

# Uzbekistan

by Bruce Pannier

*Capital:* Tashkent  
*Population:* 26.0 million  
*GDP/capita:* US\$2,074  
*Ethnic Groups:* Uzbek (80.0%), Russian (5.5%),  
Tajik (5.0%), Kazakh (3.0%),  
Karakalpak (2.5%),  
Tatar (1.5%), other (2.5%)

*The economic and social data on this page were taken from the following sources:*

**GDP/capita, Population:** *Transition Report 2006: Finance in Transition* (London, UK: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2006).

**Ethnic Groups:** *CIA World Fact Book 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

## Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Electoral Process	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.50	7.00	7.00
Independent Media	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00
Governance*	6.25	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.50	7.00	7.00
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.25	6.75	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.75	6.75
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.50
Democracy Score	6.38	6.42	6.46	6.46	6.46	6.43	6.82	6.82

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

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Uzbekistan marked 15 years of independence in 2006, but in terms of basic freedoms the country is further away from democratic norms than at any period in its independent history. It continues to be one of the most authoritarian countries that emerged from the Soviet bloc. In Uzbekistan's first years of independence, the government of President Islam Karimov established its oppressive response to public dissent by violently crushing student protests in 1992 and targeting secular opposition groups. Throughout the 1990's the government sought to distance the country from Russia for economic reasons and to balance security through developing ties with Western governments. The government's Westward focus dissipated following a series of bombings from 1998–2004, but gained momentum in reaction to colored revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and neighboring Kyrgyzstan. In response, Karimov vowed he would never let a color revolution happen in Uzbekistan and began a crackdown on civil society and closure of political space. This was demonstrated most profoundly over the government's handling of events in the city of Andijan in 2005 where troops opened fire on demonstrators.

In 2006, the events of Andijan were revisited as the Uzbek government released a video showing some 10,000 armed, but not well disciplined demonstrators gathered in the city's streets. At the same time, the Uzbek government continued to press Kyrgyzstan to extradite a handful of refugees not granted asylum. The closure of Western nongovernmental organizations and media which began after Andijan continued for reasons that Uzbekistan's Ministry of Justice termed "violations of the country's laws". Such violations frequently were minor technicalities or trumped up charges, followed by processing through expedited and unfair trials. Domestic human rights activists were arrested and jailed, and Internet sites blocked in the government's quest to eradicate any opposition. Additionally, the government sought to replace its security and financial ties with the West by improving ties to Russia and Asian countries, including China, many of whom supported the government's heavy-handed actions at Andijan.

In late 2006, an EU delegation visited Uzbekistan to resume technical meetings with Uzbek officials regarding the extension of sanctions, which the EU imposed in November 2005 following the violence at Andijan. While these negotiations resulted in a one year extension of the weapons export ban, and a six month extension of the visa ban, little or no effective pressure was exerted on the Uzbek government to ease restrictions on society and implement democratic reforms from the West. The centralized political structure of the state continues to place exclusive powers in the hands of the executive. Leadership has not brought into practice policies and procedures that adhere to the stated Constitutional goal of establishing a democratic republic that respects human rights and protects civil liberties. And,

in practice, administrative functioning remains excessively politicized, controls over the media stifle freedom of expression, and rule of law continues to be subservient to the state.

**National Democratic Governance.** As it is written, Uzbekistan's 1992 Constitution preserves all basic citizen rights—speech, freedom to practice religion, public assembly, and so forth—and divides the branches of power into the executive, legislature, and the judiciary. In reality, the office of the president has all the power in the country. President Karimov exerts control over the legislative and judicial branches, and no member of the government has ever challenged his decisions. He dismisses or appoints officials as he wishes. Karimov decides all matters of state policy, both domestic and foreign. There were rarely public displays of discontent with government policy in the years following independence; and since the Andijan demonstrations and violence, there have been no significant acts of public protest against government policy. The people have no real mechanisms they can employ to force the government to be accountable. The five registered political parties in the country are all pro-presidential. There were no visible efforts by the Uzbek government during 2006 to loosen political or economic controls over the country or to stray at all from policies adopted after the Andijan events. *The Uzbek executive branch dominates all aspects of society and remains absolutely intolerant of criticism and dissent, and the people of the country have no means of affecting change. Thus the national democratic governance rating remains at 7.00.*

**Electoral Process.** No national elections were held in Uzbekistan in 2006. Despite previous elections having been assessed by Western organizations, such as the OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, as being well short of democratic standards, there was not even talk of any reform of the electoral system in 2006. There are five registered parties in Uzbekistan: the People's Democratic Party, Fidokorlar, Adolat, the Liberal Democratic Party, and Milli Tiklanish. All five support the president's policies, so even in parliamentary elections the voters are offered five versions of basically the same brand of politics. Several opposition parties or movements have tried in the last five years to register, without any success. As relations with the West deteriorated during 2006, there were questions whether organizations such as the OSCE will be invited to monitor the scheduled presidential elections in Uzbekistan in December 2007. It should be noted that those elections are to be held 11 months after President Karimov's seven-year mandate in office expires on January 22, 2007, and questions were raised before the end of 2006 as to whether Karimov's rule would be legitimate between the end of January and December 2007. There are concerns that the poll will be a farce and that President Karimov will either remain in office past his constitutional term limit or install a handpicked successor. A deteriorating relationship with the West provides grounds to question whether any of these countries or organizations will be able to monitor the electoral process by that time. *As no elections were held during 2006*

*and no improvements made to the elections framework, the electoral process rating for Uzbekistan remains unchanged at 6.75.*

**Civil Society.** The Uzbek government has always carefully watched the activities of any group, be it religious, political, or human rights oriented. Following the Andijan violence, authorities targeted all such groups, and in 2006 there were a number of detentions, trials, and imprisonments. Efforts to neutralize political opposition continued, with the Sunshine Uzbekistan coalition and its leadership being the biggest victim in 2006. However, members of older Uzbek parties and movements were also harassed, detained, and jailed, and some who fled the Andijan violence found shelter in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Many NGOs, particularly those based in the West, were closed down by court order. Some leading rights activists were either jailed or fled the country. The campaign against select Islamic groups and other religions continued. *The government moved to wipe out all vestiges of possible dissent or any group that attempted to offer a view of the Andijan violence on May 13 that differed from the official version of those events. Therefore Uzbekistan's civil society rating remains at 7.00.*

**Independent Media.** The only media coming from within Uzbekistan that could be termed independent is Internet publishing. Even this sector faces major obstacles, and the Uzbek government continues to work to block access to sites that carry information criticizing the government and its policies. There is no independent print media, radio, or television, though some Western radio stations like the BBC and Radio Liberty continue broadcasting into Uzbekistan from outside the country. The correspondents working for such organizations face a constant risk of arrest and imprisonment. Warming ties with Russia have brought slightly better access to Russian programming (radio and television), but this is largely entertainment programming, and Russian news rarely mentions events in Uzbekistan. *The campaign against independent journalists in Uzbekistan continued in 2006. Authorities succeeded in chasing most foreign journalists out of the country, and Internet sites with information critical of the government and its policies were blocked. Thus the independent media rating for Uzbekistan remains unchanged at 7.00.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** Local officials in Uzbekistan are appointed on the expectation that they will carry out the policies of President Karimov's regime. The inability of local officials to deal with unexpected situations was clearly demonstrated during the Andijan violence in 2005. Lacking instructions from Tashkent, Andijan officials were ineffective in handling the unfolding crisis in and around the city. Some paid the price on May 13, 2005, when they were taken captive by the more violent elements in the crowd, and others who survived paid the price later. Even in the last half of 2006, there were dismissals of officials from Andijan who had served during the incidents of May 2005. Local officials are appointed by Tashkent, or in some cases local councils (all loyal to the president) select officials at district and city levels. *Nothing was done to improve the quality of local officials, who*

*served as scapegoats for the Andijan violence in 2005 and continued to aid the harassment of human rights defenders and independent journalists throughout 2006. Accordingly, Uzbekistan's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.75.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** During 2006, the judiciary was obviously functioning as a tool to implement President Karimov's policies. The Ministry of Justice and the tax police worked to find violations by mostly Western-based NGOs working in Uzbekistan, while the court system, particularly Tashkent's civil court, shut down these organizations. Similarly, courts handed down jail sentences to some of the few remaining opponents of the government, mainly human rights activists. In the case of these activists, appellate courts did on occasion reduce sentences, though verdicts were never overturned. However, the appeals courts did not reverse the decisions that closed down foreign-based NGOs. *The guilty verdicts against NGOs, human rights activists, and anyone else who opposed the government or offered ideas contrary to those of the government demonstrated that a main purpose of the courts is to rid the country of groups and individuals the government sees as opponents or obstacles. Uzbekistan's rating for judicial framework and independence remains at 6.75.*

**Corruption.** The Uzbek government does not like to publicize bad news about officials, and while officials have been dismissed for incompetence, they have rarely been publicly exposed as corrupt. The country's system of government is influenced by clan ties and contains a great deal of nepotism, which makes corruption inherent. The president and his family are immune from scrutiny, but reports from opposition groups and individuals claim that they enjoy a luxurious lifestyle that most Uzbek citizens could not hope to achieve. Petty corruption is evident everywhere, from police and border guards taking bribes to local officials forcing children to work gathering the harvest and pocketing money made from their labor. *Owing to a lack of transparency and an abundance of anecdotal evidence suggesting officials are capable of doing as they please with little fear of consequences, Uzbekistan's rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.50.*

**Outlook for 2007.** As 2006 ended, Western countries and organizations could do seemingly little or were simply not willing to take the steps necessary or lacked the collective will to exert effective pressure on the Uzbek government to ease restrictions on society and implement democratic reforms. At the same time, the Karimov government has made it clear that it intends to disregard criticism from democratic governments and institutions as to how the country should be ruled.<sup>1</sup> The Uzbek government has worked continually to close down or marginalize any independent media or unregistered political opposition groups in the country and foreign NGOs that try to help them. The fact that presidential elections will be held in late December rather than in January raises questions about the legitimacy of Karimov's government. The country's foreign policy has shifted toward the East, and political allies such as Russia and China have more of an interest in seeing the situation

in Uzbekistan remain as it is than risk any social upheaval that could accompany political or social reform. Such policies practically force domestic political opponents, both secular and religious, to radicalize their own policies, since the authorities have demonstrated they will punish peaceful protest and dissent. With all of these factors combined, the outlook for Uzbekistan in 2007 is not promising.

# MAIN REPORT

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## National Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.50	7.00	7.00

Uzbekistan's Constitution enshrines basic freedoms, but the written document has never reflected the reality of Uzbek society. Chapter 1, Article 2, declares, "The state shall express the will of the people and serve their interests. State bodies and officials shall be accountable to the society and the citizens." This is not the case, as proved by the continued harassment of government opponents. In 2006, businessman Sanjar Umarov, a presidential hopeful, and Nadira Hidoyatova, of the Sunshine Uzbekistan coalition, were among the most visible examples of the fate of the political opposition. Sunshine Uzbekistan was formed in April 2005 when Uzbekistan and the government were receiving a good deal of attention from the international media for the country's role in the global war on terror. Sunshine Uzbekistan was never registered, but the group was able to post its statements on the Internet and sent information regularly to a list of e-mail subscribers.

After the Andijan events, Sunshine Uzbekistan was subjected to the same scrutiny and legal problems that NGOs and human rights activists faced. Umarov and Hidoyatova were both arrested for illegal financial dealings. On March 1, 2006, Hidoyatova, a 38-year-old mother of two, was convicted of money laundering and tax evasion, sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, and ordered to pay US\$230,000 in back taxes. In May, an appeals court changed her ruling to a seven-year suspended sentence with three years' probation and a fine of US\$100,000. On March 6, Umarov was found guilty of creating a criminal gang, committing dangerous crimes, embezzling large sums of money, tax evasion, paying bribes, and forgery. He was sentenced to 10 years and 8 months in prison and fined US\$8.3 million. His jail term was reduced in April to 7 years and 8 months.

Article 9 of the Constitution says, "Major matters of public and state life shall be submitted for a nationwide discussion and put to a direct vote of the people." But in fact, since independence in 1991, the people have never been called to help decide major matters of public and state life except for two referendums on extending President Karimov's term in office.

Article 11 states, "The principle of the separation of power between the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities shall underlie the system of state authority in the Republic of Uzbekistan." In reality, President Karimov makes all important decisions for the country. The Parliament merely formalizes the president's legislation, which has meant placing further restrictions on the right to register religious organizations, social and political groups, and media outlets. For example, a law was passed in the late 1990s requiring that all mosques have a certain

number of regular worshippers in order to be registered. The rule applies to other faiths but is understood to have been passed to provide legal precedent for closing down “underground mosques,” where, at least according to Uzbek authorities, clerics were preaching radical Islam.

The judiciary hands out verdicts in keeping with the president’s internal political policies. The court systems have jailed political opponents, like Umarov and Hidoyatova, and even handed down a death sentence to Erk leader Muhammad Solih (in absentia). The courts have also punished rights activists and others who have challenged the regime. And in 2006, the court system ordered the closure of foreign-based NGOs.

#### Electoral Process

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

The authority of the Uzbek government is neither based on universal and equal suffrage nor on the will of the people as expressed by regular, free, and fair elections conducted by secret ballot. Instead, Uzbek parliamentary and presidential elections have been characterized by violations of the country’s electoral laws and of accepted international practices. Genuine political competition does not exist, civic discourse is suppressed, and the population is disenfranchised from the country’s political decisions.

There were no national elections in Uzbekistan in 2006, but the country is scheduled to hold presidential elections in late December 2007. Past elections have proven no more than a formal exercise. In December 1991, President Karimov easily defeated opponent Muhammad Solih, who received only 12.5 percent of the ballots cast in an election many feel was heavily rigged. President Karimov extended his term in office through a national referendum in March 1995. The next presidential election was held in January 2000, with incumbent Karimov receiving some 92 percent of the vote in a poll memorable for his opponent’s announcement that he had cast his own ballot for Karimov. A referendum in January 2002 again extended Karimov’s term in office until the third Sunday in December 2007, which is 11 months after Karimov’s second term in office expires.

Parliamentary elections held in 1994, 1999, and 2004 featured exclusively candidates from pro-government parties or individuals known for their loyalty to Karimov’s regime. No true opposition party or movement has ever been registered, though the Birlík movement again tried to register with the Ministry of Justice in late November 2006. The opposition, therefore, has no representation in the Parliament, which is essentially a rubber-stamping body that has never opposed President Karimov on any issue. Amendments to the Constitution in 2002 changed the unicameral 250-seat body into a bicameral Parliament with a 100-seat Senate



(upper house) and a 120-seat Legislative Assembly (lower house). The revision in structure did not alter the Parliament's subservience to the president.

The only significant news involving registered political parties during 2006 was the announcement that the People's Democratic Party, once the Communist Party and headed by Karimov even after independence, had lost about half its membership—down from 585,200 to 286,700—when it underwent reregistration during the summer.<sup>2</sup> And on November 9, Uzbek newspapers *Khalk Suzi* and *Narodnoye Slovo* published a letter from President Karimov to the Legislative Assembly that proposed constitutional changes aimed at “drastically strengthening the role and importance of political parties in the system of the country's state and social building, which will play a decisive role in efforts to overhaul and modernize the country and build its civil society.”<sup>3</sup>

The most interesting question about electoral process in Uzbekistan is what will happen in 2007 when the country is due to hold presidential elections. President Karimov, born January 1938, has for several years been rumored to be in ill health. Constitutionally, he is limited to two terms in office, meaning he should not be able to run in the scheduled December 2007 poll. Karimov has twice extended his term in office through referendums. It is also possible that the Constitution could be altered to allow him an additional term or strike the term limit altogether, as was done in neighboring Kazakhstan. Drastic amendments to the Constitution could also void his previous two terms and give him a blank slate to run for two more terms, as was done in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Or Karimov could find a successor who could be the face of the executive branch, with Karimov actually running policy. If the last scenario unfolds, efforts to groom a popularly acceptable successor should become visible in early 2007.

#### Civil Society

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
6.50	6.50	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.50	7.00	7.00

The Uzbek government has always kept a close watch on political groups and NGOs in the country. According to Article 34 of the Constitution, “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have the right to form trade unions, political parties, and any other public associations, and to participate in mass movements.” This is not the case in reality, as only pro-presidential political parties are registered. Protests, when they occur, are quickly broken up by police and security officers, and permission is rarely granted for parties, groups, or movements except for those with a solid history of government support to meet in municipal buildings and hotels. In recent years, police also regularly broke up meetings of opposition activists that were held in private homes and cafes.

When the Uzbek government allowed the U.S.-led coalition operating in Afghanistan to use Uzbekistan's Khanabad air base in late 2001, the government somewhat relaxed restrictions on the media and civil society. The Uzbek government gladly allowed the international media into the country to report on Uzbekistan's contribution to the global war on terror—good press for a country that is most often the subject of reports on terrorist bombings and rights abuses. That small relaxation changed after the Andijan violence in May 2005, and the government has since implemented a crackdown on all perceived dissent that has seen many foreign-based, and particularly Western-based, NGOs closed down, political opponents jailed without what some consider due process of law, and human rights activists imprisoned or forced to flee the country.

The first evidence of this new policy came in July 2005 after the Uzbek government requested that the U.S.-led coalition at the Khanabad base vacate the country by year's end. The United States was one among many voices calling for an independent international investigation into the violence in Andijan and criticizing Uzbek authorities for a disproportionate use of force against mainly peaceful protesters. By year's end, the Khanabad base was vacated, and Western broadcasting agencies—such as Radio Liberty, the BBC, the NGO-affiliated Internews, Open Society Institute, and IREX, which helps train journalists—were ordered to close.

In 2006, a trend developed in the push to expel foreign-based NGOs. The Uzbek Justice Ministry would announce that a foreign-based NGO was violating the laws of Uzbekistan and would most often bring the matter to Tashkent's civil court. The U.S.-based group Freedom House was one of the first to go through this process in 2006: In January, the civil court ordered the group's work in Uzbekistan suspended for six months for providing public Internet access without a license, administrative irregularities, and other problems. By March, all possibility of appeal was exhausted when the same court ordered the Freedom House office in Uzbekistan to be closed. Between April and September 2006, the civil court in Tashkent ordered the closures of a number of U.S.-based NGOs.<sup>4</sup>

In July, the Ministry of Justice accused Human Rights Watch of releasing reports and statements that contained "tendentious and biased information about the situation in the republic." The ministry demanded proof of the claims made by Human Rights Watch. Other Western-based NGOs experienced similar difficulties. Between July and September, the Ministry of Justice announced it was investigating the activities of several European-based NGOs.<sup>5</sup>

In October, a nominally independent Uzbek analytical group called the Fund for Regional Politics posted comments on its Web site accusing the Valley of Peace NGO, part of the Danish Refugee Council, of spying in the Fergana Valley. Bektosh Berdiyev, an expert from the Fund for Regional Politics, wrote that a number of Western NGOs in the Fergana Valley were engaged in espionage. This "fund" increasingly posts material on its Web site accusing foreign-based groups of false intentions and misdeeds and provides a basis for authorities to launch an investigation into the claims.

Rights activists in Uzbekistan faced a series of problems during 2006. Aaron Rhodes, executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, gave an indication of the situation in February when he described it as “an assault against human rights activity in Russia, Belarus, and Uzbekistan that is more damaging than any since the fall of Communist regimes.”<sup>6</sup> For example, in early January Saidjahon Zaynabitdinov, director of the Andijan-based human rights group Appelyatsiya, was sentenced in a closed trial to seven years in prison. Zaynabitdinov said the violence in Andijan in May 2005 was much worse than authorities were admitting. He was arrested shortly after those events and charged with defamation and antigovernment activities. In February, Human Rights Watch reported that Zaynabitdinov was convicted of slander, undermining the constitutional order, and membership in an extremist religious group and sentenced to seven years in jail.

In mid-January, Arabboi Nodyrov, chairman of the Ezgulik rights organization in Namangan, was arrested on charges of hooliganism. Later in January, Human Rights Watch issued a press release about an attack on rights defender Rakhmatullo Alibayev. Ezgulik has continued to post material on Web sites speaking about rights abuses in Uzbekistan. Nodyrov’s was only one of many cases where Ezgulik activists were harassed during 2006.

Mutabar Tojibayeva, head of the Fergana-based rights group Burning Hearts, was found guilty of “antigovernment activity and receiving money from Western governments to disrupt public order” in early March and sentenced to eight years in prison. Tojibayeva’s group has also given a different version of the Andijan events from that of the government. She was arrested in October 2005 as she prepared to travel to Dublin to attend an international rights conference. Human Rights Watch issued a statement describing her trial as “puppet theater.”<sup>7</sup> As a last example indicating the level of pressure on rights activists, Tolib Yakubov, head of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, fled the country in July and received asylum in France. Yakubov and his group kept track of rights abuses in Uzbekistan and publicized these cases for years.

Religious groups, even those of the Muslim majority population, continued to face harassment and imprisonment. Uzbekistan undeniably has a problem with some Islamic groups that are clearly anti-government and who appeared in Uzbekistan about the time the secular opposition had been neutralized as any sort of political force. Some of the members of these anti-government Islamic groups claim it was the impossibility of challenging the Uzbek government through legal means that led them to join with banned groups which in some cases have used violence to try to affect change in Uzbekistan. Among the more radical, or more prone to the use of violence, was the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), but there were newer groups such as Jama’at (which the Uzbek government held responsible for the Bukhara and Tashkent bombings of 2004), Akromiya (allegedly responsible for the Andijan violence in May 2005), and Hizb an-Nusra, reportedly the armed wing of Hizb-ut Tahrir. The IMU did stage armed incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 and fought with security forces in

the two countries for several weeks and is on record as calling for the overthrow of the Uzbek government. The newer Jama'at and Akromiya are held responsible for violent acts in Uzbekistan but neither of the groups has ever released any public statements and only testimonies from suspects, many of whom claimed they were tortured by Uzbek security officers, link those groups to violence.

The Uzbek government identified Hizb ut-Tahrir as a threat to the state just prior to the Tashkent bombings in February 1999. Since then, hundreds if not thousands of the group's supporters have been imprisoned on charges of plotting terrorism and the overthrow of the constitutional government of Uzbekistan, despite the group's public pledge that it shuns violence to achieve its goal of creating a Central Asian caliphate. It is difficult to say how many Hizb ut-Tahrir members were arrested and jailed in 2006. Most of the information received comes through local rights organizations, such as Ezgulik, and indicates that dozens if not several hundred were tried, convicted, and imprisoned during the year.

Details about Hizb an-Nusra are sketchy, and most of the information available has come from Uzbek scholars loyal to President Karimov's regime. However, the imam of the Kara-Suu Mosque in Kyrgyzstan, Rafik Qori, said in an interview that the group does indeed exist and that some of its members had prayed in his mosque.<sup>8</sup> Rafik Qori was killed in August in a joint Uzbek-Kyrgyz security operation.

Imam Ruhiddin Fahriddinov, who fled to Kazakhstan in 1998, was extradited and tried for terrorism and plotting to overthrow the Uzbek government. The court ruled that Fahriddinov, an alleged member of the IMU, was guilty and sentenced him to 17 years in prison. Also, in a possibly significant move, the longtime chief mufti of Uzbekistan, Abdurashid Bakhromov, was replaced in early August for health reasons by Usman Alemov, officially at Bakhromov's request. It was unclear if the Alemov appointment had any political motives, but Bakhromov appeared to be in good health and was a popular spiritual leader for many Muslims in Uzbekistan. Minority religious groups also faced problems during 2006, as noted by the Norway-based group Forum 18, which monitors the ability of religious groups to function. Forum 18 reported in early February that the Protestant pastor Bakhtiyar Tuichiyev was beaten and hospitalized. Tuichiyev said authorities were not interested in opening a criminal case on the attack.<sup>9</sup> In March, Forum 18 reported that some 40 Protestants were detained for 18 days after being found at a cafe. According to Forum 18, the group was forced to say they were holding an "unauthorized religious meeting."<sup>10</sup> In September, Forum 18 reported that armed police had raided a Protestant summer camp near Termez on August 24, detaining 20 members and beating some of them. Forum 18 cited one of the Protestants as saying, "A gas mask was put on me and the air supply cut off. The police swore unrestrainedly at us and forced us to confess that we had been holding an unlawful meeting." On September 12, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry responded to that last report, claiming that stories about police abusing "members of a sect" in the Termez area were untrue but admitting that police broke up the illegal gathering of a religious sect in the area.<sup>11</sup>

Other Christian groups encountered difficulties. In March, nine members of the Pentecostal Church were interrogated and fined for holding an unauthorized religious meeting.<sup>12</sup> In August, the regional court of Tashkent ordered activists of the Evangelical Church to pay a fine of 470,000 som (US\$400) for organizing a retreat in the woods with religious studies, saying that there are designated areas for religious studies. The Ministry of Justice closed down all branches of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Fergana Valley, leaving the congregation in the Chirchik area near Tashkent as the only one still able to function.

The Jewish community in Uzbekistan, for centuries a thriving group whose numbers have dwindled drastically since the country's independence, complained about the death of community leader Hakohen Yagudayev in February. Yagudayev was the victim of a hit-and-run driving incident, which the chairman of the Uzbek government's religious affairs committee, Shoazim Minovarov, described in February as simply an accident, not a case of anti-Semitism. In November, the U.S. State Department designated Uzbekistan as a country of "particular concern" for severe violations of religious freedom.

During 2006, minority ethnic groups in Uzbekistan were discriminated against and unable to express their opinions. On March 3, the International League for Human Rights issued a report that read, "The Government of Uzbekistan continues the Soviet-era tradition of manipulating population data by inflating the numbers of some ethnic groups (Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Ukrainians), while grossly underreporting others (Tajiks and Turkmen)." The report stated that "even recognized ethnic groups have experienced massive closures of minority-language schools and university departments, independent minority media, NGOs, and cultural centers, as well as the destruction of books and other printed materials. Ethnic minorities continue to be disproportionately affected by the Aral Sea ecological catastrophe, leading to abnormal rates of cancer, infant mortality, and asthma, destroying the regional economy, and forcing the emigration of ethnic Turkmen, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks to neighboring countries."<sup>13</sup>

Though the incident of Dadakhon Hasanov involves only one person, it merits mention in the discussion of Uzbekistan's civil society. Hasanov, a well-known poet and bard in Uzbekistan, was arrested in April and charged with insulting the honor and dignity of the president and threatening Uzbekistan's constitutional system. Hasanov wrote a song after the Andijan violence in which he described President Karimov as a "dragon" who wanted to "drink the blood of his own people."<sup>14</sup> Hasanov received a three-year suspended sentence in September. No observers were allowed to attend his trial. In a statement in late October, First Deputy Justice Minister Ikhtiyar Abdullayev said Uzbekistan is striving for democratic transformation in defending human rights.<sup>15</sup> What exactly Abdullayev meant by that statement, or why he said it at all, is still unclear.

## Independent Media

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00

Chapter 15, Article 67, of Uzbekistan's Constitution states, "The mass media shall be free and act in accordance with the law. It shall bear responsibility for trustworthiness of information in a prescribed manner. Censorship is impermissible." In reality, the independent media in Uzbekistan have always faced enormous challenges, and the government has been fairly successful in eliminating, or at least limiting, opportunities for independent media outlets.

There have been periods when controls were relaxed slightly, notably right after U.S.-led coalition troops were allowed to use an air base in southern Uzbekistan for operations in Afghanistan. Certainly in the first months after troops arrived in late 2001, the Uzbek government informally encouraged Western media to come to the country. Major international television news channels had journalists in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, and the southern city of Termez on the Afghan border, covering the first days of the assault in Afghanistan. The Uzbek government was pleased to receive coverage of its contribution to the U.S.-led war on terror, and Uzbek officials were eager to tell foreign journalists about Uzbekistan's struggle with terrorism since 1999. Local media, especially independent journalists, had the opportunity to work more freely since they were often in contact or on-site with these foreign journalists. But the violence in Andijan in May 2005 evaporated the tolerance the Uzbek government had earlier exhibited for the media.

Media freedom organizations provide the best indication of the current situation in Uzbekistan. Reporters Without Borders released its press freedom rankings in October 2006, and out of 168 countries on the list—1 being the best and 168 the worst—Uzbekistan was ranked 158. The Committee to Protect Journalists rated Uzbekistan one of the 10 most censored countries in the world.<sup>16</sup> The efforts of a few to open media outlets in Uzbekistan not only have proven futile, but have often ended with these individuals facing harassment or legal problems.

All registered print, radio, and television media are owned by the state. An editor at a state newspaper once said there was no need for a censor in Uzbekistan, as media employees have a censor in their heads. Uzbek media serve the state and its policies. One striking example relates to the presence of troops from the U.S.-led coalition at the base in Khanabad. When the troops arrived, some Uzbek newspapers carried stories about residents of the Khanabad area who said the foreign troops were a boon for local businesses. After Andijan, newspapers carried stories about the terrible noise made by planes taking off and landing and the environmental degradation caused by aircraft.

Jizzak-based independent journalist Ulughbek Khaidarov is another example of the problems independent media faced in 2006. There was an attempted attack on Khaidarov in early January, and he was later assaulted in April and June. In September, he was arrested after police found US\$400 in his wallet, which they

claimed was a bribe accepted from a local factory director. Khaidarov was put in a psychiatric hospital, where his wife, Munira, was given only minutes to visit him. On September 23, Khaidarov's sister Nortoiji told Radio Liberty's Uzbek service, "Munira Mustafayevna was the only one to see him on Saturday, September 23.... She says he didn't seem to be in his right mind. His eyes were unfocused. His mouth was twisted. He's lost a great deal of weight. He didn't seem to know what he was saying. He kept repeating: 'I know nothing, I know nothing,' and 'Everything's all right, everything's all right.'"<sup>17</sup> Khaidarov was sentenced to six years in prison on October 5 after being found guilty of extortion, but he was released in early November.

Another independent journalist from the Jizzak area also faced problems. Jamshid Karimov, the nephew of President Karimov, has for several years been not only an independent journalist, but also a human rights defender. Presumably because of his family ties, he was able to work without encountering the troubles other rights defenders and independent journalists routinely experience. In September, Jamshid Karimov disappeared after visiting his mother in a hospital. The Web site [www.Fergana.ru](http://www.Fergana.ru) reported on September 26 that Jamshid Karimov was himself in a psychiatric hospital.

Despite the closing of Radio Liberty by Uzbek authorities in December 2005, the harassment of Radio Liberty correspondent Nosir Zakir continued in 2006. Six months after the Andijan violence, Zakir was jailed on charges of insulting a police officer. Human rights groups and media freedom organizations said it was more likely that Zakir's reporting on the Andijan tragedy was the reason he was jailed. In August, the Committee to Protect Journalists issued a statement urging President Karimov to stop persecuting Zakir, who by that time had stopped working for Radio Liberty.<sup>18</sup>

Uzbek authorities also blocked access to Web sites that published material critical of the Uzbek government and its policies. On January 5, Deutsche Welle reported that free Internet cafes set up by the OSCE for journalists in Samarkand had not been open for weeks. On June 27, editors of the Web site [www.dialoguz.com](http://www.dialoguz.com) announced that the site was closed, even though it had started working only on June 20. In early July, Reporters Without Borders issued a press release about the closure of [www.uzmetronom.com](http://www.uzmetronom.com), the Web site of independent journalist Sergei Ezhkov. Ezhkov, who often wrote articles criticizing the Uzbek government, had opened the Web site in April.<sup>19</sup>

In mid-October, the government approved amendments to the Law on Media Registration. Utkir Jurayev, first deputy chief of the Uzbek Press and Information Agency, said, "The document provides conditions for legal guarantees on the right of all to acquire and disseminate information, the further improvement of the order of the state registration of media organizations, guarantees on the freedom of information in line with the Uzbek law, and international legal norms in the media area." The agency reports that there are more than 900 media organizations in Uzbekistan.<sup>20</sup> Among the changes, foreign aid for Uzbek media can be made only through a special public fund. Jurayev also indicated in late November that

there would be a registration review of media outlets, and those that do not have all necessary documents would be forced to reregister. Reregistration is an old tactic used among Central Asian governments to close down media outlets that do not support government policies. There are few if any such outlets in Uzbekistan, so it is unclear what effect this will have on Uzbek media.

#### Local Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.25	6.75	6.75

Local officials are appointed and serve at the pleasure of the president. Such officials are selected based on their loyalty to the regime and perceived ability to carry out orders from the president. These officials walk a political tightrope. In cases where they have no clear orders, they must act in a way they believe will be approved by the president. Usually this means prohibiting antigovernment groups from publicly demonstrating or holding meetings of any sort. Andijan was an example where officials, having first allowed hundreds of demonstrators to hold a peaceful protest, had no idea what to do when on the morning of May 13, 2005, armed men stormed administrative buildings and took officials hostage. Tashkent, and more specifically Interior Minister Zakir Almatov, took charge of negotiations with the leaders of the outlaw group in Andijan and later ordered the assault on the city. Many local officials who survived the violence were sacked. In October 2006, Kobiljon Obidov, former governor of Andijan Province, was charged with helping to organize the May 13, 2005, violence in Andijan.

In mid-October 2006, President Karimov acknowledged that the reasons for the “disorder” in Andijan were the politics of local leaders. Perhaps to reinforce that point, Karimov dismissed Andijan governor Saydullo Begaliyev just before the statement and then sacked Shermet Normatov, governor of neighboring Fergana Province, a few days later.

#### Judicial Framework and Independence

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.75	6.75

The judicial system in Uzbekistan simply provides a facade of legality to the president’s decisions, and the president appoints all judges. Those charged with serious crimes, despite constitutional guarantees to the contrary, are treated as guilty from the moment of arrest. There have been a number of cases where defendants claim they were given only limited or no access to a lawyer. Perceived enemies of the



state, both religious and secular, are arrested and sentenced by the courts. Courts regularly admit as evidence confessions made by defendants in detention centers. Human rights organizations have chronicled numerous trials in Uzbekistan where defendants recanted their confessions in the courtroom, saying they were tortured into admitting guilt or members of their families were threatened. Uzbek courts have regularly ignored such later statements and found defendants guilty. The UN special rapporteur on torture, Manfred Nowak, said in April, “There is ample evidence that both police and other security forces have been and are continuing to systematically practice torture, in particular against dissidents or people who are opponents of the regime.”<sup>21</sup>

Members of human rights organizations, both international and local, were often able to observe high-profile trials in the late 1990s up until 2005. After the Andijan violence, many trials were closed to observers, and relatives of defendants were either not informed of trial dates or given short notice of the start of court proceedings. No one accused of terrorism, attempting to overthrow the government, slander against government officials, or, in the case of opposition figures and rights activists, tax evasion or other financial crimes has ever been acquitted of such charges. There have been no attempts to reform the judicial system in Uzbekistan, which seems to have been established for the purpose of placing enemies of the government in prison.

#### Corruption

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.50

There were no publicized campaigns against corruption in Uzbekistan in 2006, but that is not surprising. Uzbekistan is a country where clans play a large role, and therefore nepotism is inevitable. Generally speaking, nearly everyone in Uzbekistan knows their relatives in neighboring villages, towns, districts, and regions. Some families are dominant and are usually represented in the local administrations. This often gives clans a regional aspect. President Karimov, for example, is from the Samarkand clan. His benefactor, the man who helped Karimov rise in the Communist Party hierarchy in Uzbekistan’s days as a Soviet republic, is Ismail Jurabekov.

Now an elderly man, Jurabekov has faded from public view in the last few years after rumors he and Karimov were at odds. But numerous articles on Uzbek opposition websites in the late 1990s and 2000 indicate that Jurabekov was involved in activities outside the law. He managed to secure several prominent government posts in the 1990s, including first deputy prime minister for a brief time after independence. Another likely example of nepotism is the president’s daughter Golnara, who owns nightclubs in Tashkent and appears to be well-off financially.

It is impossible to say how she came by her money, since no investigation of this apparent wealth is possible, but some have raised questions about the source of her income.

These examples from the pinnacle of power in Uzbekistan are present throughout the country on a smaller scale. It may not be surprising, then, to hear that *khokims*, in this case people who are mayors or village heads, are able to exploit local labor forces with relative impunity. One of the better-publicized examples of this was Jizzak regional mayor Ubaidulla Yamonkulov. Reports in 2006 said that on one given day, Yamonkulov “physically and verbally abused 32 farmers and forced them to sign documents surrendering their land.”<sup>22</sup> In November, Transparency International released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking Uzbekistan 151 out of the 163 countries surveyed.

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2006 alone, the government posted notice on its Web site that it will ignore international arbitration rulings in investment disputes, Uzbek “experts” disputed the findings of UN program on AIDS about the number of infected in Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan’s Foreign Ministry called a U.S. State Department report about religious freedoms in Uzbekistan “interference in Uzbekistan’s internal affairs.”

<sup>2</sup> Interfax report, 23 August 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Interfax, “Uzbekistan’s President Proposes to Change the Constitution, in Order to Strengthen the Role of Political Parties in the Life of the Country” (*Prezident Uzbekistana Predlozhitl Izmenit’ Konstitutsiyii, Chtoby Usilit’ Rol’ Politicheskikh Partii V Zhizni Strany*), 9 November 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Among them were the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative, Counterpart International, CAFE (Central Asian Free Exchange), the Urban Institute, Windrock International, Crosslink Development, and Partnership in Academics and Development.

<sup>5</sup> In July, an investigation of the Germany-based NGO the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association and the Holland-based NGO AIDS Foundation East-West started; in September, the Justice Ministry warned the Belgian NGO Damien Foundation Belgium about “serious violations of Uzbekistan’s laws”; also in October, the tax police filed a case against the U.S.-based NGO Mercy Corps and the Indian-based NGO Missionaries of Charity, one of Mother Teresa’s organizations.

<sup>6</sup> Associated Press, 13 February 2006.

- 7 Human Rights Watch, “Uzbekistan: Rights Defender Sentenced in ‘Puppet Theater,’” 7 March 2006.
- 8 RFE/RL interview with Rafik Qori at his home in Kara-Suu on May 11, 2006.
- 9 Forum 18, “Uzbekistan: Assault Arranged by Authorities,” 2 February 2006.
- 10 Forum 18, “Uzbekistan: Persecution Continues Throughout Country,” 14 March 2006.
- 11 Interfax report, 12 September 2006.
- 12 Forum 18, “Uzbekistan: Persecution Continues Throughout Country,” 14 March 2006.
- 13 International League for Human Rights, “International League for Human Rights Report to United Nations, League Challenges Uzbekistan’s Official Report to UN,” 3 March 2006.
- 14 Other lyrics said, “Don’t say you haven’t seen how Andijan was drowned in blood.... The victims fell like mulberries, the children’s bloodied bodies were like tulips.”
- 15 Interfax, “Uzbekistan Strives for Democratic Transformations in the Field of Defending Human Rights—Ministry of Justice” (Uzbekistan stremitsya k demokraticeskim preobrazovaniyam v oblasti zashchiti prav cheloveka—Minyust), 20 October 2006.
- 16 Uzbekistan was also on a list of the 13 worst offenders of online censorship when Reporters Without Borders held an online protest on 7 November 2006.
- 17 Radio Liberty, interview with Uzbek Service, 26 September 2006.
- 18 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Uzbekistan: Government Continues Harassment of Independent Journalist,” 2 August 2006; the report said, “Court officers raided Zakir’s house in the eastern city of Namangan on July 12, seizing some property, including rugs and light bulbs, allegedly toward an \$800 fine that his son had failed to pay.”
- 19 Reporters Without Borders quoted Ezhkov as saying the blocking of his Web site was “the traditional reaction of the authorities to viewpoints that stray from official discourse.”
- 20 Interfax, “In Uzbekistan the System for Registering Media Is Being Completed” (V Uzbekistane sovershenstvuyetsya poryadok registratsii SMI), 16 October 2006.
- 21 Interview with Uzbek Service, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 April 2006.
- 22 Institute for War and Peace Reporting, “Uzbek Farmer Abuse Claims,” 23 September 2004, press release from the Ezgulik Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, 14 September 2004.