holding company Sharshenbek Abdykerimov, has changed owners. It is now controlled by a company linked to President Sadyr Zhaparov's inner circle, 24 April 2025, Kloop.kg and Temirov Live, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhOryPCzDhY>

81 Press Release: Treasury Disrupts Russia's Sanctions Evasion Schemes, Actions expose a secret payment channel for sensitive exports and target a Kyrgyzstani financial institution for supporting Russia's military-industrial base, 15 January 2025, US Department of the Treasury, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2785>

CJSC Tengricoin (the operator of the Meer cryptocurrency exchange) were also targeted. The US has sanctioned Grinex and Old Vector, for involvement in facilitating sanctions evasion and supporting illicit crypto activity. The new UK sanctions take aim at the Kyrgyzstan-based Capital Bank and its director, Kantemir Chalbayev, for Russia's use of the bank to pay for military goods, and at Zhanyshbek Uulu Nazarbek, who is reported by local media in December 2024 to be the head of Kyrgyzstan's state trading company.

Tajikistan



Photo by Anton Rybakov

TAJIKISTAN

Suppression of Freedom of Expression and Media

The fate of journalist Rukhshona Khakimova was the most striking example of the criminalization of journalists' professional activity during the reporting period. In February 2025, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan sentenced her to eight years in prison on charges of high treason.⁸² This happened during a secret trial, and the details of the charges remained undisclosed to the public. According to available information, her "crime" was conducting a public survey on China's influence in Tajikistan – an entirely legitimate topic of coverage for a journalist.

A similar approach was demonstrated in the case of Ahmad Ibrohim, editor-in-chief of the independent weekly newspaper "Payk". In January 2025, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of bribery, extortion, and extremism. His trial was also held behind closed doors, and the case was classified as secret. Ibrohim denied all charges, claiming that they were retaliation for his critical reports about local officials. Both cases highlight that vague and fabricated charges are used to suppress what little remains of Tajikistan's independent press, while the government's systematic use of "secret trials" allows it to create a semblance of legality while actually evading any sense of accountability before the public or the rule of law.⁸³

Political Repression, Surveillance, and Arbitrary Detention

Facing almost no opposition at home, Tajikistan's regime has actively sought the return of its dissidents from democratic countries, particularly from Germany, using their participation in opposition protests in Europe as a basis for spurious charges. These protests have been labeled by Tajikistan as unconstitutional and a threat to the constitutional order. The charge that all of the exiles face is "threatening the constitutional order". Notable cases include Dilmurod Ergashev, a political activist and member of the Movement for Reforms and Development of Tajikistan, who was deported from Germany on 6 November 2024, and subsequently detained, tortured, and sentenced without independent legal representation.⁸⁴ Abdullo Shamsiddin, a protest participant and son of a Political Council member of the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, was deported on 18 January 2023, and later sentenced to seven years in prison. Bilol Kurbonaliyev, a member of the opposition "Group 24" and protester against President Emomali Rakhmon's visit to Berlin, was deported on 24 November 2023, and sentenced to ten years in prison for his political activities. Mirzomurod Aliev, from the Yazgulom community, was sentenced to 12 years in prison by a Dushanbe court. In almost all known cases of returnees family members were intimidated into silence and forbidden from sharing details of their trials and sentencing. Their verdicts were not made available to human rights

82 Tajikistan Must End Its Crackdown on Journalists and Political Opposition, 6 February 2025, World Liberty Congress, <https://worldlibertycongress.org/tajikistan-must-end-its-crackdown-on-journalists-and-political-opposition/>

83 Ibid.

84 Klever Abschiebefall sorgt für diplomatische Verwicklungen, 22 August 2025, RP Online, https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/kleve/dilmurod-ergashev-aus-tadschikistan-klever-abschiebefall-sorgt-fuer-diplomatische-verwicklungen_aid-133229533

groups or in some cases even to their relatives. Farhod Negmatov, a Tajik asylum seeker deported from Sweden at the end of 2024, was sentenced to eight years in prison on false charges of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organization banned in Tajikistan.⁸⁵

The government's multiyear transnational repression of Usmon Shamsov and his religiously pious family resulted in the expulsion of Usmon Shamsov and his wife Nigora Saidova by Poland in 2024. At least seventeen members of their family were persecuted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms ranging from 12 years to 17 years.⁸⁶ Nigora Saidova was sentenced to eight years in prison, while Shamsov is believed to be serving a 14 year prison sentence in Vakhdat, outside Dushanbe. The cases against Shamsov, Saidova and Saidova's sister Sitoramo Ibrohimova were riddled with fabrications. All three were falsely accused of membership of the Islamic State group (ISIS) and Jamaat Ansarullah.

Fortunately, Belgium refused Tajikistan's extradition request targeting Ibrohimova, granting her and her children asylum in February. The children of Shamsov and Saidova were also granted asylum in Belgium, with Ibrohimova legally recognized as their guardian by Belgian authorities following Usmon and Saidova's deportation from Poland. The case of Usmon Shamsov and Nigora Saidova is currently pending before the European Court for Human Rights. In nearly all cases of returnees, European authorities transferred the asylum seekers' mobile devices to Tajik authorities, allowing them to access contacts, chats, and social media accounts. This enabled Tajik authorities to gather information and construct new charges against critics of the government, potentially exposing hundreds of individuals in their contact lists to repression by the Tajik state.

Rule of Law and Access to Justice

The refusal of the Tajik authorities to comply with the basic principles of transparency has been confirmed at the international level. In February 2025, the OSCE was forced to cancel its mission to observe parliamentary elections scheduled for 2 March 2025.⁸⁷ The reason was the authorities' refusal to provide guarantees of accreditation for observers, which made it impossible for them to do their work. This decision is direct evidence that the government is not interested in holding fair elections and is deliberately avoiding any external control that could reveal violations.

In Tajikistan, the rule of law is non-existent, and the use of the "secret trials" mechanism is a key tool of suppression. Classifying cases as secret, as in the cases of Khakimova and Ibrohim, allows the authorities to exclude the possibility of an effective defense for defendants. This is not only a procedural violation but a cynical use of the legal system to fully legitimize arbitrariness, which indicates a level of degradation that goes beyond merely ignoring procedural norms.

Trials of supporters and members of exiled opposition groups continue behind closed doors, with families denied access to court documents and verdicts. Many of those sentenced in the past year or currently on trial are returnees from democratic countries where they had unsuccessful asylum procedures.

85 In Tajikistan, a Deportee from Sweden Sentenced to 8 Years in Prison, 7 July 2025, RFE/RL, <https://rus.azattyq.org/amp/v-tadzhikistane-prigovorili-k-8-godam-tyurmy-deportirovannogo-iz-shvetsii-prositelya-ubezhischa-/33466008.html>

86 Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office: No talk of extraditing Murodali Khalimov to Tajikistan yet, 14 November 2018, RFE/RL, <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/29599977.html>

87 Parliamentary Elections, 2 March 2025 – Election Observation Mission (Canceled), 2025, OSCE/ODIHR, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/tajikistan/584347>

Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association

Throughout the reporting period, significant restrictions on freedom of assembly and association persisted in Tajikistan, as authorities continued to suppress civil society, political participation, and independent media. Peaceful protests require prior government approval, civil society organizations face mandatory registration, and applications are frequently denied arbitrarily. Authorities also maintained strict control and surveillance of both online and offline activities. The government heavily relied on extremism-related charges to persecute critics, both domestically and abroad.

In its Needs Assessment Mission report prior to parliamentary elections scheduled for 2 March 2025, ODIHR highlighted the “overall deterioration in the exercise of freedoms of association, assembly and expression,” citing increased control and intimidation of media and civil society. The report also pointed to the dominance of the ruling party and the absence of political pluralism, noting that no new political party has been registered since 2005.⁸⁸ The observation mission was cancelled “due to the lack of assurance by the authorities of Tajikistan that observers would be accredited and able to carry out their work”. The team already in place since January had to leave the country.⁸⁹

Since 2023, more than 700 NGOs in Tajikistan have been liquidated. In May 2025 the authorities proposed higher registration fees for political parties, NGOs, associations, and international organizations. Human rights groups warn that such measures will further restrict civic initiatives, particularly amid declining international support.⁹⁰

Since the Supreme Court banned the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in September 2015, its current and former members have faced continuous persecution. In April, Freedom for Eurasia, supported by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the International Volunteers Ukrainian Fund (FUVI), and Maître Nicolas Ligneul on behalf of IRPT, submitted a communication to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Filed under Article 15 of the Rome Statute, the complaint addresses massive, persistent, and systematic human rights violations in Tajikistan, which has been a State Party to the Statute since 2000. Covering the period from 2002 to 2024, the complaint documents a coordinated state policy to eradicate political opposition in the country, particularly targeting members, supporters, and families of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT).⁹¹ Many IRPT members remain imprisoned, while others face constant threats of transnational repression, including arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and deportation.

88 Tajikistan Parliamentary Elections, 2 March 2025 – Needs Assessment Mission Report, 16–18 December 2024, OSCE/ODIHR, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/c/584344.pdf>

89 Parliamentary Elections, 2 March 2025 – Election Observation Mission (Canceled), 2025, OSCE/ODIHR, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/tajikistan/584347>

90 Tajikistan Plans to Double State Fees for Registration of Political Parties and NGOs, 25 June 2025, RFE/RL, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/v-tadzhikistane-planiruyut-udvoit-gosposhlinu-za-registratsiyu-partiy-i-npo/33454287.html>

91 Tajikistan: Complaint Filed with the International Criminal Court against the Rakhmon Regime, 11 April 2025, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/tajikistan-complaint-filed-with-the-international-criminal-court-against-rakhmon-regime/>

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Formally, all types of discrimination are prohibited in Tajikistan, with a key milestone being the adoption of the Law on Equality and the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in 2022. However, the law remains largely declarative, as systemic discrimination persists in practice, particularly against women, ethnic minorities – specifically, Pamiris and LGBT individuals. Gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, is widespread and still not criminalized. Although the government announced plans last year to criminalize domestic violence, Freedom for Eurasia is not aware of any concrete progress to date.⁹² Women continue to face restrictive gender norms and limited access to health and legal services for GBV survivors, challenges further exacerbated by shrinking funding opportunities for civil society organizations. Legal barriers also persist in the labor market, where “protective” restrictions on professions remain in place despite Tajikistan halving the list of professions prohibited for women in 2023 and pledging to further review the list to liberalize the sector.⁹³ These restrictions highlight the state’s failure to align national legislation with its international obligations under CEDAW.

Systemic repression against Pamiris has continued since 2022, when mass protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) were brutally put down. The Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial (ADC) has raised deep concerns over the situation, particularly following the recent deaths of several Pamiri activists in prison: Kulmamad Pallaev (50) in January 2025, Aslan Gulobov (35) in June 2025, Muzaffar Davlatmirov (61) in June 2025, and Eronsho Mamadrahimov (39) in July 2025. According to ADC, inmates were denied basic medical assistance, which contributed to their deaths. Activists Khushruz Jumayev and Muzaffar Muborakshoev remain arbitrarily detained by Tajik authorities. Activists, human rights defenders and government officials of Pamiri origin in Tajikistan and abroad face persecution, arbitrary detentions and torture.⁹⁴ The Aga Khan Development Network’s (AKDN)⁹⁵ infrastructure has also come under attack. In 2023, the government nationalized a park in Khorog, where the Aga Khan Foundation had invested approximately \$4 million in reconstruction between 2004 and 2005. Previously, authorities had already nationalized the Khorog Serena Inn hotel, built by AKDN.

Tajikistan does not criminalize consensual same sex sexual acts as of 1998, but same-sex unions and adoption remain illegal. Harassment and closure of LGBT organizations, such as the forced dissolution of an NGO working with LGBT persons and protecting their rights in 2017, reflect an environment of institutionalized discrimination.

92 Tajikistan Plans to Criminalize Domestic Violence, 13 July 2024, Asia-Plus, <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20240713/v-tadzhikistane-sobirayutsya-kriminalizirovat-domashnee-nasilie>

93 Tajikistan Plans to Shorten the List of Professions Forbidden for Women, 2 December 2024, Asia-Plus, <https://avesta.tj/2024/12/02/v-tadzhikistane-sokratyat-spisok-zapreshhennyh-professij-dlya-zhenshhin/>

94 Tajikistan: End Systematic Repression of Pamiri People, 4 August 2025, ADC Memorial, <https://adcmemorial.org/en/news/tajikistan-end-systematic-repression-of-pamiri-people/>

95 The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a private development agency funded by the Aga Khan, Imam of the Ismaili Shia community, with which the majority of GBAO residents identify.

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Tajikistan has a documented pattern of restricting the travel of political opponents and activists, including preventing them or their family members from leaving the country. In 2025, authorities barred Pamiri athletes from participating in the Ismaili Global Encounters Festival in Dubai under threat of prosecution. According to media reports, Alisher Mirzonabot, head of Gorno-Badakhshan, instructed the State Committee on Youth and Sports to deny athletes permission to travel, citing an unspecified “threat”. The Committee subsequently circulated a letter to sports schools and athletes urging them to withdraw, warning of potential criminal liability and dismissal for non-compliance.⁹⁶ Freedom for Eurasia is not aware of additional credible reports of state-imposed movement restrictions during the reporting period.

Corruption

According to Transparency International’s Global Corruption Perceptions Index, Tajikistan is placed near the bottom of the list among the worst perpetrators of corruption sandwiched between Russia and North Korea, ranking 164 out of 180 countries with a score of 19/100 where 100 is very clean and 0 is extremely corrupt. Its 2024 score was the worst score Tajikistan achieved since Transparency International amending its scoring system in 2012, and its worst ranking since Tajikistan was first assessed in 2003.⁹⁷

Tajikistan has been a signatory to the UN’s Anti Corruption Convention since 2006. Tajikistan is not a party to the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions. There are no independent anti-corruption advocates or investigative journalists in the country.

International anti-corruption watchdogs continued reporting about high-level corruption involving President Rakhmon’s family and close associates, who dominate the country’s key companies, leveraging their political influence to restrict or eliminate market competition. For example, Rakhmon’s grandson, Erajjon Gulov, was reported by OCCRP in December 2024 to have acquired a property in Dubai in 2015 now worth over \$1 million when he was just 9 years old.⁹⁸

Freedom for Eurasia monitored asylum procedures in the European Union states for individuals whose businesses had attracted the interest of President Rakhmon’s family or inner circle. This interest resulted in fabricated criminal cases and false accusations of membership, support, or participation in groups and organizations recognized by Tajikistan as extremist or terrorist.

96 Authorities in Gorno-Badakhshan Ban Athletes from Participating in Ismaili Games, 14 July 2025, Current Time, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/tadzhikistan-gbao-ismaility/33473591.html>

97 Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Tajikistan, 2025, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/tjk>

98 Eldiyar Arykbaev, Firuzi Makhmadali, Muhamadjon Kabirov, The Grandson of Tajikistan’s President Bought a Dubai Apartment at Age 9. Where Did the Money Come From?, 24 December 2024, OCCRP, <https://www.occrp.org/en/project/dubai-unlocked/tajik-presidents-grandson-bought-a-luxury-dubai-apartment-at-age-9-where-did-the-money-come-from>

Turkmenistan



TURKMENISTAN

Suppression of Freedom of Expression and Media

Turkmenistan remains one of the world's most tightly controlled and repressive countries, where the government strictly monitors and censors information and media. There are no independent outlets, and journalists risk imprisonment or even their lives for cooperating with international media. The Turkmen regime also actively engages in transnational repression. In 2025, bloggers Alisher Sakhatov, Abdulla Orusov, and Umida Bekchanova, who criticized the Turkmen government on social media, were detained in Türkiye and threatened with deportation. Despite having valid residence permits, they were accused of “posing a threat to public order and security”. If returned to Turkmenistan, these activists face torture and political persecution. Another form of transnational repression is the authorities’ refusal to issue and renew passports for citizens living abroad, which forces them to return to a dangerous environment.⁹⁹

Turkmenistan’s authoritarian grip also manifests in everyday life through bizarre and repressive measures that reinforce loyalty to the ruling Berdymukhamedov family. Civil servants, for example, risk losing their jobs if they mishandle newspapers containing images of the current or former president,¹⁰⁰ highlighting the regime’s demand for a near-religious attitude to the leader. The government also enforces extreme control over the digital sphere: access to independent online platforms and social media is heavily restricted, while state-sanctioned VPNs are promoted as the only “legal” option, ensuring that authorities can track citizens’ online activity.¹⁰¹ These restrictions are further reinforced by official bans and ideological dictates, from clothing rules to limitations on cultural expression, which aim to shape both public behavior and private life.¹⁰² In parallel, authorities orchestrate artificial social media campaigns designed to flood the internet with positive portrayals of Turkmenistan, attempting to mask the reality of repression and hardship.¹⁰³ Together, these measures illustrate the extent to which the regime seeks to dominate not only political dissent but also the daily choices, thoughts, and perceptions of its citizens, leaving little space for freedom or authenticity in public and private life.

Political Repression, Surveillance, and Arbitrary Detention

In 2025, the manipulation of justice was particularly blatant, with one activist’s prison term being extended on new, fabricated charges just days before his scheduled release. Murad Dushemov’s prison

99 Forced Loyalty, Fear, and Censorship: Turkmenistan’s Relentless Assault on Civic Freedoms, 23 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/forced-loyalty-fear-and-censorship-turkmenistans-relentless-assault-on-civic-freedoms/>

100 Turkmen Civil Servants Could Lose Jobs for Misusing Newspapers with Pictures of Berdimuhamedovs, 3 February 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/turkmen-civil-servants-could-lose-jobs-for-misusing-newspapers-with-pictures-of-berdimuhamedovs/>

101 Turkmenistan Tightens Internet Blocks to Promote State-Controlled VPNs, 16 July 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/turkmenistan-tightens-internet-blocks-to-promote-state-controlled-vpns/>

102 Bans and Beliefs: Understanding Central Asia’s Most Controversial Restrictions, 27 June 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/bans-and-beliefs-understanding-central-asias-most-controversial-restrictions/>

103 Turkmen Authorities Order Social Media Campaign to Showcase “Positive Image”, 9 June 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/turkmen-authorities-order-social-media-campaign-to-showcase-positive-image/>

term was due to end on 14 June 2025, but shortly before his release, the authorities transferred him to a pre-trial detention facility and brought fresh charges based on a dubious claim by a cellmate that Dushemov had broken his arm.¹⁰⁴ The tactic of creating new accusations against critics already in custody to ensure their continued imprisonment is a common one in Turkmenistan.

The Turkmen regime also practices transnational repression, targeting critics who have fled the country.¹⁰⁵ In 2025, two Turkmen bloggers Alisher Sakhatsov and Abdulla Orusov who criticized the Turkmen government on social media have been missing in Türkiye since July 2025 after being held in Turkish deportation centers. Both are at serious risk of forced return to Turkmenistan, where credible threats include torture and arbitrary detention. Although a Turkish court initially upheld an order for their deportation, the Constitutional Court later suspended it and ordered an investigation into the disappearance. Human rights defenders have expressed concern that these cases reflect Türkiye's failure to protect individuals from abuse or persecution by their home state.¹⁰⁶ The Turkmen regime also uses other repressive tactics, such as cracking down on VPNs and searching students' phones for "suspicious content".

Rule of Law and Access to Justice

Access to justice failed in the case of Murad Dushemov since the authorities even refused to provide Dushemov's mother with information about his lawyer or to allow her a visit. This case illustrates how the authorities use the judicial system to hold critics, unwilling to release them, and how justice in the country is completely subordinate to political interests.

The fabrication of charges, as in the case of Murad Dushemov,¹⁰⁷ and numerous cases of enforced disappearances,¹⁰⁸ show that the Turkmen system does not even try to imitate legality. It functions on the basis of blatant arbitrariness, where the law is only a tool for the implementation of the will of the ruling regime.¹⁰⁹ This model of functioning represents the worst-case scenario of legal system degradation, in which none of the four key components of the rule of law are observed.

To Freedom for Eurasia's knowledge, during the reporting period there have been no credible reports indicating progress by Turkmenistan in strengthening the rule of law or improving access to justice.

104 Turkmenistan: Imprisoned Activist Faces New Dubious Charges, 25 June 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/25/turkmenistan-imprisoned-activist-faces-new-dubious-charges>

105 Ibid.

106 Türkiye: Turkmen Risking Deportation Reported Missing, 30 July 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/30/turkiye-turkmen-risking-deportation-reported-missing/>

107 Turkmenistan: Drop New Charges, Release Civic Activist Murat Dushemov <https://nhc.no/en/turkmenistan-drop-new-charges-release-civic-activist-murat-dushemov/>

108 World Report 2025: Turkmenistan, 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

109 Ibid.

Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association

In its 2025 Freedom in the World report, Freedom House rated Turkmenistan as Not Free, awarding it 0 out of 40 points for political rights and 1 out of 60 for civil liberties.¹¹⁰ Freedom of assembly and association remains severely restricted in both law and practice. The country's Law on Public Associations prohibits the operation of unregistered organizations, while independent political activity is banned, leaving the ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan as the only officially registered political party. In short, Turkmenistan is a totalitarian state.

Public associations are also barred from pursuing goals deemed to undermine national security or alter the constitutional order provisions frequently used to silence dissent. Human rights watchdogs, including CIVICUS, report that citizens attempting spontaneous expressions of grievance face intimidation and harassment, further deterring participation.

Trade and professional unions in Turkmenistan are state-controlled and often used to mobilize workers for compulsory labor or participation in state-organized cultural and sporting events. During the annual cotton-picking campaigns, public sector employees, including teachers and healthcare workers, are either required to participate directly or compelled to pay for substitute pickers. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, citing the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), on 19 March 2025 university and secondary school students in Turkmenabat were forced to attend official Novruz celebrations from 9am to 5pm in temperatures exceeding 35°C. Participants were not allowed to leave, eat, or drink water, and two female students reportedly lost consciousness from heat stroke. Similarly, on 22 March 2025, the president ordered a nationwide subbotnik (a volunteer workday), during which citizens were required to plant trees in temperatures of around 30°C.¹¹¹

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Despite declarative government statements and reforms, Turkmenistan performs poorly on gender equality, reflecting persistent gaps in education, health, and income. Women face political and social marginalization, with restrictions on their appearance, mobility, and participation in public life increasing in recent years. Independent women's organizations as well as other independent entities, are not allowed to operate, limiting their civic engagement. While many restrictions are not codified in law and instead come as informal orders from "above", they are strictly enforced for those working in the public sector and government institutions. The Turkmen state pays particular attention to women's appearance in society, frequently imposing rules on their attire. In March 2025, authorities in Ashgabat reportedly issued an unofficial directive requiring unmarried women to wear yellow headscarves and married women to wear yellow dresses at work, with non-compliance

110 Freedom in the World 2025: Turkmenistan, 2025, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkmenistan/freedom-world/2025>

111 Forced Loyalty, Fear, and Censorship: Turkmenistan's Relentless Assault on Civic Freedoms, 23 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/forced-loyalty-fear-and-censorship-turkmenistans-relentless-assault-on-civic-freedoms/>

punishable by dismissal.¹¹² Due to official data unavailability Turkmenistan is not included in the Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index.

Ethnic minorities, particularly Uzbeks and Tajiks, face increasing pressure for “Turkmenization”. RFE/RL’s Turkmen service reported in April 2025 that authorities in Turkmenistan’s Lebap Province now require ethnic Uzbek and Tajik families to give their newborn children traditional Turkmen names.¹¹³ Minority communities are also denied the right to study their native languages, despite constituting a sizable portion of the population.

Consensual same-sex relations between men remain criminalized in Turkmenistan, punishable by prison time. Human rights watchdogs report that entrenched homophobia and transphobia place LGBT persons at serious risk of police abuse, including sexual violence and extortion. Although reporting from Turkmenistan remains scarce due to severe media suppression, this case reported by AFP illustrates the risks LGBT individuals face if returned to the country. An HIV-positive gay Turkmen man, identified as Emir for safety reasons, now in exile, fears deportation, where he would likely face torture, imprisonment, and denial of life-saving antiretroviral treatment. Emir fled the country in 2018 and tested positive for HIV in 2024. Now, with his documents expiring, he must renew his passport in Turkmenistan, which in his case would mean risk of imprisonment and torture.¹¹⁴ Confirming these concerns, in May 2025, the UN Committee against Torture published findings on several State parties, including Turkmenistan, expressing alarm at persistent reports of widespread torture and ill-treatment in pre-trial detention and prisons. The Committee was particularly disturbed by the “targeted abuse of individuals perceived to be homosexual, highlighting the discriminatory and systemic nature of such treatment”.¹¹⁵

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Turkmenistan continued to impose severe, arbitrary restrictions on foreign travel. Many citizens are prevented from boarding flights to leave Turkmenistan at the last moment due to government policies. Reasons for denial include passport issues or being flagged by security services, who may force citizens to return home.¹¹⁶ Apart from the prolonged process of obtaining biometric passports and the extensive wait time for acquiring foreign visas, authorities routinely obstruct passport renewals at embassies and block targeted individuals from boarding outbound flights, frequently without legal justification.¹¹⁷

112 Amos Chapple, Dress Codes Tighten for Women in Turkmenistan, Where the State Tells You What to Wear, 16 March 2025, RFE/RL, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-color-clothing-women-rules-repression/33349460.html>

113 Bruce Pannier, Only Turkmen Names Allowed, 23 April 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/only-turkmen-names-allowed/>

114 Deportation, 2025, HIV Justice Network, <https://www.hivjustice.net/topic/travel/deportation/>

115 UN Committee against Torture Publishes Findings on Armenia, France, Mauritius, Monaco, Turkmenistan and Ukraine, 2 May 2025, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/un-committee-against-torture-publishes-findings-armenia-france-mauritius>

116 Citizens of Turkmenistan Being Prevented From Flying Abroad, 19 April 2025, The Times of Central Asia, <https://timesca.com/citizens-of-turkmenistan-being-prevented-from-flying-abroad/>

117 Citizens Who Want to Leave Turkmenistan Detained at the Airport, 20 May 2025, RFE/RL, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/grazhdan-zhelayuschih-pokinut-turkmenistan-zaderzhivayut-v-aeroportu/32930751.html>

Despite limited signs of potential reform, restrictions on freedom of movement in Turkmenistan remain widespread and burdensome. Foreigners seeking to enter the country are still required to obtain visas and present negative COVID-19 tests,¹¹⁸ highlighting the government's strict control over international travel. While authorities have publicly considered the creation of an electronic visa system to simplify entry procedures,¹¹⁹ no concrete progress has been made, and access remains tightly regulated. Domestically, new policies further entrench state control over citizens' lives, such as proposed changes to raise the conscription age,¹²⁰ which could prolong the period during which young men remain under state obligations and subject to restrictions on their mobility. Arbitrary enforcement of travel bans continues to separate families, with some cases only overturned after prolonged struggles, such as that of a Turkmen woman and her daughter who were eventually allowed to reunite with relatives in Türkiye.¹²¹ One positive development, though its practical impact remains uncertain, is the agreement between Belarus and Russia on mutual visa recognition, which came into force on 11 January 2025. Under this arrangement, Turkmen citizens holding a visa from either country can enter, exit, reside, and transit through both states for the duration of the visa's validity.¹²² While this may ease travel to and within parts of the region, Turkmenistan's own restrictive practices continue to undermine citizens' freedom of movement, keeping international mobility tightly constrained.

Corruption

In 2024, Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked Turkmenistan among the world's most corrupt countries placing it 165 out of 180 countries with a score of 17 out of 100 where 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) – the lowest of all the Central Asian nations, and lower than Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.¹²³ Turkmenistan has been consistently near the bottom, achieving the same score in 2024 as it did in 2012.¹²⁴

The government lacks a dedicated agency solely tasked with addressing corruption. Additionally, independent bodies or NGOs that monitor or investigate corruption are absent from the scene. International anti-corruption advocates and exiled civil society activists consistently report the prevalence of endemic corruption and the existence of extensive patronage networks that influence all sectors of the country. Anti-corruption efforts have tended to be selective and often linked to internal conflicts among the ruling elite.

118 Turkmenistan Still Requires COVID Tests and Visas for All Visitors, 3 July, 2025, The Times of Central Asia. <https://timesca.com/turkmenistan-still-requires-covid-tests-and-visas-for-all-visitors/>

119 Turkmenistan's Parliament is currently reviewing a draft bill aimed at introducing an electronic visa system—a move that could signal a significant shift for a country known for having one of the most restrictive visa policies in the region, 14 April 2025, Visanews. <https://visasnews.com/en/turkmenistan-considers-creation-of-electronic-visa-system/>

120 Turkmenistan Plans to Raise Conscription Age, 21 February, 2025, The Times of Central Asia. <https://timesca.com/turkmenistan-plans-to-raise-conscription-age/>

121 Travel Ban Overturned: Turkmen Woman and Her Daughter Rejoin Family in Turkey, 18 July 2025, The Times of Central Asia. <https://timesca.com/travel-ban-overturned-turkmen-woman-and-her-daughter-rejoin-family-in-turkey/>

122 Citizens of Turkmenistan Will Be Able to Visit Russia and Belarus under a Single Visa, 12 January 2025, Turkmenistan.ru, <https://www.turkmenistan.ru/ru/articles/48133.html>

123 Turkmenistan — Country Profile, 2025, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/turkmenistan>

124 Turkmenistan — Country Profile, 2012, Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2012/index/tkm>

The parliament adopted the Law on Combating Corruption in March 2014.¹²⁵ However, the law was largely exploited to extract revenue from affluent officials and business leaders. Bribery is deeply embedded across all levels of social and daily life, with officials from various sectors—including traffic police, customs, border control, migration services, driver licensing authorities, educational institutions, hospitals, the State Commodities Exchange, and those involved in public procurement and tenders—regularly soliciting bribes.

In Turkmenistan, corruption has become systemic, permeating all levels of power. City and velayat (regional) leaders abuse their authority in land and construction matters, leading to the degradation of the territories entrusted to them.¹²⁶ A particular problem is the activity of the Cyber Security Department, which artificially restricts access to information and creates corrupt schemes with “selective” access to the Internet.¹²⁷

The vicious practice of “vertical” corruption, wherein higher-ranking officials burden subordinates with unspoken “taxes”, forces the latter group to pass these expenses on to ordinary citizens. Corruption schemes have penetrated even seemingly innocent spheres, such as cultural institutions, demonstrating the scale of the problem and its destructive impact on all aspects of Turkmen society.

The lack of transparency and reliable data in authoritarian and corrupt Turkmenistan has led to the exclusion of the country from the analytical reviews of reputable international institutions such as the World Bank. In 2025, Turkmenistan’s exclusion from the Global Economic Prospects report is due, according to the authors, to the “lack of reliable data of adequate quality”, which puts the country in a unique position – the only state in the world for which the World Bank does not publish data on GDP, income, and economic growth.¹²⁸

125 Turkmenistan — International Religious Freedom Report 2014, 10 September 2015, U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2014/228663.htm>

126 Turkmenabad: Once a thriving city, now turning into a ghetto, 12 February 2025, Turkmen.news, <https://turkmen.news/turkmenabad-nekogda-cvetushiy-gorod-prevrashaetsya-v-ghetto/>

127 Turkmenistan: Cyberterrorism continues, 7 February 2025, Turkmen.news, <https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-kiberterrorizm-prodolzhaetsya/>

128 Global Economic Prospects, June 2025, World Bank, <https://www.vsemirnyjbank.org/ru/publication/global-economic-prospects>

Uzbekistan



Photo by Ahmet Hilmi Ermiş

UZBEKISTAN

Suppression of Freedom of Expression and Media

In Uzbekistan, the government's ambiguous laws on extremism and defamation continue to be a powerful tool for silencing dissenting expressions and restraining civil liberties despite ongoing promises of reform. The first half of 2025 has seen a continuation of these actions, with numerous bloggers and social media users facing arrest, fines and punitive psychiatry.

In 2024 the application of defamation laws was so widespread that over 30,000 citizens were charged with “slander” and “insult”, with more than 200 of them sentenced to prison terms.¹²⁹ In addition, new amendments introducing stricter penalties for insulting the president or threatening public order online, were initiated.¹³⁰

The situation is particularly concerning for individuals from Karakalpakstan where three Karakalpak bloggers who had posted videos criticizing the treatment of Karakalpaks and questioning government narratives were arrested and charged with inciting ethnic hatred – a serious accusation with little evidentiary support.¹³¹ As of 2025, Zhumasapar Dadebaev,¹³² an ethnic Turkmen activist from Karakalpakstan, remains in prison in Uzbekistan, serving a 12-year sentence. He was forcibly abducted by Uzbek special forces in January 2022 while seeking asylum in Türkiye and later charged with a wide range of politically motivated offenses, including incitement, terrorism, and slander against the president. Despite credible reports of torture, inhumane detention conditions, and ethnic discrimination, no independent investigation has been launched into his abduction or treatment in custody.

Furthermore, Mustafa Tursynbayev, a well-known Karakalpak blogger, died in a penal colony in February 2025 while serving a five-year sentence. He was reportedly convicted on falsified charges in retaliation for his independent journalism on social issues. His death, officially accidental, marks the third reported death of a Karakalpak political prisoner in the last two years.¹³³

Another egregious example is a case of Valijon Kalonov, a blogger forcibly detained in a psychiatric hospital since December 2021 for “threatening public safety” and insulting the president online

129 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 4 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

130 Freedom in the World 2025: Uzbekistan, 2025, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2025>

131 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 4 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

132 Zhumasapar Dadebaev, Activist from Karakalpakstan, Subjected to Inhumane Treatment in Prison, 30 April 2024, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/zhumasapar-dadebaev-activist-from-karakalpakstan-subjected-to-inhumane-treatment-in-prison/>

133 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 4 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

through his social media posts. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention unequivocally declared his confinement “arbitrary” in February 2025, urging his immediate release and reparations.¹³⁴

Rinat Utambetov was sentenced to two years and three months in prison by the Nukus City Court on 17 April 2025, after being extradited from Kazakhstan. He was convicted of encroaching on the constitutional order and disseminating materials threatening public security after sharing videos from protests with a telegram group consisting of ten users.¹³⁵ In its review of a similar case involving Karakalpak activist Akylbek Muratov, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that such charges “have no merit” and warned against extradition due to the risk of torture.¹³⁶

During the reporting period, persecution of bloggers and activists persisted, illustrating the ongoing pattern of targeting dissenting voices. For example, activists Dildora Khakimova and Nargiza Keldiyorova were sentenced to more than six years in prison on dubious extortion charges after they criticized corruption in the education system.¹³⁷ In February 2025, a well-known religious blogger, Alisher Tursunov, was placed on a wanted list on charges related to the illegal distribution of religious materials. These events have caused serious concern among activists about a return to the repressions of “Old Uzbekistan”.¹³⁸

In May 2025, a newly proposed law, “On the Protection of User Rights on Online Platforms and Websites” was published for public discussion. This legislation signals a significant shift in how the government manages online content. Instead of outright blocking platforms that do not cooperate with government directives, the law proposes court-ordered “throttling”, which means reducing access speed to these platforms. While framed as a move to protect user rights and liberalize legislation, this effectively allows the government to limit the reach and impact of critical content without a complete ban, maintaining control over information flow.

Karakalpak activist Aqylbek Muratbai was detained in Almaty on 15 February 2024 following an extradition request from Uzbekistan. Although he was granted asylum-seeker status, Kazakhstan’s Refugee Commission denied his application in September 2024, claiming there was no evidence of persecution. He remained in pre-trial detention for a full year before being released on 15 February 2025, but continues to face politically motivated charges in Uzbekistan for “public calls for violence” and “spreading threatening materials”. His case highlights once more how Uzbekistan seeks to silence dissent abroad through criminal prosecutions and extradition requests, while also exposing the vulnerability of Karakalpak activists in countries like Kazakhstan, where refugee protection remains inconsistent and previous applications from Karakalpaks have been rejected leaving individuals like Muratbai at serious risk.

134 Uzbekistan: Free Blogger from Forced Psychiatric Detention, 31 March 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/31/uzbekistan-free-blogger-forced-psychiatric-detention>

135 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 4 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

136 Ariadna Mañé & Thijs Korsten, What the Arrest of a Prominent Karakalpak Activist Tells Us about Not-So-New Uzbekistan’s Transnational Repression, 28 March 2024, Lossi 36, <https://lossi36.com/2024/03/28/what-the-arrest-of-a-prominent-karakalpak-activist-tells-us-about-not-so-new-uzbekistans-transnational-repression/>

137 Malik Mansur, VOA Uzbek: Activists Fear Repression Returning to Uzbekistan, 22 February 2025, Voice of America (Uzbek Service), <https://www.voanews.com/a/voa-uzbek-activists-fear-repression-returning-to-uzbekistan-/7984254.html>

138 Ibid.

Political Repression, Surveillance, and Arbitrary Detention

In Uzbekistan, authorities have intensified their crackdown on free speech by imprisoning critical bloggers on spurious criminal charges.¹³⁹ A new “Interdepartmental Automated System” has been launched to monitor user data, including photos, videos, and IP addresses, for citizens active in the blogosphere, leading to a significant increase in self-censorship.¹⁴⁰

Reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities also persist. Authorities have taken no steps to hold senior officials accountable for the excessive use of force that resulted in deaths of peaceful protesters during the 2022 Karakalpakstan protests.¹⁴¹ The report from the commission investigating the events, presented to parliament in December 2024, was never made public. A journalist and activist from Karakalpakstan who was sentenced to 16 years in prison for his role in the protests remains in custody, and it was reported in early March 2025 that he was subjected to further abuse, including beatings by other inmates. In April 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention officially declared his imprisonment a violation of international human rights law.

The Uzbek government has systematically employed a set of legislative provisions to criminalize peaceful dissent and justify the prosecution of activists. The primary charges cited in connection with the Karakalpakstan protests are “encroachment on the constitutional order” (Article 159) and “dissemination of materials threatening public safety” (Article 244-1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan.¹⁴² The language of these laws is deliberately vague and overly broad, allowing authorities to interpret legitimate and peaceful speech as a serious threat to national security. Human Rights Watch has noted that the charge of “attempting to overthrow the constitutional order” is a relic of the authoritarian era under former President Islam Karimov, used to imprison human rights defenders in politically motivated trials.¹⁴³ This lack of legal precision allows the state to label any form of criticism as a severe crime, a strategy that is a deliberate feature of the state’s repressive apparatus.

The Uzbek government’s campaign of repression is not confined to its borders; it extends its reach to dissidents living abroad through a systematic policy of transnational repression. This policy involves a two-pronged approach, relying on both legal extradition and illegal abductions with the complicity of host-state authorities.¹⁴⁴ The case of Rinat Utambetov provides a clear example of the legal component of this strategy. Utambetov was detained in Kazakhstan in April 2024 and extradited

139 World Report 2025: Uzbekistan, 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uzbekistan>

140 Attacks on Media Workers in Uzbekistan in 2024, 11 February 2025, Justice for Journalists, <https://jfj.fund/attacks-on-media-workers-in-uzbekistan-in-2024>

141 Karakalpakstan Victims Await Justice Three Years on Investigate, Hold Perpetrators Accountable for Rights Abuses <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/02/karakalpakstan-victims-await-justice-three-years-on>

142 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 4 June 2025, CIVICUS Monitor, <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

143 Uzbekistan: 16-Year Sentence in Autonomous Region Protests, 31 January 2023, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/uzbekistan-16-year-sentence-autonomous-region-protests>

144 Defending Dignity – Addressing Human Rights Crisis and Transnational Repression of Karakalpak Activists in Uzbekistan, 12 October 2024, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/defending-dignity-addressing-human-rights-crisis-and-transnational-repression-of-karakalpak-activists-in-uzbekistan/>

to Uzbekistan after he reportedly withdrew his asylum request in early 2025.¹⁴⁵ On April 17, 2025, a Nukus City Court sentenced him to two years and three months in prison on charges of “encroaching on the constitutional order” and “disseminating materials threatening public security”. Activist sources allege that the case against him was based on a single video post he made in July 2022 within a private Telegram group of only 10 people. This use of a serious political charge for a minor, private act of communication underscores the disproportionate and punitive nature of Uzbekistan’s legal response. The reported withdrawal of his asylum request suggests that he may have been subjected to pressure, possibly through deception or threats against his relatives remaining in Karakalpakstan, a well-documented tactic of “proxy punishment” used to coerce dissidents to return.

When legal mechanisms prove insufficient, the Uzbek government reportedly resorts to more aggressive, illegal means. The case of Zhetkerbai Abdramanov, a Karakalpak activist and asylum seeker, is an instance of a blatant abduction. Abdramanov was kidnapped from Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow in December 2024 and was later found in Tashkent before being transferred to a detention center in Nukus.¹⁴⁶ This transfer was reportedly facilitated by Russian law enforcement and the Federal Security Service (FSB) despite prior rulings from Russian prosecutors who had determined the legal basis for his extradition was “insufficient” due to a lack of evidence from Uzbek authorities. This action represents a clear case of illegal rendition, in violation of both Russian and international law. Upon his arrival in Uzbekistan, he was held for nearly a month without formal charges or a court ruling to justify his detention, with his legal team formally asserting that his arrest was unlawful and arbitrary. On 29 April 2025, Nukus City Court ruled to transfer Karakalpak activist Zhetkerbai Abdramanov from pre-trial detention to home imprisonment for 4 years and 7 months.¹⁴⁷

The incidents involving Utambetov and Abdramanov are not anomalies but a continuation of a long-standing state policy. Karakalpak Zhumasapar Dadebaev was in January 2022 allegedly kidnapped from Türkiye, underscoring the well-established pattern of repression by Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states that relies on close ties with the security elites of host countries like Russia and Türkiye.¹⁴⁸

In February 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared¹⁴⁹ the forced psychiatric confinement of Uzbek blogger Valijon Kalonov to be arbitrary and in violation of international law. Kalonov has been held in a psychiatric institution since December 2021 after openly criticizing government policies, calling for an election boycott, and speaking out against China’s treatment of

145 Freedoms under Threat as Uzbekistan Continues to Put Pressure on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, 1 July 2025, IPHR, <https://iphronline.org/articles/freedoms-under-threat-as-uzbekistan-continues-to-put-pressure-on-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders/>

146 Karakalpakstan: Statement on the Situation of Zhetkerbai Abdramanov, 10 March 2025, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/karakalpakstan-statement-on-the-situation-of-zhetkerbai-abdramanov/>

147 Statement on the Release of Zhetkerbai Abdramanov to Home Imprisonment, 27 March 2025, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/statement-on-the-release-of-zhetkerbai-abdramanov-to-home-imprisonment/>

148 Zhumasapar Dadebaev, Activist from Karakalpakstan, Subjected to Inhumane Treatment in Prison, 30 April 2024, Freedom For Eurasia, <https://freedomforeurasia.org/zhumasapar-dadebaev-activist-from-karakalpakstan-subjected-to-inhumane-treatment-in-prison/>

149 Opinion No. 47/2024 concerning Valijon Kalonov (Uzbekistan) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session101/a-hrc-wgad-47-2024-uzbekistan-aev.pdf>

Uyghurs.¹⁵⁰ Despite no credible evidence of mental illness, a domestic court ruled he had a chronic psychiatric condition, enabling his involuntary detention. UN experts have called for his immediate release, compensation, and reparations, stressing that his case exemplifies the misuse of psychiatry to silence dissent in Uzbekistan.¹⁵¹

The case of Dildora Khakimova exemplifies critical failures in Uzbekistan's justice and prison systems, revealing multiple, severe human rights violations. Khakimova, a teacher, blogger and social justice activist, was detained in February 2024 and sentenced to six years in prison on extortion charges based largely on the testimony of a dismissed former school director.¹⁵² Since her conviction, her health has rapidly deteriorated. She has been battling breast cancer for years, was pregnant when arrested, and has been denied essential medical care including cancer treatment, prenatal services, and post-natal maternal support. Moreover, inhuman practices such as restraining her while in labour and separating her from her newborn violate both domestic policy and international standards under the ICCPR, CEDAW, and UN Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules).

The cases of Valijon Kalonov and Dildora Khakimova reflect ongoing human rights violations in Uzbekistan in 2025. Both cases reveal politically motivated persecution, denial of fair trial rights, and inhuman treatment, underscoring Uzbekistan's failure to uphold its international human rights obligations.

Rule of Law and Access to Justice

In 2025, Uzbekistan demonstrated a clear departure from its previously declared course of liberalization, which was expressed in the increased persecution of activists and journalists, as well as the persistence of impunity for serious human rights violations.

The case of journalist and activist Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov continues to be a symbol of injustice. In 2024, the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan rejected his appeal, upholding his sentence of 16 years in prison.¹⁵³ In March 2025, his continued ill-treatment in custody, including beatings by other inmates, became public knowledge. In April 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recognized Tazhimuratov's detention as a violation of international law.¹⁵⁴ Still, the Uzbek authorities have refused to release the activist. Similarly, the case of Zhetkerbay Abdramanov illustrates a fundamental disregard for basic procedural standards. Abdramanov was detained for nearly a month without a formal charge or a court ruling to justify his arrest, and was instead asked to provide a written

150 Uzbekistan: Free Blogger From Forced Psychiatric Detention Un Experts Call For Immediate Release From Arbitrary Detention, Compensation <https://www.uzbekforum.org/uzbekistan-free-blogger-from-forced-psychiatric-detention-un-experts-call-for-immediate-release-from-arbitrary-detention-compensation/>, 31 March 2025, Uzbekforum.org,

151 Ibid.

152 Uzbekistan: Free Wrongfully Imprisoned Activists, Provide Urgent Medical Care, Quash Convictions, 17 September 2024, Uzbekforum.org, <https://www.uzbekforum.org/uzbekistan-free-wrongfully-imprisoned-activists-provide-urgent-medical-care-quash-convictions/>

153 World Report 2025: Uzbekistan, 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uzbekistan>

154 Uzbekistan: UN Declares Detention of Journalist and Activist Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov a Violation of International Law, 8 April 2025, Freedom Now, <https://www.freedom-now.org/uzbekistan-un-declares-detention-of-journalist-and-activist-dauletmurat-tazhimuratov-a-violation-of-international-law/>

explanation in the presence of a state-appointed lawyer. This action directly contravenes due process norms and the very legal reforms that stipulate shortened pretrial detention.

The authorities also took no steps to hold senior officials accountable for the excessive use of force during the Karakalpakstan protests in July 2022, which resulted in 21 deaths. The report of the commission investigating these events, submitted to parliament in December 2024, was never made public.¹⁵⁵

Uzbekistan is demonstrating a selective approach to reforms. On the one hand, the government is making visible progress in combating forced labor in the cotton industry and passing laws against domestic violence, which has been noted by Amnesty International and UNDP.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, it is intensifying the persecution of critics, refusing to investigate the events in Karakalpakstan, and ignoring UN decisions. This strategy of “managed liberalization” is aimed at improving the international image and attracting investments, but not at a real expansion of civil liberties that could threaten political control. This approach creates a dangerous precedent, where the international community, by focusing on some selected positive shifts, risks legitimizing authoritarian regimes.

Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly and Association

In its Freedom in the World 2025 report, Freedom House once again rated Uzbekistan as Not Free, maintaining last year’s overall score of 12 out of 100, including 2 out of 40 for political rights and 10 out of 60 for civil liberties.¹⁵⁷ Political pluralism is absent, as no opposition parties are permitted to operate legally, and civil society organizations continue to face tight restrictions. The experience of the Akbaskur civil society group in Karakalpakstan illustrates the obstacles NGOs encounter despite the existence of supportive legislation.

Since its initial registration attempt in December 2019, Akbaskur has repeatedly encountered bureaucratic barriers, including vague allegations of “errors” in its founding documents, contradictory demands from local and regional authorities, and refusals to issue required confirmations of residence. When the group sought to restart the process in January 2025, Karakalpak authorities imposed artificial obstacles that prevented it from even gathering the necessary founding documents.¹⁵⁸ Although legislation sets out clear procedures and timeframes for registration, these rules are applied inconsistently and are deliberately manipulated to obstruct independent organizations.

Further restrictions were introduced in May 2025, after the Ministry of Justice mandated that NGOs must notify it at least seven days before any foreign travel related to their activities. Notifications

155 World Report 2025: Uzbekistan, 2025, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/uzbekistan>

156 EU/Central Asia: Authorities Must Safeguard Civil Society Space for Genuine Progress, 31 March 2025, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/eu-central-asia-authorities-must-safeguard-civil-society-space-for-genuine-progress/>

157 Freedom in the World 2025: Uzbekistan, 2025, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2025>

158 Uzbekistan: Obstacles to Registration of NGO “Akbakor”, 15 July 2025, LabourMission, <https://labourmission.org/ru/news/uzbekistan-prepyatstvia-registracii-nno-akbakor/>

must follow a rigid format and disclose extensive personal and organizational information, including passport details, funding sources, and partner organizations. These requirements, which take effect in August 2025, further extend state control over NGO operations and international engagement.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, securing funding for independent NGOs remains a persistent challenge, aggravated by cuts in US international assistance and the overall decline in donor support, leaving civil society under-resourced and vulnerable.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

The Constitution of Uzbekistan prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including sex, race, ethnicity, religion, social origin, and social status. In recent years, the government has taken some steps to strengthen protections for women, including reforms in the areas of gender-based violence prevention and labor rights. In February 2025, Uzbekistan enacted a reform allowing victims of domestic violence to file for divorce without being subject to a mandatory reconciliation period. This change removes a procedural barrier that previously extended victims' exposure to possible further violence during an enforced waiting period.¹⁶⁰ Last year, Uzbekistan aligned its by-laws to fully cancel the list of prohibited professions for women, which had first been abolished in 2019 but which was later replaced with a similar "recommendatory" list.¹⁶¹

Despite these steps, significant challenges remain. During the reporting period, Uzbekistan made no progress toward acceding to the CEDAW Optional Protocol, which would enable survivors of gender-based violence to seek international remedies once domestic options are exhausted. At the same time, reported cases of harassment and violence against women rose sharply in early 2025. In the first half of the year, 48,303 cases were registered (a 121% rise from 2024), with over 6,000 prosecutions, nearly 5,000 administrative penalties under Article 59-2 on domestic violence (3,200 fined and 1,752 arrested), and 231 criminal convictions, including 65 prison sentences.¹⁶²

The continued criminalization of consensual same-sex relations between men in Uzbekistan remains one of the most serious human rights concerns in the region. Article 120 of the Uzbek Criminal Code, which punishes consensual same-sex relations between adult men with up to three years of imprisonment, is used not for justice but as a tool of persecution and intimidation. This provision enables widespread harassment and blackmail by law enforcement officers, who exploit it to extort money, coerce confessions, and threaten exposure. Many victims are afraid to report these abuses, as doing so would expose them to further persecution, stigma, and even prosecution under the same law. Police frequently use entrapment methods — posing online or arranging meetings to detain individuals

159 NGOs in Uzbekistan Will Be Required to Notify the Justice Authorities in Advance of Foreign Trips, 5 June 2025, *Gazeta.uz*, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/06/05/ngo/>

160 Violence victims will be able to divorce without a reconciliation period, 13 February 2025, *Kun.uz*, <https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/02/13/violence-victims-will-be-able-to-divorce-without-a-reconciliation-period>

161 Uzbekistan Has Improved Legislation on Accessibility of the Transport Sector for Women's Employment, 15 February 2024, ADC Memorial, <https://adcmemorial.org/en/news/uzbekistan-has-improved-legislation-on-accessibility-of-the-transport-sector-for-womens-employment/>

162 The number of identified cases of violence against women has increased in Uzbekistan. In Tajikistan too, 13 August 2025, *Asia-Plus*, <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/centralasia/20250813/the-number-of-identified-cases-of-violence-against-women-has-increased-in-uzbekistan-in-tajikistan-too>

— and then demand bribes to avoid criminal charges. In some cases, the threat of public outing is used to pressure individuals into silence or to force them to cooperate with authorities.

Religious freedom is also heavily curtailed: authorities have made no progress in easing registration for religious communities, continue to impose arbitrary controls on former prisoners of conscience, and prosecute Muslims under broadly defined extremism charges. In June 2025, the Senate approved amendments to the Criminal Code, introducing criminal liability for teaching religious knowledge to minors without formal religious education or authorization from a registered religious body. The offense is punishable by fines, correctional labor, or up to three years of imprisonment, significantly tightening what were previously administrative penalties.¹⁶³ These changes further restrict freedom of religion and disproportionately affect unregistered religious communities. In their 2025 annual report USCIRF recommended the US Government to place Uzbekistan on the “Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)”.¹⁶⁴

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Uzbekistan uses the practice of travel bans against its citizens. In May 2025, human rights defender Sharifa Madrakhimova was prevented from traveling to receive an award after her passport was reportedly destroyed in transit deliberately, she believes, by authorities.¹⁶⁵ There have been credible reports of Uzbek authorities refusing to issue passports to Karakalpak activists to prevent them from leaving the country. According to information received by Freedom for Eurasia, in 2025 the family of Saadatdin Reimov was denied passports, effectively preventing their planned travel to the OSCE Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw (6–17 October 2025). No official explanation was provided, and the denial appeared politically motivated.

Corruption

Uzbekistan remains deeply corrupt. According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Uzbekistan’s score has increased steadily from 2012 to 2023, but suffered a slight downturn in 2024, scoring 32, ranking it 121 out of 180 countries, on a par with Angola.¹⁶⁶ Uzbekistan is a member of the OECD Anti-Corruption Network (ACN) for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Additionally, Uzbekistan is a party to the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). The country underwent its first UNCAC review cycle in 2016, with the second review scheduled for June 2026.

163 Uzbekistan’ Senate Approves Introduction of Criminal Liability for Illegal Religious Instruction of Children, 25 June 2025, *Gazeta.uz*, <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/06/25/religion/>

164 Uzbekistan 2025 USCIRF Annual Report, March 2025, USCIRF, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2124294/Uzbekistan+2025+USCIRF+Annual+Report.pdf>

165 Uzbek Human Rights Defender Prevented From Traveling to Receive Award, 3 June 2025, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/uzbek-human-rights-defender-prevented-from-traveling-to-receive-award/>

166 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, 2024, Uzbekistan, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/uzb>

Although the law prescribes criminal penalties for corruption, in practice it functions largely as a façade, selectively applied against politicians who have fallen out of favor. Provisions formally prohibit civil servants from accepting gifts, engaging in business activities, holding foreign accounts, or purchasing property abroad, and require them to declare income and assets. However, the officials most vulnerable to corruption—the president, members of parliament and the senate, judges, law enforcement, and military personnel—are effectively exempt from these restrictions.

Corruption remains a significant issue in Uzbekistan’s economy and social sphere, largely due to deficiencies in law enforcement practices, low public sector wages, and the widespread prevalence of extortion and bribery, particularly within law enforcement agencies. Despite a surge in government anti-corruption efforts, fraud and bribery remain deeply embedded in Uzbekistan’s system of governance. According to a 2024 study of over 500 people in Uzbekistan, nearly half of respondents said that they choose not to report incidents of corruption due to fear for their safety, while around a quarter did not report it because they believe it would lead to no meaningful change.¹⁶⁷

Meanwhile, high-profile cases rumble on. On 28 March 2025, Belgium confiscated \$108 million linked to the infamous case of Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of the former president, who reportedly received around \$1 billion in bribes related to Uzbekistan’s telecoms sector.¹⁶⁸ Previous repatriations of assets to Uzbekistan have received criticism due to their lack of transparency, and it now seems likely that Belgium will retain these funds.

167 Kodir Kuliev & Niginakhon Saida, *Uzbekistan’s Corruption Crackdown: Progress or Perpetual Crisis?*, 13 February 2025, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/02/uzbekistans-corruption-crackdown-progress-or-perpetual-crisis/>

168 Sadokat Jalolova, *Belgium Transfers \$108 Million in Seized Assets to State Treasury Following Uzbek Corruption Probe*, 4 April 2025, *Times of Central Asia*, <https://timesca.com/belgium-transfers-108-million-in-seized-assets-to-state-treasury-following-uzbek-corruption-probe/>.



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