

UZBEKISTAN

Vibrant Information Barometer

2 0 2 2



Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL SCORE
13

Preface

To ensure reliability and comparability of VIBE scores, IREX conducts multiple data quality control checks and investigates any potential inconsistencies in scores. In most cases, score changes can be clearly tied to actual changes in a country’s media or information systems, or their operating environment, over the preceding year(s); in some cases, changes may be tied to revisions in IREX’s assessment methodology.

However, sometimes IREX encounters score changes that cannot be mapped to real change in a given country or to revised methodologies. Despite comprehensive efforts to ensure a clear VIBE questionnaire and scoring methodology, in some cases, panelists’ scores are not fully calibrated to the VIBE methodology or do not align with other peer countries’ scoring.

Based on internal analysis and input from the VIBE Uzbekistan chapter moderator/author, IREX believes Uzbekistan’s preliminary scores in VIBE 2022 were inflated due to misunderstanding among the Uzbekistan panel on the VIBE scoring scale, complicated by a perception of an open society in the continued aftermath of the repressive Karimov regime.

As such, for the purposes of the 2022 VIBE publication IREX is modifying Uzbekistan’s VIBE scores downward by 8 points for an overall score of 13 to better align with the intent of the VIBE scoring scale, the evidence provided in the narrative chapter, some small improvements over time in Uzbekistan, and the scores of other countries with similar information systems and environments (see chart below;

adjusted indicator level scores can be found in the VIBE Explorer dashboard.) The scores are modified uniformly at the indicator average level to avoid relitigating or casting judgment on panelist scores on a case-by-case basis, but rather to focus on aligning top level scores.

Uzbekistan VIBE Scores (Original and Modified)

	Overall	Principle 1	Principle 2	Principle 3	Principle 4
Original	21	21	23	16	22
Modified by IREX	13	13	15	9	14

Due to Uzbekistan’s operating environment, IREX does not publicly release names of panelists in Uzbekistan; however, the original, anonymized indicator-level panel scores are available upon request (info.vibe@irex.org).

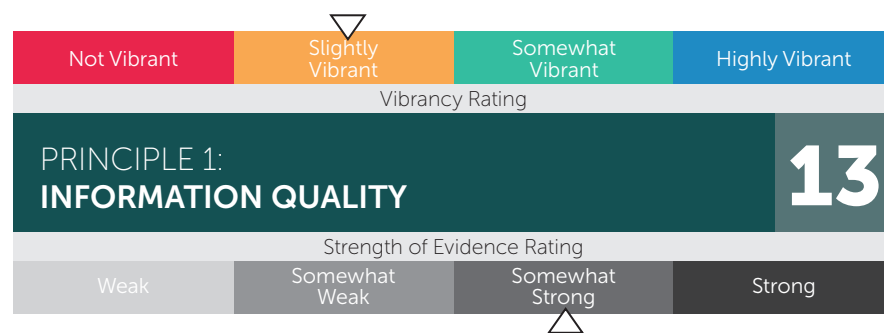
The year of 2021 began with high hopes among many in Uzbekistan that the country's wide-ranging reforms would continue, in a break from its authoritarian post-Soviet history. In July, for example, Komil Allamjonov, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's former press secretary and now chairman of a national media development fund, reiterated the president's assurances that the press in Uzbekistan is free and "there is no going back." Additionally, improvements to Uzbekistan's telecommunications infrastructure sent prices down and speeds up for internet users, whose numbers swelled in turn. The improved technology fostered content production and information flow, bringing the number of media outlets to 1,916 (736 state and 1,180 independent) and enabling 655 of these media organizations to have an online presence. However, over the course of the year, the government once again tightened up media and religious freedoms.

President Mirziyoyev won a second term in a flawed election that was rescheduled from late December to October 24. Arrests and threats to bloggers and reporters increased in the run-up to presidential elections. Dozens of posts from anonymous accounts threatening RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reporters bombarded their Telegram channel on October 16. Months ahead of the vote, and shortly after an embarrassing reporting on a luxury resort allegedly built for Mirziyoyev, slandering or insulting the president online became a criminal offense. Other newly criminalized behaviors include disrespecting the state, calling for unsanctioned meetings, threatening the public order, and humiliating top officials and law enforcement officers in the media. The law requires website owners and social media users to remove comments on their pages deemed to violate any of its prohibitions. In addition, a July decree authorized the State Security Service to block the dissemination of content that would dishonor or sully the image and dignity of officials under its protection.

The Interior Ministry detained alleged followers of illegal religious organizations on charges of propagating extremist ideas and disseminating extremist literature. Even though a law signed in July

lifted a ban on wearing religious attire in public, social media reports persisted of men with beards and women in hijabs being singled out for harassment or persecution. Two popular news platforms, KUN.UZ and AZON.UZ, were suspended and fined for posting stories on religious topics without approval from the Committee for Religious Affairs, which, among other things, monitors writings on faith-related matters. Additionally, several media professionals and bloggers received prison sentences because of their work, and at least one foreign reporter was expelled from the country for questioning the government's progress on promised democratic reforms.

Uzbekistan scored 21 in the 2021 VIBE study, for its somewhat vibrant media scene. Panelists gave relatively high scores to Principle 1 (information quality) and Principle 2 (multiple information sources)--21 and 23, respectively--crediting the state for affordable technology and high-speed internet, as well as professional and nonprofessional content producers for timely, and at times fearless, reporting. Panelists gave Principle 4 (transformative action) a score of 22 and noted cases when content producers, including GAZETA.UZ, KUN.UZ and individual bloggers, held authorities accountable. Principle 3 (information consumption and engagement) received the lowest overall score (16), noting that content producers lack the knowledge and privacy protection tools to secure their outlets and the public lacks the media literacy to safely navigate media platforms. For fear of prosecution, people in Uzbekistan avoid liking or leaving comments on posts critical of the government.



Panelists scored indicators examining the level of quality information, the level of mal-information and hate speech, and inclusive and diverse content higher. They credited both professional and non-professional content producers for voicing the concerns of underprivileged people in remote communities. Thanks to timely coverage of community issues by bloggers and reporters, considerable numbers of government officials quit their jobs. “The media are still awake and trying to hold officials accountable,” one panelist responded to another’s comment that edutainment is eclipsing coverage of political and social issues. “Journalists feel pressured and practice self-censorship. Therefore, they do not try to seek evidence and tell the truth,” the panelist added. Panelists agreed that most media are under-resourced and understaffed. Yet independent media have it better than state-owned media, reflected in faster internet, reporters with defined beats, and higher advertising revenues.

Indicator 1: There is quality information on a variety of topics available.

The national media offer information on diverse topics, though the quality varies from outlet to outlet, with the diverse content coming from independent media and nonprofessional content producers. Bloggers tend to quickly take the lead on a variety of issues and spread the word via social media users. They work in various formats, including photo, video, and audio.

Students can receive formal media education at journalism departments of seven universities, including the National University of Uzbekistan, Karakalpak State University, and the Uzbekistan State World Languages University. There is also the Journalism and Mass Communications University of Uzbekistan, and last year marked the launch of journalism departments in Bukhara State University, Samarkand State University, and the Samarkand Foreign Languages University. These universities struggle with limited access to computers and high-speed internet, and a dearth of Uzbek-language textbooks and professional faculty. Many university courses fail to teach coherent, research-based, ethical reporting skills or soft skills to enable graduates to compete in the local media market. In recent years, the Journalism and Mass Communications University of Uzbekistan has received donor-funded media equipment and started exchange programs with 14 foreign universities and media agencies. “There has been a vacuum between an academic education and newsrooms,” one panelist said, “New reporters who join unscrupulous newsrooms get used to their environment and news reporting habits or switch to PR or advertising.”

Working media professionals depend heavily on donor support to get professional training and improve their qualifications. Tashkent-based media NGOs—including the In-service Training Center for Journalists, Media Data Lab, Modern Journalism Development Center (MJDC), and New Media Education Center—get foreign funding and conduct short-term trainings.

Lacking formal journalism education, bloggers sometimes do not take time to verify facts, provide context and evidence, and interview alternative sources; they leave the research and in-depth analysis to reporters. “The majority of nonprofessional content producers are financially motivated,” said a panelist who is himself a blogger, “Consumers take the content of influential bloggers for granted and trust it.” Another panelist, who owns a media nonprofit, called for a code of ethics and said the public does not demand balanced and independent media. “Media do not want to come out of their comfort zone, go against [editorial norms], and create problems for themselves,” she argued. Although media content is diverse and covers opposition political parties and developments, as well as environmental and social issues, reporting

usually appeals to the emotions. “Fact-based reporting is still on the horizon,” a panelist said.

Indicator 2: The norm for information is that content is based on facts.

In 2021, professional and nonprofessional content producers enjoyed technological advancements but limited media freedom, often letting fake news and misinformation filter into the mainstream media. In an effort to gain likes and subscribers, amateur bloggers disseminated misinformation about the illnesses and deaths of some entertainment media celebrities.

Although the government had criminalized the dissemination of false information about the coronavirus in March 2020, panelists complained that both professional and nonprofessional content producers continued spreading misinformation on vaccine safety before and after the country rolled out mass vaccinations last April. “Because the authorities launched public-awareness campaigns late, amateur content producers filled the information vacuum with fake news,” a panelist said, “They should have delivered COVID-related quality content to consumers.” The Ministry of Health responded late to many rumors on severe side effects and vaccine-related deaths, and it formed a working group to study each case and debunk the disinformation. “The public sought vaccine information on social networks where people shared personal stories of vaccine side effects,” one panelist said. In August, the Ministry of Health, Yuksalish, a government-supported NGO, WHO, and UNICEF joined efforts and facilitated nation-wide public dialogues to build local communities’ trust in the COVID vaccination. The panelists noted that media practitioners contributed to countering disinformation and reinforcing vaccination messages through televised dialogues with public health experts.

In 2021, Modern Journalism Development Center (MJDC) conducted content analysis of the COVID-related coverage in national media

and noted the shift from information on coronavirus treatment and management to official posts on COVID vaccines, less information from local subject matter experts and increased inquiry by online consumers for information on types and availability of vaccines, PCR and imaging tests (to detect potential lung damage) at reasonable prices. Preceding to the MJDC study, in 2020, Internews studied the impact of COVID-19 on media consumption of labor migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in four Central Asian countries as part of its project, “Strengthening Resilience to Radicalisation and Disinformation in Central Asia through Independent Media.” Published in March 2021, the survey findings revealed the increase in media and information consumption by ethnic minorities and labor migrants who most acutely felt the economic impact of COVID-19. Media reported on domestic violence and gender inequality in vulnerable communities and provided a wide coverage on labor migrants. The survey found that vulnerable groups had limited information access that was associated with unstable internet connection, government censorship, and blocked websites. Media and information consumers were divided into two camps: One which has trust in traditional media, viewing social media as a source of fake news, and the other which has higher trust in social media, expressing distrust of traditional media.

Panelists noted another surge in misinformation during a November sand-and-dust storm that caused poor visibility and hundreds of hospitalizations in several districts of Uzbekistan. The state’s delay in reacting to the natural disaster allowed a rumor to spread that the country’s sweeping construction projects had exacerbated the situation. “Timely delivery of quality content could have prevented misinformation,” a panelist concluded. Poor quality of care, health inequity, and embedded corruption exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact impeded the planned reforms in the shattered health sector. In the second half of 2021, the state started a helpline through social networks to get feedback from the public and medical professionals to resume and scale up the reform process.

“New reporters who join unscrupulous newsrooms get used to their environment and news reporting habits or switch to PR or advertising,” said one panelist.

Panelists said content producers lack the knowledge, skills, and resources to verify information and manage disinformation. In collaboration with UNESCO, the National Association of Electronic Mass Media and the University of Journalism and Mass Communication created a video and a handbook on fake news and disinformation for the public and journalism students in 2020. With funding from USAID, Internews has conducted the second annual 2021 MediaCAMP Eduthon on media and digital literacy for Central Asian media professionals and educators and complemented with online trainings on misinformation management. “These trainings aren’t sustainable unless newsrooms develop and apply fact-checking mechanisms, such as policies and codes of ethics, and train new reporters to verify facts and avoid producing misinformation,” one panelist said, noting that money is usually a barrier to these efforts.

“Media do not want to come out of their comfort zone, go against [editorial norms], and create problems for themselves,” a panelist argued.

Newsrooms rely on internal practices, such as having several staffers read over news articles before publishing or posting them online. Media outlets and digital platforms receive phone calls from external censors and correct or remove content that contradicts state narratives. A December 2020 decree gave the Information and Mass Communications Agency the authority to order that online pornography and content inciting extremism, war, a violent government overthrow, terrorism, or other types of threats be taken down, on penalty of legal action.

Indicator 3: The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm.

Media outlets and authorities do not engage in creating and disseminating mal-information and hate speech. However, nonprofessional content producers may use different types and degrees of hate speech targeting migrants inside the country, victims of gender-based violence and trafficking in persons, and individuals detained on charges of religious extremism.

A panelist noted that hate speech also surfaces in online discussions

of pan-Turkism and Iranism, religious topics between moderate and conservative believers, and disputes around ethnic conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Armenians or Uzbeks and Tajiks. Panelists said that when covering these issues and in response to incidents, content producers may unknowingly use hate speech and stereotypes toward target groups, including retired individuals, people with disabilities, internal migrants, and residents of other provinces. With USAID funding, Internews trained content producers to identify and avoid citing hate

speech in reporting as well as practice peacebuilding journalism and ethics when covering diverse topics in December 2020. The same year, the MJDC issued a manual on the gender dimensions of hate speech in the media with support from UNESCO. In 2021, MJDC conducted its second annual study on hate speech as part of the EU-funded BRYCA project, which promotes

media literacy to counter mal-information and hate speech among Central Asian youth. The study found that hate speech mainly revolved around ‘nationalism’ and ‘sexism’ among selected 12 categories.

Hate speech calling for discrimination against victims of gender-based violence can often be found in comments to media publications and posts in social networks. In 2021, social media users heavily discussed, and some blamed, a third-year, Tashkent university student who accused a deputy dean of trying to rape her and of hurting her by pushing out of the university’s second-floor window in October. Two months later, in December, NEMOLCHI.UZ (Do Not Be Silent), an independent digital project, called for a legal action against those in charge of social media dissemination of the student’s intimate video that had leaked from her cell phone seized during the investigation. Launched in 2017 by journalist and gender activist Irina Matvienko, NEMOLCHI.UZ publishes stories of survivors of gender-based violence and domestic abuse on its Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram channels. The contributors are mainly urban residents with proficient computer and Russian language skills, yet the project’s reach to rural women is challenged with unstable internet connection and a language barrier. The same year, NEMOLCHI.

UZ and Equality Now, a U.S.-based NGO, published a report highlighting the gaps in sexual violence laws and the lack of access to justice for survivors in Uzbekistan.

In 2021, out of 39,343 cases filed to local law enforcement offices by women who experienced some type of gender-based violence, 87 percent took place in families. Forty-eight percent of these cases were documented as psycho-emotional violence and 35 percent as physical violence. Physical and sexual violence is correlated with female suicide and has been widely reported in the country where both men and women recognize it as a social norm and a private matter. In June 2021, pro-government imam and blogger Abror Abduazimov, who is known by the pseudonym Abror Muhtor Ali to his half-million-plus followers on Instagram and Telegram, followed up earlier statements in support of wife-beating with staged raids on Tashkent bookstores to denounce famous books and paintings as counter to Islam. “Illustrations of naked people in paintings by Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt, which some call art, destroy the nation’s traditional values,” he declared in a video statement that went viral. Afterward, a street-art portrait of the Mona Lisa on a Tashkent building was defaced. Noting Muhtor Ali’s huge popularity, panelists said his antics and rhetoric pose risks for the young people who believe in him.

Indicator 4: The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.

As of October 2021, according to Uzbekistan’s State Statistics Committee, the population of the country exceeds 35 million people, and half of them (54%) have had internet access. Professional content producers are diverse, and women are strongly represented throughout the media sector, although there is no gender-specific official data on media practitioners. The gender balance of nonprofessional content producers varies based on their defined beats. For instance, religious bloggers are mostly men, whereas environmental reporters and bloggers are primarily represented by women.

Uzbekistan’s media landscape is homogeneous, with most of its content in Uzbek, along with a few state and independent media outlets that

produce content in Russian. Ethnic groups engage in open conversations about social and political issues in Uzbek, Russian, and their local languages on social networks and messaging services.

In 2021, a few nationalist media and public personalities ginned up language-related controversies, demanding public officials respond to questions in Uzbek. Several times, journalists for nationwide media criticized officials for making remarks in Russian during press conferences and senators for posting in both Uzbek and Russian on their social media pages. One journalist caused a ruckus during a Hydro Meteorological Service Center press conference, demanding that an ethnic-Russian senator who is a climate-change expert present the 2030 national strategy on climate change in Uzbek.

In January 2021, the director of the State Language Development Department Abdugaffor Kirgizboyev, criticized Uzbek officials who still use Russian in business correspondence, revealing the government’s failure to raise the status of the country’s official language in the 30 years since independence. A new law, which took effect in 2021, mandates compulsory testing of Uzbek language proficiency of all candidates for government positions. Additionally, in February 2021 the state approved a plan to transition the Uzbek language from Cyrillic to a Latin-based alphabet by January 2023. Switching content in national and electronic mass media and websites from Cyrillic to the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet could leave behind the older population and other subscribers of national news platforms who cannot read Latin-based letters.

National media outlets represent voices and experiences of all minority and marginalized groups, which increasingly use social networks and Telegram messenger for information consumption and communication in local languages. Although media coverage of viewpoints of minority ethnic groups is scarce, these groups feel safe practicing their cultures and languages. For example, many Afghan minorities live next door to Uzbek families; their children attend the same schools and extensively learn Russian and English in the Surkhandarya region on the border with Afghanistan. These minority groups consume local news and use social networks for information consumption and communication. There have been no reports of inter-ethnic clashes between the Uzbeks in

Surkhandarya region and Afghan immigrants, whose numbers have risen since the Taliban takeover of the Afghan government in August 2021.

Uzbekistan supported the repatriation and reintegration of more than 530 Uzbek nationals, including 381 children, who returned from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq during 2019-2021. These processes entailed coordination and collaboration efforts among state and nongovernment institutions, including justice and security sectors, health, education and employment services, civil society actors and receiving communities. The repatriation of the Uzbeks from war zones received polarized responses on social media with some users criticizing the government for ignoring needs of local citizens and providing housing, banking, and other legal and social services to the repatriates. Largely positive public perceptions amplified by the media contributed to the smooth rehabilitation and resocialization of the returnees. Media outlets regularly shared experiences of the repatriates by protecting their identities and news on social support services provided to them by the state and communities.

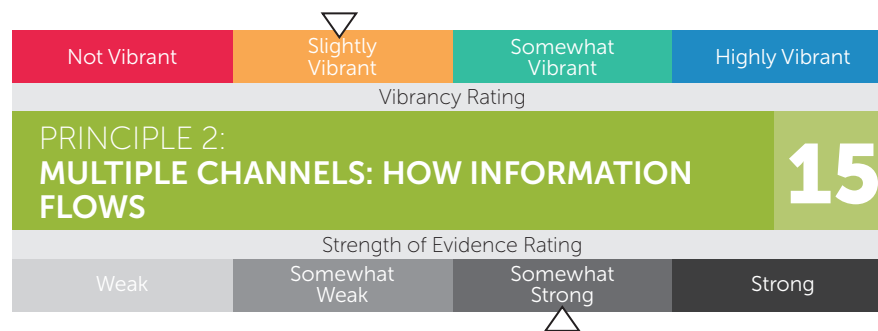
Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced.

Independent media have broadband internet and adequate human and financial resources to cover a variety of beats. They tend to operate online, with news stories reposted on social media to attract more internet and mobile users. For instance, KUN.UZ, one of the privately owned popular news platforms, shares news via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, and Telegram. The outlet’s Telegram channel has 1.14 million followers, the most of any media outlet in the country, and comes in third after second-ranked FUTBOL.TV with 1.2 million soccer fans, and first place Netflix with 1.6 million subscribers.

Large state-owned print media publicize government decrees and information about national policies, and they count regional and district governments, libraries, archives, and other state entities among their subscribers. “Until recently, 98% of newspapers in Uzbekistan lived only on compulsory subscriptions, because they were so boring that people couldn’t buy them on their own,” remarked Komil Allamjonov at an event in Geneva in April 2022.

The government regulates state media and provides direct subsidies and advertising revenues. State media outlets have launched their own social media pages to compete with independent media for advertising revenues and subscribers. District-level, state-owned print media tend to have limited internet access, one editor, and a few reporters whose salaries depend on local government funding and subscriptions. Underpaid and unmotivated media professionals in state and private newsrooms often work for various outlets, and similar content with little analysis gets published across several news outlets. The overall body of content lacks quality, diversity, context, and multimedia formatting.

Since being adopted on 25 December 1998, the advertising law has been amended more than 15 times. A new bill is expected to be signed into a law in 2022. The national media development fund has lobbied to extend a newly proposed advertising length in 30-minute TV and radio programs from three to five minutes, and to reconsider the ban on advertising hygiene products, medical services, and infant nutrition products given social needs of consumers.



People in Uzbekistan have the legal right to produce and disseminate information, but officials sought to narrow that right last year. A failed government attempt to block popular social networks resulted in a surge in the use of proxies and virtual private networks.

Authorities also plan to launch a messaging platform similar to MULOQOT.UZ, which they launched in 2011 but killed in June 2018 for technical reasons. Storing user data with the state-owned Uztelecom, the national messenger would make it easier for officials to get access to

user data and ultimately control social media content. In July, the Senate set up a committee made up of senators, lawyers, media professionals, and subject-matter experts to hear, among other reports, updates on the public's free access to information on social networks and efforts to speed up the country's internet.

Panelists scored indicators examining access to information, channels for government information, and diverse channels higher than the indicator looking at the independence of information channels. Panelists also argued that private media enjoy some independence and freedom. However, new restrictive laws and the imprisonment of bloggers and journalists for content in privately owned media in 2021 show how vulnerable independent media professionals remain to government persecution.

Indicator 6: People have rights to create, share, and consume information.

Uzbekistan's constitution guarantees people's right to free speech and "the right to seek, obtain, and disseminate any information except that which is directed against the existing constitutional system and some other instances specified by law."

The public, including journalists and civil society activists, exercises these rights to varying extents. Most citizens lack knowledge of the law and avoid questioning or criticizing the authorities for fear of ending up like bloggers or others who have been imprisoned after sharing anti-government, or even just iconoclastic, views.

At a February 2021 meeting with media professionals, Mirziyoyev reaffirmed his support and solidarity with journalists: "You are my comrades-in-arms; I count on your help," the president declared, "I see you as a force that fairly reports on our achievements and shortcomings to our people. ... The president is behind you." However, a month later, he signed a law providing for prison sentences for online content that insults the president or disrespects society and the state. The legislation, which also bans public calls for mass riots and violence, came a few days after an attack on Miraziz Bazarov, who blogs about LGBT rights.

Bazarov's calls for LGBT gatherings in front of a Tashkent mosque angered social media users and triggered riots in March.

In January 2022, Bazarov was sentenced to three years of restricted freedom, akin to probation, for slander. The same law was used against Otabek Sattoriy, a blogger and citizen journalist known for fearless reporting under constant pressure from authorities in the southeastern Surkhandarya region. In May 2021, Sattoriy was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison for extortion and slander. His trial and an ensuing community outcry and petition in his support received widespread media coverage. In the Kashkadarya region, also in the southeast, three journalists from EFFECT.UZ were sentenced to up to three years in prison for libel, insult, and disruption of court proceedings. These cases of imprisoned journalists raise questions about Mirziyoyev's commitment to freedom of the press and expression in Uzbekistan.

In 2021, journalists faced pressure and legal action for covering religious issues, which the government tries to control in an effort to stem what it deems creeping Islamic radicalism. In June, for example, the widely read KUN.UZ news website suspended posting for a day to protest a \$1,200 fine for a reporter who had written stories found to violate the law on religious extremism. The religious affairs committee found that photos published in one of these stories of female police officers in New Zealand wearing hijabs could model religious attire for local policewomen and, therefore, should not be disseminated to avoid provoking public discourse. In another case, four editors at AZON.UZ, a news platform on religious topics, were fined on the same charges and temporarily ceased posting news stories. To avoid such legal penalties, many media self-censor and stick to topics discussed by authorities and state news media.

Throughout 2021, the media reposted the Interior Ministry's official reports on detention of alleged members of illegal religious organizations propagating extremism. A new law raises hurdles for small religious organizations to do the required registration and imposes restrictions on education, literature, and sharing of religious beliefs. The government also expanded a list of terrorist organizations posted on social media from 40 in 2019 to 166 in December 2021. These groups cannot operate in Uzbekistan, and people cannot engage with or

disseminate their information and print materials. Eight of them have presences on Telegram and Facebook, and three are on Instagram.

There were social media reports of men forcibly shaved at police stations and girls and women in hijabs pressured by law enforcement officers, community leaders and educators. Stories of the state's anti-beard and hijab raids appeared on Islamic social networks, predominantly on Telegram channels, yet the campaigns received little coverage in popular news media. In May, KUN.UZ posted a news report of an audio clip apparently instructing police officers at a station in the eastern Namangan region to detain men with beards and take photos of them before and after being shaved. The story included a disavowal from the Interior Ministry, which said it investigated who gave the instruction and took measures accordingly. Private television channels, such as ZOR TV and MY5, regularly blurred the faces of men with beards.

The state went after Fozilkhodja Arifkhodjayev, a 41-year-old religious blogger who openly criticized the government and religious leaders. Arifkhodjayev was initially detained in June for quarreling with a government-appointed imam and was denied needed medical attention while in custody. While he was detained, authorities said they found fundamentalist content on his phone, for which he was sentenced to more than seven years in prison on charges of creating, storing, or distributing via the media materials containing a threat to public safety.

While some panelists criticized the government's strict measures to control religious expression, others pointed to the high risks of violent extremism implicit in the many social media reports of people being arrested for allegedly belonging to illegal religious organizations. Panelists voiced their worry that prosecuting bloggers who criticize state policies on religion could fuel violent extremism recruiting, especially given that more than half of Central Asian social media content on violent extremism is in Uzbek. Existing Uzbek-language social media channels of extremist organizations tend to appeal to a broader audience with messages that do more than seek recruits or call for violence.

Panelists voiced their worry that prosecuting bloggers who criticize state policies on religion could fuel violent extremism recruiting.

Indicator 7: People have adequate access to channels of information.

While television remains the dominant medium in Uzbekistan, most people follow news on Telegram on their mobile phones. Panelists said residents of remote areas do not have access to alternative content often delivered by independent media. "Residents can't access the technology and high-speed internet connections due to the cost, poor infrastructure, and frequent power outages," a panelist observed, "They mostly engage with nonprofessional blogger content." Another panelist said reliable information "often comes in foreign languages, including Russian and English," leaving it out of reach to those who do not speak those languages.

Officials are working to make the internet more accessible. In 2021, Uztelecom cut the cost of internet services to providers by 42.9 percent and connected 67 percent of the country's villages, towns, and cities to high-speed internet. Expanded communication lines that

connected major districts in 12 regions and the Republic of Karakalpakstan to broadband internet boosted the number of internet users from 16.38 million in 2020 to more than 27 million. Additionally, the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications reported that 95 percent

of the population, or 25 million people, use mobile internet. As part of an effort launched in November 2021 to further develop Uzbekistan's telecommunications infrastructure, the government committed to increase international data transmission capacity by 3.5 times and provide 80 percent of households with broadband wired internet access by 2023, via three routes: Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China, and Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Turkey.

In July, the government of the country blocked Twitter, TikTok, WeChat, Skype, and VK messaging and social media platforms for not complying with a new requirement to collect and store users' personal data in Uzbekistan, instead of abroad, and to register data in the state registry of personal databases. The legislation went into effect in April, and

parliament passed tougher penalties for violations in October. Then in November, the State Inspectorate for Control over the Sphere of IT and Communications (Uzkomnazorat) blocked Telegram, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Russia's Odnoklassniki on the same charges. After only three hours, however, the president lifted that blackout. Telegram, Odnoklassniki, and Facebook dominate other social networks, with 18 million, 16.7 million, and 4.7 million subscribers, respectively.

Following that incident, the minister in charge of ICT resigned and was replaced by a former education minister. Mirziyoyev fired Uzkomnazorat's director for "erroneous and uncoordinated actions." The ban on social networks caused a surge in the use of VPNs, just as it had at times in 2018, 2019, and 2020 when Facebook and YouTube were inaccessible in Uzbekistan. In a 2019 interview on the Alter Ego blog, Komil Allamjonov, director of the national media development fund, warned the use of VPNs would open access to uncensored content and undermine the security of IT systems.

The cancellation of the TikTok Fest, a concert featuring Russian and Ukrainian bloggers scheduled for December 25 in Tashkent, disappointed the same young fans that it was meant to protect from the nefarious influence of an emerging youth culture. The Culture Ministry did not take responsibility for the event, which had been organized by a private company, but supported blocking the app.

The Milliy Tiklanish (National Revival) Democratic Party urged the government to block TikTok after two 16-year-old female students used offensive language on the app while in class. Access to TikTok without a VPN was restored in December following talks between Allamjonov and TikTok Vice President Theo Bertram. A month after the app was unblocked, another uproar ensued over video posted on it of a teenager kicking the face of a middle-aged man in Samarkand. The Adolat Party found support for its call for a ban on the app in Uzbekistan. The youth's parents were fined, while the blogger, who had kicked the man, and the person who recorded the incident were detained by the police.

Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information.

Uzbekistan's constitution guarantees citizens' right to information outlined in the country's Right to Information Law, the Law on Appeals of Individuals and Legal Entities, and the Law on Public Control. These laws conform to international standards and norms. However, low levels of legal and digital literacy among citizens prevents them from exercising their right to information and fully engaging in information exchange with local and national authorities.

Government services, such as the Single Interactive Portal of Government Services (<https://my.gov.uz/>), the Open Data Portal (<https://data.gov.uz/en>), onsite People's Receptions with regional and district offices, and the President's Virtual Public Reception (<https://pm.gov.uz/uz>) are founded to create direct dialogues with citizens and review and responds to their individual needs and appeals in a timely and comprehensive manner. These mechanisms allow people to monitor the processing of citizens' appeals by state-run organizations and hold government institutions and officials accountable to the public.

Citizens know about these mechanisms. In the past five years, both the President's Virtual Reception and the People's Reception offices have received more than 5.78 million appeals and satisfied 3,288,000 of them. Citizens' complaints and appeals address issues on the transfer of pensions and other social benefits to bank debit cards, housing, and citizenship among many others. However, e-government services require basic computer literacy. If citizens are computer illiterate, they can file appeals in municipal, district, or regional offices of People's Reception offices and/or receive needs-based information in the closest Public Services Center (<https://davxizmat.uz/uz/map>). Founded on the "one-stop-shop" principle in 2017, there are 205 public service centers and 115 remote branches that have raised the public service delivery to a relatively new level and met the population needs for information and services. Although the number of public services has increased in 2021, issues related to improving electronic digital signatures, upgrading mobile applications of interactive state services, and introducing discounts for persons with disabilities are to be addressed.

Lately, it has become a common practice for state agencies to engage with consumers in information sharing and exchange through press conferences to comment on incidents and provide updates on activities and funding. Government spokespeople reliably tell the truth to the press and public, which generally perceive their information as trustworthy with educated citizens going further and seeking alternative sources of information.

Although television is a primary source of government information, both television and radio deliver heavy government content that is less critical of policies and authorities. The National TV and Radio Company of Uzbekistan (NTRC) consists of 14 national and 12 regional channels and stations. Last year, the state marked the 65th anniversary of national television and NTRC signed a contract with Russia's SPB TV to air 12 NTRC channels in Russia and the CIS enabling over 2 million Uzbekistanis in Russia and elsewhere to watch Uzbek-language news, sports, and entertainment channels.

Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow.

In Uzbekistan, legal entities and individuals can freely register a media outlet by submitting both a media charter and a founding agreement per Uzbekistan Mass Media Law. Even though Chapter 3 of the draft law regulates relations and formally establishes a separation between an editorial office and a founder, it risks imposing unnecessary administrative obligations on media outlets and interfering with their editorial freedom to organize news production and reporting. Reporters are financially motivated or encouraged to engage in revenue generating activities by seeking advertisers and private sponsors.

In 2021, OSCE assessed the compliance of the draft Law on Mass Media in Uzbekistan with international human rights standards on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. On the positive side, the legal analysis revealed that the draft Law prohibits censorship, bans media monopolization, and guarantees some media freedom. Among many recommendations, OSCE suggests that the draft law clearly defines the

“Residents can't access the technology and high-speed internet connections due to the cost, poor infrastructure, and frequent power outages,” a panelist observed.

status and roles of authorities regarding media regulation and upholding editorial freedom and independence in Articles 17 to 19. The state should avoid limiting media content on the grounds of broad terms such as 'extremism' and 'fundamentalism.' OSCE also recommends registering print and online media on a voluntary basis and minimizing state interference with the internal organization of media business operations.

A media outlet's charter specifies its location, name, type, language, production frequency, and funding sources, and any changes to these provisions requires re-registration with a consent of the founder. The Open Data Portal contains a list of the banned extremist organizations, but it has no registrar of all mass media with specifications.

Uzbekistan tries to prevent media monopolies with laws limiting foreign or domestic ownership. The media monopolization law limits foreign ownership of any given outlet to 30 percent; additionally, it specifies that domestic legal entities or private individuals can hold or control, directly or indirectly, up to 25 percent of the mass media market. The law does not deal with mono- or multimedia concentrations or vertical monopolies that could include production, distribution, advertising, or if an individual or a group can control production and distribution of information and related activities, such as advertising or telecommunications. A story by a news organization in Kazakhstan, reposted by KUN.UZ in September, reported that nine media outlets in Uzbekistan are held by a handful of conglomerates controlled by government officials. Specifically, the story alleged that Komil Allamjonov owns the Milliy TV channel and that Suren Sapov, the son-in-law of a high-ranking senator, manages GAZETA.UZ. New legislation is in the pipeline to ban public officials from owning media.

Last year, International Media Service Uzbekistan (IMS), an independent regional media seller, joined EGTA, a Brussels-based non-profit association that represents the interests of television and radio sales houses. The membership of Uzbekistan in EGTA enables the sale of

advertising of state and private television and radio channels in Europe and beyond. IMS Marketing Director Elena Pivovarova noted that revenue in the digital media market was projected to exceed 600 billion UZS (US\$53.5 million) in 2021.

The demand for television advertising is due to television having the largest audience in Uzbekistan, low advertising costs, and a high return on investment. Pivovarova forecasted the growth in the digital media market in coming years in light of the increased numbers of new, foreign advertisers. State television channels, such as Uzbekistan 24 and Toshkent, provide state narratives of ongoing developments. Private TV channels, including ZOR TV, Sevimli, Milliy, and Mening Yurtim, are popular for entertainment programming, movies, and soap operas. Russian speaking residents prefer to watch Russian television channels via paid cables or antenna.

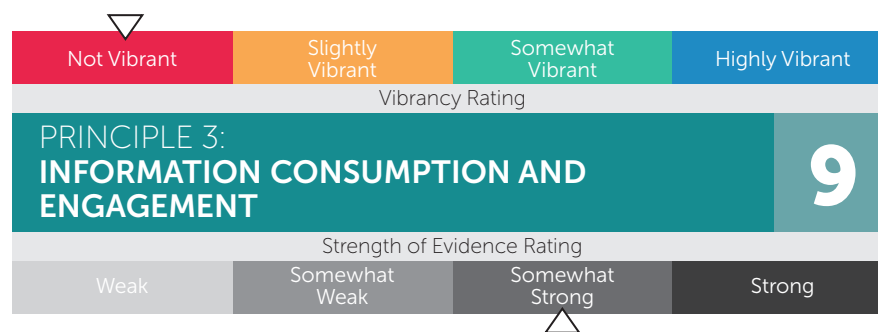
Since the broadcasting spectrum is a limited public resource, the government must ensure that the process for spectrum allocation is fair and transparent. However, Uzbekistan’s licensing procedures do not outline the rules and conditions for license tenders, allowing the state to set conditions favorable to certain bidders. The telecommunications law contains vague language about procedures of allocating licenses, which are not fair or transparent and lack oversight by the justice system and civil society. This makes it vulnerable to powerful individuals and corrupt transactions. Governmental regulatory bodies that oversee frequency allocations, licenses, and telecommunications services are not independent or free from the state interference and control.

Indicator 10: Information channels are independent.

The press lacks freedom and independence from the state in Uzbekistan where media organizations avoid criticizing their owners, which are either government owned or private companies run by the wealthy and powerful, including government officials. Advertising revenues and ownership investments into media outlets influence newsroom stance as content producers sell advertising and are directly involved in securing government subsidies, blurring the lines between media outlets’ business operations and editorial independence. In one

panelist’s radio station, he complained that the process for awarding frequencies is opaque. The panelist added that he had never seen the State Commission on Radio Frequency announce a competition for frequencies, as required by law. The commission includes government officials and a representative from the nonprofit National Electronic Media Association. Mostly state-run and private media outlets favorable to the government can receive government subsidies or advertising contracts that make them reinforce state narratives.

Uzbekistan does not have public service media, and the government has not made any movement towards transitioning state media to a public service media model.



Panelists scored indicators examining engagement with information and engagement with audiences’ needs higher for news sources operating in two local languages. Content is predominantly in Uzbek, but other ethnic groups speak Russian and get information from popular Russian-language platforms GAZETA.UZ and PODROBNO.UZ, which also have pages in Uzbek.

The indicator on media literacy received the lowest score in this principle due to its low levels among information producers and consumers. Although all content producers are expected to be media literate, reporters in remote locations can rarely take time off from work for trainings offered mostly by international agencies such as UNESCO, Internews, and others. In 2021, trainings covered topics including misinformation management, media and legal literacy, and multimedia content development, most of which were held in Russian, one panelist

noted. “Reporters from the regions may not fully understand Russian and be aware of these trainings, which are often attended by the same group of journalists,” the panelist said.

Indicator 11: People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.

Major national media have the money and IT specialists to help secure their news platforms, but smaller news organizations may be more vulnerable to external threats and attacks. A panelist who edits a news website said he had to be trained in privacy protection and security tools. Panelists agreed that most citizens and content producers are not aware of personal data and privacy protection issues and may not feel safe navigating internet and mobile resources for fear of government censorship or hackers.

In April and May, KUN.UZ reported on repeated attempts by unknown individuals to access Telegram accounts of the company’s employees, and in two cases these attempts were successful. The company could not assess the extent to which personal and corporate information was stolen because of these attacks. KUN.

UZ interviewed IT experts who said that the hackers may have used an unknown program or changed IP addresses. In January 2021, the Surkhandarya regional administration reported on the hacked websites of the region, cities, and districts.

“Hire professionals for the ICT department, not those who graduated from the university through corruption,” a hacked message read in Uzbek (reported by KUN.UZ), “If you don’t pay enough attention to professionals and spare your precious time for them, your undisclosed decisions and orders will be disseminated all over the internet.”

There were social media reports of consumers sharing personal data on trading platforms and falling victim to scammers. “There are no training courses on privacy and security on the internet for content producers and the public,” one panelist said. For example, there are few news articles on internet fraud and theft due to a scarcity of expert

views on these topics. New legislation on personal data protection warned content producers to monitor content on social networks and messengers and obligated them to remove content flagged by the Information and Mass Communications Agency.

Indicator 12: People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate.

Government leadership has committed to promoting media literacy at all levels, especially in school systems. However, the country is still in early stages of step-by-step integration of media and information literacy in school curricula. In 2021, DW Akademie supported MJDC to conduct series of trainings in media literacy for educators at pilot schools and sensitization seminars for officials from the Committee for Science, Education, Culture and Sports and the Information Technologies Development Committee. With the support of international donor organizations, MDJC launched an effort to promote media literacy among content producers in 2015; however, over time it recognized the need to introduce the concept to the public, state, and civil society to enable them to respond and prevent the spread of disinformation and fake news.

Civil society groups counted hundreds of reports of people lacking basic digital and media literacy who were defrauded, sucked into money laundering or human trafficking, or radicalized via social media

last year. One panelist observed, “The public engages with information on informal and doubtful news platforms and social networks, such as TROLL.UZ, that describes itself as providing ‘bitter truth mixed with laughter,’ has 94,800 subscribers on Telegram, and reposts content on three other social networks.”

There are too few studies of public opinion and media analyses to assess how media literate Uzbekistan’s content producers and consumers are, but one panelist said, “The Uzbek public is vulnerable to fake news because they lack knowledge, skills, and tools to become more media literate.” He lamented the popularity of “informal and dubious” social

“There are no training courses on privacy and security on the internet for content producers and the public,” said a panelist.

networks with tens of thousands of subscribers and nearly ubiquitous posts. In February, USAID supported a five-day seminar on media and digital literacy for academics, bloggers, and trainers from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Webster University in Tashkent held a second round of English-language classes for media professionals to help them more easily access content in English-language news sources.

Indicator 13: People engage productively with the information that is available to them.

The public, including journalists and civil society activists, exercise their rights to information and use freedom of speech to a lesser or fuller extent depending on information sought. The public perceives national decrees and policies as trustworthy and does not question them, which may infringe their constitutional rights.

Citizens avoid questioning authorities out of fear, having seen the imprisonment of individuals and bloggers who have voiced views alternative/opposing to conventional thoughts, social norms, and state narratives. People engage with information presented by national television channels and turn to alternative sources of information on social media, which increasingly serve as platforms for public debates on recent legislation, social injustices, and infringements of various rights. Public debates in town halls take place in the capital, academic settings, and call-in shows, which are attended by the same group of people. Platforms for public debate typically attract the educated who have mobile internet, moderate levels of media and digital literacy, and who are bilingual in Russian and Uzbek.

Typically absent from the public square are elderly, disabled, or poor people, who get their information from national television. Although misinformation is not commonplace, people unknowingly spread it on their social networks. Additionally, non-professional content producers and information consumers unintentionally reinforce misinformation in their social media networks. Hate speech usually involves religious

content, such as producers and consumers with radical views who get embroiled in heated and corrosive debates.

Increasingly, local, and national authorities try to address issues raised by bloggers and social media in a somewhat fair and balanced way. In Uzbekistan, Facebook groups serve as convenient platforms for public discussions on political and social developments. For instance, government efforts to repatriate women and children from Afghanistan and Syria caused heated public discussions.

Indicator 14: Media and information producers engage with their audience's needs.

Media outlets provide tools and opportunities for their audiences to submit feedback through letters to the editor or online comment sections. With fewer tools and resources for information and media consumer analysis, content producers make efforts to build trust with audiences through community events, reporting methods, and publishing corrections. Content producers, community members, and state and civil society actors collaborated and networked together

for productive information sharing and coordination of fundraising and volunteer activities to provide disadvantaged families with clothing and food products in the early stages of the COVID epidemic.

Although media outlets acknowledge the importance of studying their audiences'

content preferences, they do not have sufficient resources to fund experts who can conduct annual media monitoring and evaluation surveys. The Information and Mass Communications Agency and NGO Public Opinion Research Center occasionally conduct research on media and communications. An analysis last year by the Public Opinion Research Center team found that most coverage of youth issues in national media focused on tolerance, civic education, patriotism, healthy living, and youth interest in education and science. The liberties and rights of young people, youth and religion, and youth and the internet received less attention. Popular news networks acknowledge that they

“The Uzbek public is vulnerable to fake news because they lack knowledge, skills, and tools to become more media literate,” said a panelist.

educate consumers and try to meet the demand for quality news and information with in-depth, analytical content, including interviews with subject-matter experts and Uzbek researchers living and studying abroad.

One panelist said some bloggers and journalists serve the interests of those in power or use sensational and inaccurate content to attract an audience.

Indicator 15: Community media provide information relevant for community engagement.

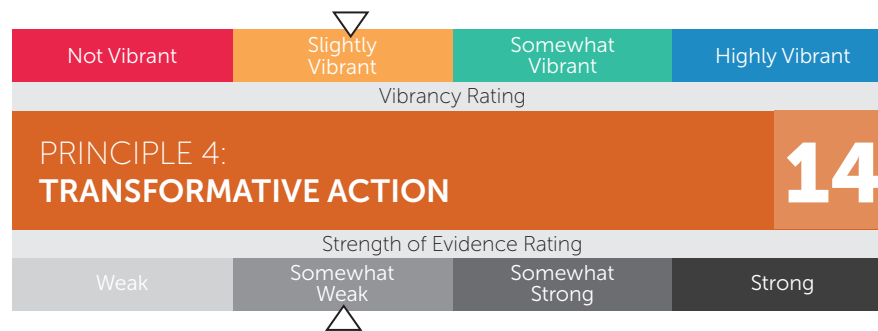
This indicator received a lower score and was supported by weaker evidence because of the polarized scores from the panelists. Most panelists argued that Uzbekistan has no community media, with media consolidated in the hands of the government or a few rich and powerful owners.

Bloggers and social media fill the role that would traditionally belong to community media. A few panelists, for example, pointed to closed online communities formed according to geography. Notably, residents of Tashkent have a Telegram channel with 618,798 followers; similarly, residents of Samarkand and other cities and regions also have their own channels and groups.

Bloggers have become increasingly vocal in criticizing policies that limit free speech and religious expression, and in voicing concerns of marginalized and oppressed groups and individuals. “The public doesn’t have a tribune; they have mobile phones, which they use to create, disseminate, and consume content,” one panelist said, “Social networks serve as a source of information for state and private media outlets, raising community issues, and people’s problems.”

In 2021, people posted video and audio evidence of violations of citizens’ rights or of local officials’ neglect of community issues, including physical and sexual violence against women and minors, and confiscation of traders’ goods and people’s properties. Because many people do not know the law or fear retribution, they surreptitiously record such

violations and turn to bloggers and news organizations to post on social media instead of filing formal complaints. And they sometimes get results. For example, two posts about poor classroom conditions last year led to a gym renovation and a shipment of new desks.



Panelists said quality information and the exchange of information helped inform the actions of individuals, civil society organizations, and the government. The indicator examining good governance and democratic rights received the lowest score in this principle because there is scant evidence that existing laws ensure citizens’ democratic rights.

Indicator 16: Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.

The public consumes nonpartisan news content on independent media platforms, and information producers put out content of all political stripes. Few people use the comments sections of online media to give feedback or engage in dialogues, preferring forums such as social media to engage in open and constructive discussions informed by quality news and information. The social media channels of extremist organizations tend to shift public narratives and appeal to a broader audience with messages that do more than seek recruits or call for violence. While these narratives portray Afghanistan as the country winning the war over the Western world, they use stories of persecution of religious citizens in Uzbekistan as evidence for the need to establish an Islamic society.

Indicator 17: Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.

People's views on political or social issues are shaped primarily by quality information they consume on national television rather than misinformation. Citizens use quality information on e-government services and Telegram-based official government channels to engage with officials on social issues and individual needs. However, when it comes to election outcomes in the 2021 presidential elections, OSCE observed no meaningful engagement between candidates and a genuinely pluralistic environment. In the run-up to the election, journalists and bloggers experienced prosecution from authorities and pressure from new media restrictions. The election outcomes for many in Uzbekistan were obvious with no real alternatives to choose among the five candidates.

The COVID crisis has stagnated reforms in the health system, and people consumed fact-based health information and public health safety recommendations on television and the Ministry of Health's official Telegram messaging channel. The year began with students returning to schools and labor migrants fleeing to Russia and other countries in search of jobs after a long COVID quarantine, waiting period.

People act in a cautious way when it comes to their health needs. Lately, people tend to seek health information and recommendation from fellow citizens on social networks about choosing a doctor or a clinic, and when looking for lab tests at reasonable prices. Healthcare has improved in recent years, yet people still experience health inequity and poor medical services that the state has committed to transform in coming years.

“ Lately, people tend to seek health information and recommendations from fellow citizens on social networks about choosing a doctor or a clinic, and when looking for lab tests at reasonable prices.

Indicator 18: Civil society uses quality information to improve their communities.

Ongoing reforms focus mainly on the economy leaving behind political and civil reforms and hindering civil society development in Uzbekistan. The legal and political position of civil society organizations in Uzbekistan continues to limit the effectiveness and impact of socially important projects.

Fundamental legal frameworks adopted by May 2018 and March 2021 presidential decrees have slightly improved the legal environment for civil society. Yet, they have also introduced unnecessary regulation and bureaucratic control measures that, taken as a whole, impede civil society development. For instance, the March 2021 decree outlines civil society development strategies for 2021—2025 that seek to strengthen the organizational capacity of CSOs and increase state subsidies among other efforts. These strategies aim to tighten state control over CSOs through the increase in government subsidies for social projects, the involvement civil society in state programs, and their membership in the National Association of NGOs, which allows its members to receive state subsidies.

Since civil society organizations are closely involved in pressing issues—ranging from protecting the children left behind by labor migrants to helping victims of domestic violence to countering violent extremism to reintegrating labor migrants and other expatriates back into society—they have access to reliable information, and they act on it within the legal and political confines outlined above. Prior to project implementation, civil society must navigate government sensitivities and policies and need approval from local officials for their work, so they tread lightly or even adopt the government's stance on sensitive topics. These groups must be flexible when government agencies ask for last-minute changes to programs and agendas, and their reliance on government or foreign funding typically gives them less control over

which projects they can pursue. CSOs self-censor on sensitive topics, including religious extremism, media, corruption, and human rights, for fear of legal repercussions that could hinder their work and tend to follow government narratives in their programming.

Civil society organizations rely on trusted news to explain their mission and engage with quality information on CSO policies, regulations, and grants on *A Database of NGOs in Uzbekistan*, a Telegram group that has over 1000 subscribers, and *Democracy in Uzbekistan*, a monthly newsletter published on the website of Yuksalish, a pro-government NGO with support from the U.S. Department of State and a Slovenia-based nonprofit, Regional Dialogue. International donor agencies use Telegram to disseminate information on their project updates and grant announcements.

Nongovernmental organizations share quality information with the public and do not disseminate misinformation. They reference well-informed research studies funded by either or both the government and international development agencies when they design their programs and/or call for policy changes. In 2021, several nonprofit organizations managed hotlines and continued implementing domestic violence, migrant assistance, forced labor, countering trafficking in persons, and violent extremism projects. For increased impact and reporting on their projects, civil society groups collaborated with local media outlets, which covered state policies regarding labor migration and challenges faced by thousands of migrants primarily in Kazakhstan and Russia, along with news stories about reintegrated families who had returned from Afghanistan and Syria.

Lack of funding as well as lack of effective communication, policy advocacy and monitoring skills lead to low engagement of CSO with their audiences and low involvement in systematically analyzing and addressing the issues that concern the public.

CSOs self-censor on sensitive topics, including religious extremism, media, corruption, and human rights, for fear of legal repercussions that could hinder their work and tend to follow government narratives in their programming.

Indicator 19: Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.

The Uzbek government considers reliable information and substantive public feedback in its political and social reforms and public policy decisions.

For example, in late 2021, the government launched Vision Zero, an effort to make the country's roads safer, based on accident statistics but also taking into account social media reports on issues of road safety, road construction, and phony drivers' licenses. The government fired top public safety officials in some regions and set up a pilot program in the densely populated Ferghana region, which leads the country in traffic accidents. In the future, officials plan to go nationwide with the program, which will include improved road safety/driving regulations, better driver education and introduce road safety instruction in schools, among other things.

In another example, journalists and bloggers amplified the voices of ordinary people concerned about wholesale tree felling by municipalities to clear space for construction work. In response, the president extended a moratorium on tree cutting and raised the penalty for violations, established environmental police units, and promised cash rewards for whistleblowers.

Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic rights.

Panelists scored this indicator the lowest in this principle, because they do not believe that quality information in Uzbekistan contributes to free and fair elections and societal reforms, including uncovering corruption and violations of human and civil rights. Social media recorded several instances of violations of human rights, as well as religious and media freedoms, that were either committed or ignored by the authorities.

This chapter represents desk research, interviews, and the results from questionnaires filled out by people familiar with the state of media and information in the country. Participants will remain anonymous because of Uzbekistan's evolving environment.

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This study is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government, or IREX.