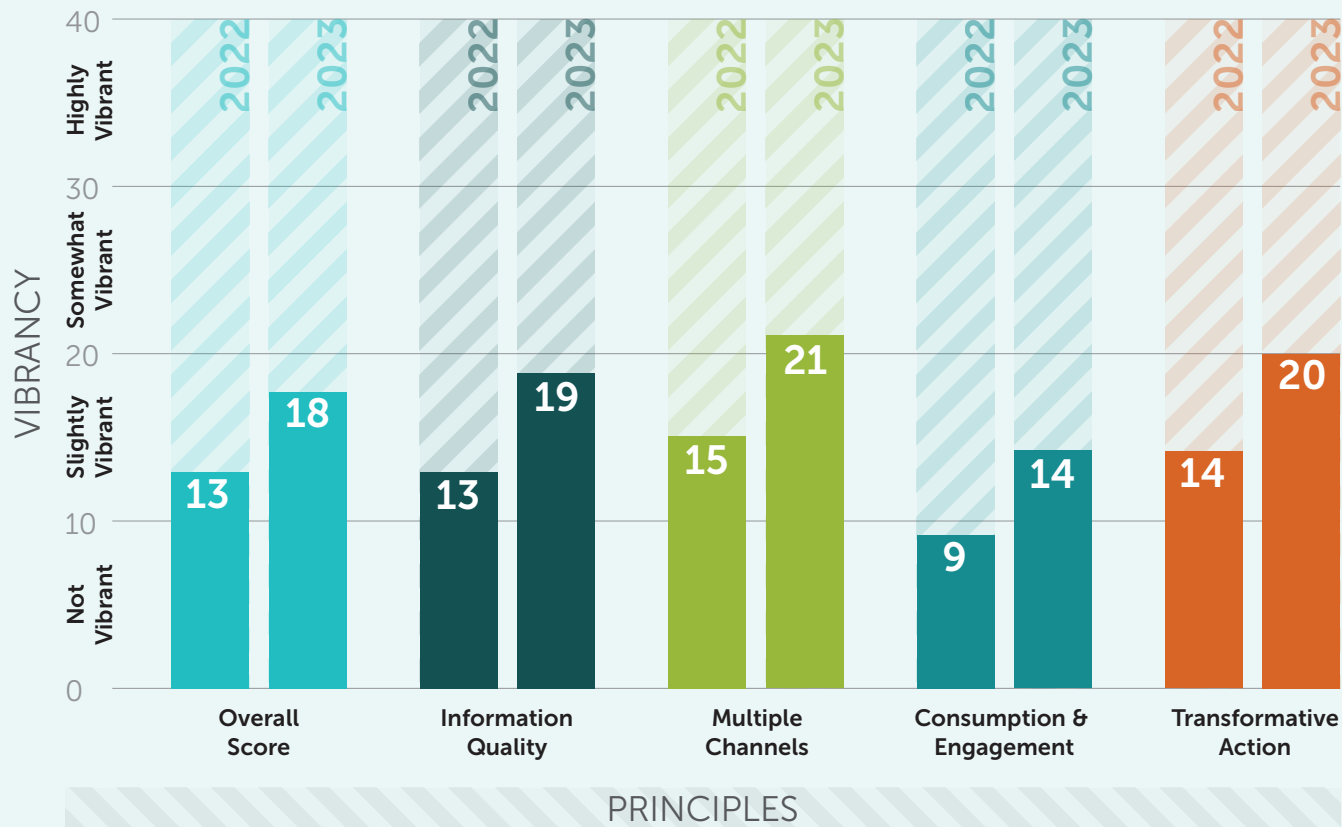


UZBEKISTAN

Vibrant Information Barometer

2 0 2 3





Highly Vibrant (31-40): Quality information is widely available in this country. People have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information; they recognize and reject misinformation.

Somewhat Vibrant (21-30): Quality information is available in this country and most of it is editorially independent, based on facts, and not intended to harm. Most people have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information, although some do not. Most people recognize and reject misinformation, although some do not.

Slightly Vibrant (11-20): Quality information is available on a few topics or geographies in this country, but not all. While some information is editorially independent, there is still a significant amount of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in circulation, and it does influence public discourse. Most people do not recognize or reject misinformation.

Not Vibrant (0-10): Quality information is extremely limited in this country. The vast majority of it is not editorially independent, not based on facts, or it is intended to harm. People do not have the rights, means, or capacity to access a wide range of information; they do not recognize or reject misinformation; and they cannot or do not make choices on what types of information they want to engage with.

Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL SCORE

18

In 2022, Uzbekistan strained to maintain a steady supply of electricity and gas, fretted over a nearby war, and encountered public protests over autonomy in Karakalpakstan. These events set off waves of disinformation and fake news, and a flurry of reactions in social media. As content producers struggled to keep up with international, political, and social developments--and hold officials accountable for their actions--they faced new waves of repression and intimidation.

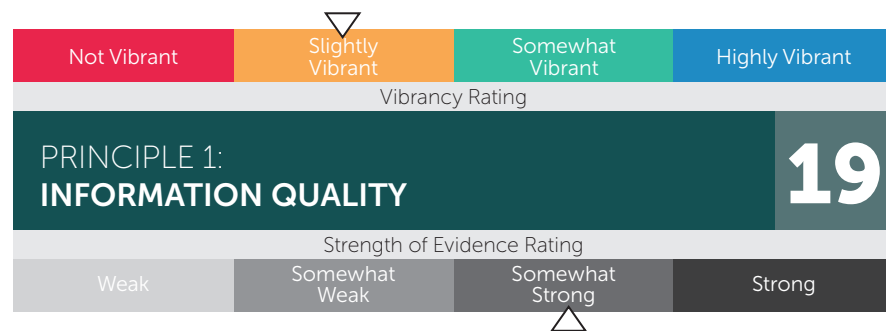
News coverage of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sowed information chaos and polarized views among Uzbekistanis. The global geopolitical and economic crisis hit the country’s economy, which gradually recovered to prewar levels due in part to remittances from Russia. The influx of Russian businesspeople, IT specialists, and companies boosted the real estate, advertising, and IT industries as well as banking, hospitality, and catering. The war tested Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, which sought to maintain cooperation with Russia, China, and the United States.

In June, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed several amendments to the constitution, including the annulment of the current presidential term and the extension of presidential terms from five to seven years. In an interview with Kun.uz, the Senate’s first deputy chairman, Sodiq Safojev, confirmed speculation on social media that the changes would allow Mirziyoyev to run in presidential elections again, annulling existing term limits.

The government also adopted several laws and regulations that tightened control over the media: A law to ensure cybersecurity for state bodies can also be used to restrict freedom of expression online; a law on advertising can

impede media advertising revenues; a new regulation controls the implementation of foreign-funded projects by media NGOs; and a new regulation bans posting photos and videos of traffic police online, thwarting attempts to stem corruption or abuse of power. In addition, the draft Information Code, if passed, restricts access to information during trials; makes content producers liable for distributing information critical of the government, along with the author of information; and proposes that journalists receive accreditation from government departments.

Despite these worrying developments, Uzbekistan’s scores improved from the VIBE 2022 study. The Principle 1 (Information Quality) score increased, powered by an expanded telecommunications infrastructure and more diverse content, spurred by domestic and international events. Principle 2’s (Multiple Channels) score was the highest of this year’s Uzbekistan study: Lower costs and faster internet speeds broadly increased access to information, including for marginalized groups, to diverse channels of information in various languages. Moreover, due to new regulations, state entities share information with the public through regular press conferences. Principle 3 (Information Consumption and Engagement) had the lowest score in this year’s Uzbekistan chapter, reflecting weak media literacy and digital security skills, as well as restrictions on the free flow of information. Principle 4 (Transformative Action) scores also saw some improvement in this year’s study due to instances of people using quality information to hold officials accountable and of the government engaging with the media and civil society to address issues.



Over the year, the Uzbekistan’s media produced diverse and varied content, and more people sought out news of the conflicts in Karakalpakstan and Ukraine. Content producers tried to meet consumers’ preferences for video reports and engaged with new audiences, who sought alternative news on social media platforms. Panelists assessed information as fact-based, free of harm, diverse, and inclusive, and scored the related indicators more highly. However, Indicator 5, which focuses on adequate resources, received the lowest score for this principle, recognizing that content production remains underdeveloped and under resourced.

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

Technologically and creatively, Uzbekistan’s media landscape is transforming. In 2022, the telecommunications infrastructure expanded, and domestic and international events spurred a diversity of content. People switched from reading long texts to consuming audio and video in a variety of formats, including podcasts, short videos, interviews, and documentaries. Content producers created engaging headlines and visuals and streamed video on social networks to draw in new audiences.

However, fundamental impediments to the flow of reliable information remain, including widespread corruption in education, a challenging media environment, and low wages. Media ethics are underdeveloped, and journalists have little grasp of conflicts of interest or robust

news analysis and investigative reporting. The Journalism and Mass Communication University of Uzbekistan and journalism departments at different universities fail to provide rigorous media education. Internships, which was refused government registration, offers selected media training limited in numbers and reach. Panelists said graduating students are poorly prepared, and many prefer better-paid jobs in advertising and public relations or to run their own blogs on social networks. Panelists said bloggers have more freedom to produce content, are not pressured by deadlines, and earn more than reporters. Sloppy and unethical practices may go unnoticed unless they discredit officials who take journalists and bloggers to court for libel.

Online media responded to the public’s growing appetite for news on the protests in Kazakhstan and Karakalpakstan and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Older and rural residents got their domestic and international news from official media, while their urban counterparts watched Russian television channels via paid providers. Panelists said most people received one-sided information due to their limited foreign-language proficiency and a lack of alternative sources of information, media literacy, and critical-thinking skills.

While official media remained silent about the political and military conflicts, bloggers set the tone for Uzbekistan’s information space, with posts critical of Russian news propaganda and the government’s inability to counter disinformation.

In March, television host Robert Frantsev of Russia 24 criticized Uzbekistani bloggers and the outlets Kun.uz and Gazeta.uz for reposting anti-Russia news from foreign media. He also accused Uzbekistani media of inciting ethnic hatred in multiethnic Central Asia. Later that month, Ukraine’s ambassador to Uzbekistan, Mykola Doroshenko, asked Uzbekistani authorities to block Russian TV broadcasts, noting that “the information war waged by the Russian media is an integral part of the military campaign and is aimed at misinforming the global community.” Additionally, during a September online news conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Central Asian media—including Kun.uz, Gazeta.uz, Repost.uz and Yep.uz--the minister asked journalists to “be critical of the information received from Russian sources. Today,

Russia uses propaganda to cover up its ‘operations’ in order to absolve itself of responsibility for crimes.”

Authorities refused but expanded a list of foreign TV channels in December. Political analyst Kamoliddin Rabbimov said these channels counterbalanced Russian propaganda but criticized official media’s lack of coverage and analysis of the war and government policy limiting the variety of opinions. Daniel Rosenblum, the former U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan, also noted the “relatively little coverage of the actual atrocities that are being committed in Ukraine,” remarking in an interview with the Alter Ego project that “the loudness of the voices we are hearing from the Russian media drowns out other voices.”

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

Misinformation is minimal in state media, which gets checked by newsrooms and government censors, panelists said, but the official practice of providing limited information in order to thwart follow-up questions can give rise to misinterpretation or misinformation. Government statements, often terse, get reposted on online outlets.

Independent media try to provide varied, factual content to cement their reputations as trusted news sources and increase audience reach and engagement. Media outlets also verify their content lest they face lawsuits or lose their licenses. At times, professional content producers take shortcuts under pressure of deadlines or competition and unintentionally spread misinformation. In a wave of fake news in 2022, content producers struggled to verify information due to the absence of fact-checking tools. The only fact-checking resource, AntiFake.uz on Telegram, did few fact-checks.

The panelists noted an increase in social media misinformation about possible gas and electricity shortages and street rallies in the aftermath of the power cuts. Citizens themselves spread misinformation about

the possible causes of power cuts and fretted about the duration due to limited and delayed government information on the first day. Eventually, the Energy Ministry provided regular updates at press conferences. Media outlets and digital platforms lack adequate mechanisms or processes in place for responding to false information by moderating content in a way that reduces misinformation.

Journalists might report in good faith, but facts are frequently contested in Uzbekistan.

When foreign media reported that Russia was recruiting Uzbek labor migrants to fight in Ukraine, authorities denied it and reminded Uzbeks abroad that it is illegal to join foreign militaries. In an October YouTube interview, Ukrainian journalist and blogger Dmitry Gordon said Iranian drones, which were attacking Ukraine, were being assembled in Uzbekistan. After the Foreign Minister denied the allegations and protested to Ukrainian officials, the journalist said he had meant to say Tajikistan. A month later, Uzbekistan’s Foreign Ministry summoned Ukraine’s ambassador over an alleged false claim by a Ukrainian defense official in an interview to *La Repubblica*. The claim stated that Uzbekistan was helping Russia to circumvent sanctions by selling spare parts needed for missile production.

Mal-information and hate speech triggered by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine divided Uzbek society, creating conflict within families, workplaces, and communities.

During the Karakalpakstan events, images of injured people and what appeared to be blood in the streets circulated on social media. The government called them fake, while international news outlets shared them with the disclaimer that they could not be verified. One panelist said video

presented on social media as being from the Karakalpakstan events was actually from January protests in Kazakhstan.

In April, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), a terrorist group in Afghanistan, fired 10 rockets at an Uzbekistani military base. Although the ISKP claimed responsibility, officials in Uzbekistan called reports of the attack “false” and urged citizens to trust only official news sources. Later, the Taliban confirmed the incident to Gazeta.uz. Another five

rockets fired from Afghanistan into Uzbekistan in July did not explode but damaged four houses and a stadium in the border city of Termez. Later that month, the Defense Ministry denied reports of a third missile attack from Afghanistan as misinformation.

With no formal education in journalism and ethics, nonprofessional content producers disseminate false information to boost their audiences and revenue. Bloggers targeted banks, publishing information on the banks' violations of clients' rights, hoping to trigger a panic and an exodus of customers.

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

Social media users in Uzbekistan increasingly resort to hate speech when posting or commenting on bloggers' posts and media reports on sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence, religious beliefs, and domestic and international conflicts.

The government monitors official and independent online media for mal-information, hate speech, and criticism of top leadership and state reforms. State and media reports of imprisonment of individuals for reading and sharing "materials threatening public safety and public order" online sparked angry comments among followers of Islam. Accounts of government raids, forced beard shavings, and hateful posts on women's dress flooded social media.

Professional content producers did not disseminate mal-information or hate speech for fear of legal and reputational consequences, but social media users responded with hate speech and stereotypes to video reports on minority groups. The media coverage of an October incident involving two women who shared a kiss during a soda marketing campaign in Tashkent provoked public discussion on social media.

On occasion, hate speech turned to intolerance and harassment, which moved from offline to online contexts and vice versa. In November, a man dressed as a woman was filmed being chased and beaten by a group of people. Bloggers and social media users called for violence and

even made death threats against the LGBTQ+ community. According to a recent UN report, hate speech by religious and political figures and bloggers targeting activists, women, and members of religious and LGBTQI+ groups significantly increased in Uzbekistan from 2018 to 2022.

Hate speech targeted victims and survivors of gender-based violence in response to media accounts of three women who tried to sell their children and a woman who attempted to drown herself and her three children in a river last November, losing two children as a result. A few users on social media questioned the underlying causes while most blamed the women.

There are legal consequences for bloggers, social media commenters, or social media sites unless they regulate posts and comments by cleaning up hateful remarks. Otherwise, they receive warnings from the state media regulator. The protests in Karakalpakstan elicited hate speech on social media, with some ethnic Uzbeks calling the Karakalpaks unappreciative of what Uzbekistan has done for them. To remain in compliance with laws that criminalize libel and slander and hold owners of blogs and media sites accountable for the accuracy of their content, media outlets switched off their comments sections to preclude hate speech or deleted critical comments on their channels.

Mal-information and hate speech triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine divided Uzbek society, creating conflict within families, workplaces, and communities. Supporters and critics of the invasion attacked each other on social media. Many worried that the war would depress the remittances from family members working in Russia or Ukraine or that those relatives would be recruited to fight. Ferghana News noted bloggers' increased influence on their audiences and critical views of the Russian invasion. Security services asked bloggers and journalists to provide neutral coverage of the conflict or to report on less sensitive angles, such as the evacuation of Uzbek citizens and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Religious bloggers take an "anti-West" position and accused the United States, NATO, and its allies of bombing civilians in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries.

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

Uzbekistan is home to 36 million people of 136 ethnicities and 16 religious denominations. Uzbeks make up 85 percent of the population with Tajiks, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks the three next-largest ethnic groups. State-owned television remains the main source of information, and the National TV and Radio Company (NTRC), which owns 26 television and 16 radio channels, airs information in Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, and English. In March, the NTRC and Piramida channel from Kyrgyzstan agreed to begin exchanging content. In December, the number of foreign TV channels available through paid digital providers expanded from 50 to 192 and includes major foreign networks. In June 2021, the Yangi Uzbekiston news site began publishing content in Tajik in addition to Uzbek, Russian, English, and Kazakh.

With nearly 20 million users, Telegram is by far the dominant social network in Uzbekistan, where its reach is second only to its Russian audience. It has 18,000 chat groups and 123,000 channels, classified by regions, cities, professions, news, and various themes, with music and blogs leading other categories. People use Telegram for entertainment, communication, and national and international news. Knowing that few households can afford laptops and Wi-Fi connection, online media outlets share information via Telegram channels, which most people access via their mobile phones. In comparison, Facebook and Instagram have a combined total of 10 million subscribers in Uzbekistan.

Despite vast coverage from communication infrastructures, marginalized groups' access to information is still restricted by costs, utility outages, limited computer skills, and media and information illiteracy. A United Nations Development Programme in Uzbekistan survey conducted in 2022 found that both men and women primarily use the internet at home on mobile phones, with increased use in urban areas. Although smartphone ownership is higher among women than men, women lag behind men in digital skills, with older,

poorer, and less-educated women particularly left behind. Other barriers include the lack of content in local languages, the lax security of messaging apps, and restrictions on social networks. Social norms and gender stereotypes hinder women's and girls' access to information technologies, reducing education and employment opportunities in the industry. Female respondents from the Namangan and Kashkadarya regions said their families do not allow them to use smartphones and the internet.

Marginalized groups, including senior citizens, people with disabilities, and rural residents, use the internet for business, e-government, and payments far less. The study found that people with disabilities use smartphones to access the internet 10 percent less than those without disabilities.

Women are not fairly represented in the mainstream media, which present traditional views on the role of women and men in family and society. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women urged the government to raise awareness of gender issues, promote nondiscriminatory images of women in the media, and enlist the media in the fight against gender-based violence, among other actions.

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Bloggers, journalists, and Nemolchi.uz, an independent, bilingual project with a presence on popular social media, reported numerous incidents of gender-based and domestic violence, including a woman beaten and shaved by four men in Kashkadarya, a 12-year-old girl who hanged herself in Ferghana, a 38-year-old woman who threw herself under a train in Bukhara, a woman who set herself on fire at the Fergana Oil Refinery, and a father who beat his 16-year-old daughter to death in Ferghana. In October, Kun.uz reported on seven women who were killed in one month by their husbands, and in one case by a father-in-law, leaving more than 10 children motherless in the Jizzakh, Ferghana, and Andijan regions. While some social media users called on the government to criminalize gender-based violence,

others expressed skepticism that the new legislation could help, given that existing laws are not enforced. The panelists said these accounts are evidence of the public’s increased awareness of gender issues and demonstrate civil society and the media’s commitment to combat domestic violence.

Owners, management, editorial staff, journalists, and other content producers are diverse and gender balanced. There is diversity and gender-balance among non-professional content producers.

Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced.

Professional content producers lack sufficient funds and staff to produce high-quality information. As a result, journalists seek extra work, and various news outlets often share the same content. Until mid-year, when the president signed a decree reducing the income tax rate for media by 50%, media outlets paid the same taxes as other businesses in relation to established tax rates. Income received from advertising revenues remains at the same tax rate, but the presidential decree exempted media equipment from customs duties.

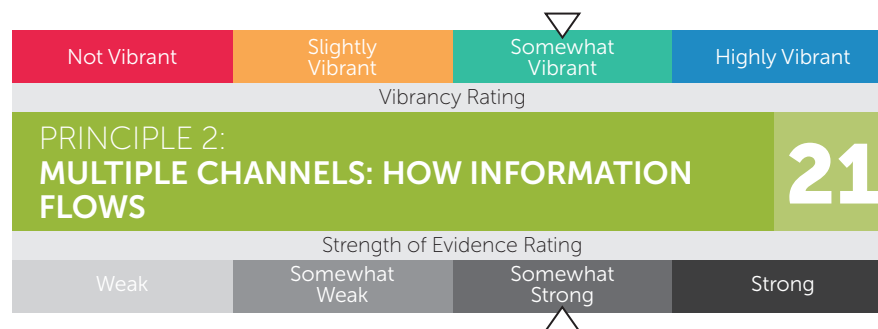
Independent media depend on advertising and private funding, lacking traditional funding streams to be resilient to economic and financial pressures. “Our mass media have not learned to monetize their content and they do not have paid subscriptions and other sources of income except advertisements,” one panelist added.

State-owned media are funded through subscriptions and subsidized by national and local governments. Some news subscriptions are compulsory. In November, a local district in Tashkent allegedly ordered a school to subscribe to 15 copies of Bektemir Haqiqati, its print newspaper, instructing school administrators to collect money for subscription fees from teachers.

The law on advertising, which was signed by the president in June 2022 and came into effect three months later, includes regulations on the content and language of advertised products, requiring they not discredit national symbols and individuals based on gender, nationality,

beliefs, or social status. The law requires content creation to be primarily in Uzbek. Trademarks and logos of foreign products can be in their original language, but their costs must be displayed in the local currency. The law also bans the advertisement of drugs by celebrities or physicians, breast milk substitutes, fireworks, and alcohol--but allows limited advertising of locally produced beer and wines.

The demand for advertising on blogs has doubled. Advertisers seek long-term contracts with popular bloggers who are skilled in advertising and offer advertising formats for different budgets. Generally, advertising in blogs is proving more effective than placing spots in other media. Meanwhile, the influence of bloggers is expanding beyond social networks. They are invited to public and personal events or to give interviews, monetizing both their content and personas.



Expanded infrastructure, reduced costs, and faster internet speeds have broadened access for the public and marginalized groups to diverse channels of information in various languages. In compliance with new regulations, state entities have committed to openness and transparency of government data and share information with the public through regular press conferences. Panelists gave Indicator 8, on appropriate channels for government information, the highest score, citing adequate access to diverse channels. Panelists noted, however, that those channels are not independent, arguing that media distribution networks remain monopolized and heavily controlled by the state.

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

The constitution and laws ostensibly protect freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but the government imposes restrictions through legal and extralegal means, and the absence of regulations and penalties for obstructing journalistic activity leaves room for abuse. The current legal environment allows the state to control domestic publications, websites, channels, and ICT providers. That leaves out social networks, so officials instead order users and channel administrators to remove information that regulators consider illegal, typically content deemed to violate Uzbek morality or disrespect society and the state. Criticism of the government, officials, or political and socioeconomic reforms can be prohibited under this criterion. The Ministry of Digital Technologies and the Agency of Information and Mass Communications (AIMC) regulate and censor online content. If a media outlet does not address government notifications promptly, the state suspends the organization's license.

During the Karakalpakstan events, Gazeta.uz resisted pressure to remove news stories. When Kun.uz posted a Ramadan series of interviews with imams who explained religious rituals, the state fined the editor-in-chief for illegal dissemination of religious content.

One panelist said the lever of economic pressure is the most effective. Major businesses that buy advertising spaces are often affiliated with government officials. When instructed, these businesses can stop buying advertisements and shift them to other outlets. This is a financial tool to pressure media outlets, resulting in a loss of income. The state can also close channels so that a media outlet cannot advertise. The outlet loses its means of existence and closes itself.

Privacy laws cover state secrets, commercial secrets, and personal data. These laws are not fairly enforced, and most are outdated. The legislation lacks classifications for state secrets, rendering information confidential even after it has lost its significance. Journalists cannot access archived data or criminal cases since they are not considered open data and there are no procedures that regulate access to this

type of information. A panelist noted that there are many violations of information-access laws. Requests are denied, incomplete, or provided in raw form, or agencies charge money for releasing information. There is no detailed register of open data. The law on open data is not fully enforced, and not all government bodies comply.

Media organizations did not operate freely in 2022, as the government exercised control over their coverage and held media outlets, individual journalists, and bloggers accountable for sensitive content, such as the war in Ukraine, the president and his family, and other officials. One panelist noted that media never sue a government body, rather, they are only ever defendants in lawsuits for defamation, libel, or damage to officials' reputations. Biased judgements are common, thanks to judicial corruption.

Panelists cited numerous violations of reporters' rights and interference in their work during 2022. Kun.uz reported that since 2019, authorities have discussed bills to impose liability for obstructing journalistic activity but have not done so. While several laws prohibit harassment and intimidation of journalists and the media, there is no penalty for noncompliance. On April 15, Rost24 journalist Anora Sodikova reported that she experienced government pressure and threats for an article linking 25 Uzbekistanis in the security services to the Pandora Papers. Summons and interrogations of journalists and bloggers and their family members by security services are also common practice.

Several times, law enforcement officers obstructed the work of content producers with impunity and seized their equipment. Andijan police prevented a Human.uz journalist from filming a report on the sale of sugar on his mobile phone and took the phone. Tashkent police prevented a Sevimli TV crew from entering a stadium to cover a soccer match and then detained the crew when they tried to film fans outside. After confiscating their press passes, a group of six or seven police officers began beating them and shocking them with tasers. An energy official in the Kashkadarya region choked a Daryo.uz journalist and tried to take his camera. An Andijan state electricity official allegedly beat blogger Fatima Jurayeva for questioning an increase in farmers' utility bills.

Several journalists and bloggers received fines and prison sentences. Blogger Olimjon Khaydarov was fined UZS 21 million (\$1,800) after being convicted of spreading false information and illegally organizing a workers' protest at a natural gas plant during a shutoff. Blogger Sobir Boboniyazov was sentenced to three years in prison for posting video and audio content that insulted the president. Tashkent journalist Aleksey Garshin, known for his expose on a secret presidential mansion built with public funds on a nature reserve, received the maximum fine of UZS 108 million (\$9,500) for insulting a blogger on social media. Garshin also reported pressure from authorities after livestreaming demonstrations in support of Ukraine outside the Ukrainian Embassy in March.

Journalist and lawyer Dauletmurat Tajimuratov, Makan.uz editor Lolagul Kallykhanova, and 12 protesters were tried on various offenses relating to demonstrations in Karakalpakstan, including organizing unrest and attempting to subvert the government. Human rights and media groups were denied entry to the courtroom. Gazeta.uz streamed the hearings for five days, until the court cut the online video feed. Tajimuratov was ultimately sentenced to 16 years in prison and Kallykhanova was sentenced to eight years of "restricted freedom."

In December, the AIMC posted a draft Information Code that would infringe on media freedom and freedom of expression, combining eight laws and many existing provisions. New measures would allow journalists to access government meetings and use drones, but they would also allow authorities to hide information, censor and punish the media, limit information during investigations and trials, and ban obscenities and information that promotes same-sex relations or insults or shows disrespect for society, the state, or state symbols. The AIMC received 80 comments by media professionals and organizations that are being reviewed by the Ministry of Justice. In 2023, the AIMC intends to send the document to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for feedback and hold a roundtable to discuss it with media representatives before submitting it to parliament. Human Rights Watch urged the government to withdraw the bill, saying

“ The government directly owns and indirectly controls private media outlets in Uzbekistan.

it is “discriminatory, violates freedom of expression, and is in breach of multiple obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

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

Uzbektelecom expanded telecommunications and internet infrastructure to remote locations in 2022, increasing internet speeds and decreasing the cost for providers by 25 percent, making it affordable for most people. According to Cable.co.uk mobile data pricing for 2022, Uzbekistan's prices ranked 15th globally (\$0.37 for 1 GB of mobile data) and second in the Commonwealth of Independent States, after Kyrgyzstan.

In 2022, Uzbekistan had more than 31 million internet users and more than 29.5 million mobile internet users, respectively a 14 percent and 16.6 percent increase over December 2021. Total internet network bandwidth grew substantially, extending mobile broadband and mobile communications to more than 98 percent of the population. In the event of a disruption or electricity outage, people can access mobile internet.

In July, the Ministry of Digital Technologies and Chinese companies tested a 5G network in the Samarkand region and agreed to expand the network coverage nationally and increase mobile and internet speed in the eastern and western regions. Uzbektelecom received a new internet channel from Cogent, one of the world's largest internet providers, allowing the agency to improve internet services and provide transit channels to foreign providers.

The government owns all information and communications technology infrastructure and tightly controls its content. Authorities have the capacity to switch off all means of communication, as they did in Karakalpakstan during the July protests. The power cuts in the beginning and the end of 2022 caused another information vacuum that released chaos and disinformation in the media environment.

Marginalized groups, including women and people with disabilities, have limited access to information due to social norms and disabilities.

Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information.

The country's constitution and laws guarantee citizens' access to government information. Under a 2021 presidential decree, government agencies must place annual reports on their websites by March, hold press conference on these reports by April, and upload updates on public procurement, expenses, beneficiaries, and other topics on the [government's open data portal](#) beginning in July each year. Also in 2021, Uzbekistan launched an upgraded [Open Budget portal](#), versions of which are used by governments around the world to encourage public participation in and monitoring of the budget process. In August 2022, Mirziyoyev signed a law stipulating fines for officials who violate the openness policy or fail to upload government information online.

Throughout the year, government bodies provided information and social services to the public through the president's [Virtual Public Reception](#). The platform's utility is limited, though, because it requires basic computer skills, legal literacy, and a stable power supply and internet connection. Most people prefer to walk into one of the 201 public reception centers, single-window registration facilities that provide 148 types of services. In response to complaints of long lines and reports of lax and fraudulent services at the centers, the presidential office introduced regional assistants to coordinate the centers' activities. These assistants can pass citizens' complaints against local officials to courts, which can hold officials accountable for administrative violations. More than 99,883 violations were recorded in the public sector in 2022, most concerning missing deadlines, unlawful requests for documents, unjustified refusals, and failure to provide direct public services.

Uzbekistan ranked 37th of 192 countries in the 2022/2023 Open Data Inventory biennial report, an international, nongovernmental project,

leading Central Asia and outperforming the Russian Federation. In the Global Data Barometer, an expert survey, the country ranked 58th of 109 countries. In the World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index 2022, Uzbekistan made progress in four indicators, including public service delivery and digital citizen engagement, and joined Group A countries that lead in digital transformation. Among 198 countries, the country ranked fourth in digital skills and innovation in public services and 43rd in public administration and services. The index highlighted the performance of the Single Portal of Interactive Public Services, an e-government platform where citizens and businesses can register, file, and make payments for services. Uzbekistan took these international indicators seriously and hosted an Open Data Week and UNESCO's Global Conference on Universal Access to Information 2022.

Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow.

There are legislative frameworks for licensing TV and radio broadcasts, with all legal and administrative issues regulated by subordinate government resolutions and decisions. Licensing procedures, which lack transparency and clear rules in the allocation of broadcasting frequencies and licenses, are subject to political influence. The National Council for Radio Frequencies under the Ministry of Digital Technologies meets ad hoc and allocates frequencies and licenses behind the scenes. Information on licensing procedures and government calls for bids on spectrum allocation are not available to the public. It is challenging to launch a radio channel since broadcasting frequencies have already been allocated. State-owned Uzbektelecom holds a monopoly on internet access and sells internet traffic to domestic internet service providers, which are prohibited from connecting to the international internet and maintaining satellites. Like Uzbektelecom, private internet service providers can filter and block websites.

The government lifted restrictions on Skype, Twitter, TikTok, WeChat, and Vkontakte in 2022, possibly as a result of staff changes in the

“ The media environment is warped by strong self-censorship, mutual distrust among content producers, and a fragmented and weak media community.

presidential administration, including the appointment of Sardor Umurzakov as the head of the administration and Allamjonov, the former media foundation director, as his deputy. These social networks were blocked in 2021 following the adoption of a law that required them to store personal data of Uzbek users on servers physically located in Uzbekistan. No social network is known to have done so yet. Former IT Minister Shukhrat Sadikov was dismissed for blocking the social networks but was named a deputy head of the prime minister’s secretariat in February 2023.

In August, the Ministry of Innovative Development called for applications to develop a national social network and messengers, ostensibly to protect the personal data of Uzbek citizens. Some IT experts interviewed by Kun.uz called the move a waste of money, noting that 32 previous attempts to create a national social network went nowhere.

The government directly owns and indirectly controls private media outlets in Uzbekistan. There are 36 state and 38 private TV stations, which have state and/or private funding. Although a law prohibits media monopolies and requires that owners disclose shareholder information, that information is not made public.

In April 2023, AidData, a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute, published a media ownership profile that analyzed domestic media ownership in Uzbekistan. According to AidData, one outlet had direct Russian ownership. The Uzbek government fully owns the fifth most-consumed channel, Yoshlar, and partially owns Mening Yurtim (MY5), the second most-consumed channel. Zo’r TV, the most-consumed channel in Uzbekistan, is owned by Ismail Israilov and Shukhrat Akhmetov, who both have business ties with the (now) ex-mayor of Tashkent, Jakhongir Artikhodjaev. Israilov owns shares in Pro FM and Akhmetov controls Vodiy Sadosi radio and the Tasvir publishing house.

Indicator 10: Information channels are independent.

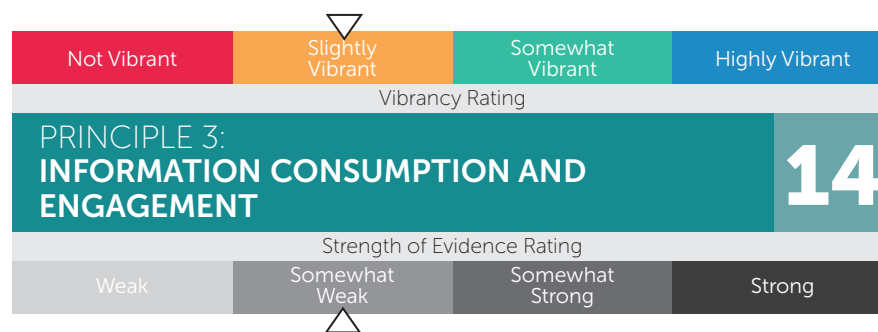
Financial precarity compels media organizations in Uzbekistan to depend on their state or private owners and tread lightly in covering the government. Funding sources, including advertising revenues and

owners’ investments, influence the choice of topics, constrain reporting, and blur the lines between newsroom and business operations. The government awards subsidies and advertising contracts mainly to state-owned media or friendly private media.

Because media outlets in Uzbekistan are homogenous or controlled by the government, there is little distinction between state and private media, with the second being critical of midlevel officials. The media environment is warped by strong self-censorship, mutual distrust among content producers, and a fragmented and weak media community.

Membership in regulatory bodies and their criteria and decisions on frequency allocations, licenses, and telecommunications services are not transparent or publicly available, contrary to the government’s widely ignored policy on openness.

The government uses various means, including tax audits and health inspections, to pressure media. In fear of losing their licenses, owners dictate editorial stances and order articles removed following phone calls or warnings from authorities. In many cases, the owner and editor are the same person.



Even though people have adequate access to channels of information, their consumption of and engagement with information is limited by a lack of media literacy and digital security, and restrictions on the free flow of information. Panelists cited somewhat strong evidence that the public and the media lack the knowledge and skills to protect their privacy and security online. The panelists said that people of all

education levels lacked media literacy and rated that subindicator poorly. The indicator on community media received no score because Uzbekistan has no community media.

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

Laws and regulations aim to ensure data privacy and digital security, including the 2019 law on personal data, amended in 2021 to require the physical storage of user data in Uzbekistan. The country's first law on digital or cyber security, which tasks the Security Service with policing cybersecurity issues and safeguarding the information and security systems of state bodies, was adopted in April 2022. In October 2022, the government increased penalties for ICT fraud and required that personal-data processing receive four levels of protection from debit cards. The government uses protection of personal data as an excuse not to release public information.

Reports by the media and the Internal Affairs Ministry exposed the lack of digital security training and tools for the media, citizens, and government bodies, making them vulnerable to cyber threats and attacks. Hundreds of citizens suffered financial losses from online theft in 2022 because they lacked basic digital-security and data-literacy skills. In 2023, the Interior Ministry's Cybersecurity Center launched campaigns to educate the public about the risks of sharing personal information online. Still, there is no systematic approach to cybersecurity education.

The Cybersecurity Center recently counted more than 1.3 million cyberattacks in the national internet segment and found that only 14,000 of 38,000 active domains had security certificates. In August, the center named the Justice Ministry, Central Bank, and State Statistics Committee among the 10 state bodies with the best information and digital security systems. In November, hackers left a greeting for the Cybersecurity Center on the homepage of the Senate's website.

 **The concept of media literacy is in its infancy in Uzbekistan.**

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

The concept of media literacy is in its infancy in Uzbekistan. Authorities have not introduced it in a systematic way in schools or more broadly. Although Allamjonov, the deputy head of the presidential administration, told a gathering in Geneva in April that Uzbekistan must cooperate with foreign organizations in order to help its journalists and bloggers become more “legally literate” and to increase its citizens' media literacy, officials have long refused registration to well-known international media organizations that promote media literacy.

As part of projects by USAID, ERIM (Equal Rights and Independent Media), and DW Akademie, dozens of journalists, bloggers, and civil society representatives conducted media- and information-literacy sessions for marginalized groups, including unemployed women and youth, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and incarcerated people. These activities were, as usual, sporadic, short, and limited in reach and coverage. A few enthusiastic public-school teachers integrated elements of media- and information-literacy into their lessons. Given Uzbekistan's top-down approach, if instructed from above, officials have the capacity to develop a national media- and information-literacy strategy and integrate it into the formal education system.

Acceptance of Russian propaganda about the war in Ukraine and widespread cybercrime suggest that both adults and youth seldom think critically or check facts. The lack of media- and information literacy and fact-checking websites make it difficult to distinguish trustworthy news from poor-quality news and information. People tend to obey social norms and refrain from questioning family traditions or the views of their elders.

The USAID-funded MediaCAMP survey, which assessed media consumption and media literacy in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 2021, recorded a slight improvement in media literacy in Uzbekistan, where people preferred entertainment to news, and

television remained the primary source of information. The study found greater consumption of Uzbek-language domestic content and more loyalty to centralized official media on television, than to foreign or provincial outlets. The Uzbek-language segment of the internet is limited in quality and quantity. Urban residents with higher education were more likely to use the internet and consume Russian media than their rural counterparts.

Trends in media consumption were upended by the conflicts in Karakalpakstan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, which fed a growing demand for news in 2022, panelists said. They also said consumers sought alternative news from online media as official outlets kept silent about political developments. One panelist said their online outlet saw a jump in visits by users from neighboring countries during the protests in Karakalpakstan. Uzbekistan youth, who made up 40 percent of the foreign labor migrants in Russia in 2022, followed news of the war and worried about a possible loss of jobs and rumors about conscription into the Russian army. A panelist from a local media NGO said respondents struggled to cope with information overload and negativity on social media, and eventually tuned out.

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

Most people engage with limited fact-based information they consume on social media. There are no platforms for public debate, which is discouraged to avoid criticism of government policies. With regard to political events or news posts, open debate on contentious issues on social media platforms turns to harsh rhetoric full of skepticism and angry statements by conflicting sides. Media consumers who report misinformation, mal-information, or hate speech to public councils, ombudsmen, or platform moderators are rare.

Media professionals and civil society activists cannot fully exercise their rights to information and freedom of speech to address social issues and

report on the news. Content producers seeking information experience bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and arbitrary refusals from authorities. Kun.uz reported dozens of instances in which the General Prosecutor's Office selectively responded to the outlet's inquiries on the status of criminal cases opened against officials. Using specious explanations, courts repeatedly banned journalists from attending open hearings.

About 35 content producers at all levels were pressured or threatened and received fines and prison sentences for their activities in 2022.

On the deadly protests in Kazakhstan and Karakalpakstan and Russia's war on Ukraine, security services and the Agency for Information and

Mass Communications informally warned journalists and reporters to provide neutral coverage or none at all. Journalist Marina Kozlova reported receiving an official warning from the agency over a video interview with Mykola Doroshenko, Ukraine's ambassador to Uzbekistan. "They

summoned one of our correspondents, one of my deputies, then my business partner, and now they're waiting for me," the Kun.uz founder wrote on social media.

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

It is common for audiences to provide feedback in comments sections under news stories or blog posts, which are moderated by news sites and owners of social media channels. Even though media and content producers take steps to build trust with audiences and transparency in authorship, their reporting methods and publishing corrections are questionable and undermined by unethical practices.

Journalistic media, content producers, civil society organizations and government institutions rarely collaborate and network together. Productive information sharing is hindered by government attempts to control the media, content producers and civil society and frame information to align state narratives. The government rarely accepts and

Content producers seeking information experience bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and arbitrary refusals from authorities.

considers feedback from the media and civil society.

For years, Uzbekistan’s media did not comply with international standards and could not meet foreign advertisers’ need for accurate audience measurements. That began to change in 2017 with the launch of the National Media Council and significant reforms. These reforms, however, have yet to transform the radio industry. Many stations are local and lack audience measurement tools.

Television accounts for more than 30 percent of the Uzbekistan media market, and state-owned television is the single most dominant media, with national coverage and the biggest market share. In October 2018, TNS Central Asia (Kantar Media) received a five-year state contract to monitor 1,500 viewers in 550 households using stationary people meters connected to televisions. The ratings system sparked competition among channels, which began producing a variety of content in new formats. However, television lacks enough domestic content to fill the airtime and has to address unlicensed content, copyright issues for foreign content, and unclear regulations on advertising over-the-counter drugs and locally produced beer.

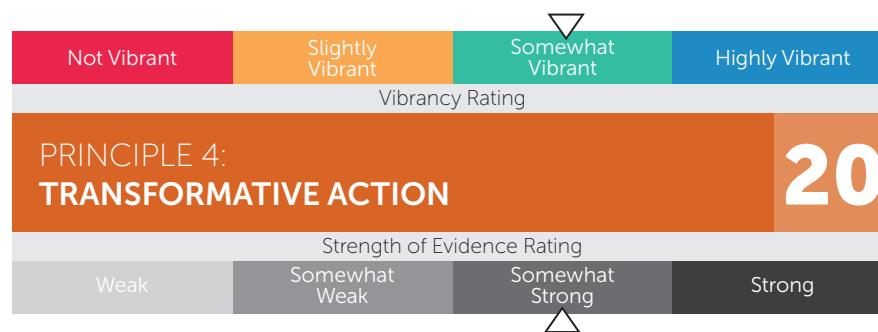
The digital media market has seen an increase in online video content. Videos adapted for mobile devices engage audiences on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Digital media in Uzbekistan, however, have struggled to make money from their content. In March 2023, the government asked the U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan, Jonathan Henick, to assist with acquiring access to YouTube (Google/Alphabet) monetization.

Independent news media struggle to stay afloat partly because they do not know how to market themselves. They have trouble attracting new advertisers, maintaining relationships with existing ones, and winning back past clients. They are slow to develop new commercial formats for special projects or to reach specific clients. Panelists said online news media also lack management expertise and financial literacy. Most media owners do not have knowledge of finance and business management and do not use accounting data to make informed decisions. Top media leadership and commercial departments have

poor knowledge of the media market and limited engagement with customers. They do not apply customer-development approaches when launching new projects and do not consider the views of potential advertisers in developing new products.

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

Uzbekistan does not have community media.



People use social media to air views on various sociopolitical events, but the exchanges are not always open or constructive, especially on the Karakalpakstan protests and the war in Ukraine. Many users do not openly criticize the Uzbek government or Russia’s motives for war, and content producers delete such criticisms from their comment sections for fear of legal repercussions.

Panelists scored indicators on information sharing, using information to inform actions and improve communities, and civil society’s use of information higher. They cited instances of people using quality information to hold officials accountable and of the government engaging with the media and civil society to address issues. The indicator on good governance and democratic rights received the lowest score in this principle due to numerous media accounts of corruption and human rights violations.

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

State-owned media promote government propaganda that shapes public opinion. People tend to trust official media and treat online media — usually foreign — with suspicion due to the language barrier, lack of media literacy, and limited access to alternative and nonpartisan news and information. City-dwellers with higher education, foreign language skills, and stable access to the internet tend to consume multiple types of media.

Town hall meetings and call-in shows are not common in Uzbekistan. People meet and discuss political and social issues during a gap, an informal gathering of various social groups, including friends, colleagues, neighbors, and extended families. Even during these gaps, people refrain from openly criticizing the president and his family, given a deep-rooted fear for personal and family safety and mutual distrust. In an interview with the Alter Ego blog in August, Daniel Rosenblum, the outgoing U.S. ambassador, said that even though Uzbekistanis now feel freer to criticize the government and can more freely produce and exchange information online, people remain wary of discussing certain topics. “I think it has something to do with these red lines; people feel if they publish it or write about it, there will be consequences. And I can’t call that freedom of speech,” he said.

Social media users respond to a news story or a blog post and voice their opposing views and criticism of the government on social media platforms. However, their comments are scrubbed by the owners of the social media channels for fear of legal repercussions. A panelist noted that although the state does not regulate social media, “The government sends notifications to users and the administrators of channels asking them to clean up comments, not the posts, because that’s where sharp critical views are usually found.”

“ State-owned media promote government propaganda that shapes public opinion.

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

People’s views on political and social issues are shaped by televised government narratives. Although the government does not necessarily engage in misinformation to explain its decisions, authorities often conceal or provide incomplete information on important issues.

Information during election campaigns is heavily controlled by the state. Limited quality information prevents people from making informed decisions. There is little analysis of candidates’ agendas, no public debates or opposing views on media outlets, which are flooded with positive government narratives of a favored candidate. People strongly believe that their votes do not influence election outcomes or are convinced that ballots are replaced by pre-prepared ballots.

There were a few significant examples in 2022 of people in Uzbekistan acting on reliable information to affect, or prevent, change. In one instance, a public outcry followed a Kun.uz report that a construction company with connections to a former mayor of Tashkent, in a closed decision of the cabinet, won a state contract to consolidate three cancer hospitals. The public ultimately saved two of the hospitals.

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

Civil society organizations (CSOs) produce reliable content on the projects they implement, although they avoid sensitive topics and produce content that is in line with government narratives. NGOs cooperate with the media as part of their grant projects and invite the press to cover their project activities. However, despite some improvements including better cooperation with government officials, the operating environment for CSOs remains restrictive. Notably, the government passed a regulation in 2022 that forces any NGO receiving project funding from international organizations to inform

the Ministry of Justice, after which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may or may not approve the funding and appoint a state agency to act as a “national partner,” resulting in long delays in beginning projects. This assigned agency appoints a government official to, among other things, oversee the planning and implementation of the project, make recommendations, and devise a planning roadmap. The regulation challenges civil society’s access to foreign funding and ability to report on sensitive issues, such as corruption and human rights violations.

Dozens of groups have asked that the regulation be cancelled, arguing that it “contradicts national law, international standards on human rights to freedom of association, and hinders the development of an independent civil society” in Uzbekistan. CSOs noted that the Ministry of Justice did not get feedback from civil society before imposing the regulation, which “violates the rights of NGOs and puts independent civil society institutions in a subordinate position from national partners in the implementation of their projects.” CSOs wrote that despite progressive reforms, the state of civil society in Uzbekistan is still weak, due to the fact that laws often contradict each other, thus introducing additional bureaucratic obstacles and infringing on the freedom of association and activities. Gazeta.uz published their appeal in full.

The Ministry of Justice refused, but the state-run National Association of NGOs agreed to create a platform to discuss ways to foster better legal, economic, and social conditions for NGOs. Justice officials met with NGOs and agreed to create a working group under the association and revisit the rule based on recommendations.

Media and civil society did report on unlawful evictions and property seizures that displaced marginalized groups in 2022.

In a recent push for urban development, the government demolished some houses without giving their inhabitants other housing or adequate compensation. According to the nonprofit Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project and the Central Asia Protest Tracker from the nonprofit Oxus Society in Washington, D.C., about half of protests

in Uzbekistan since 2018 stemmed from development and property disputes, with utility shortages another major source of unrest. About one-quarter of these protests turned violent, when property owners attacked developers or self-immolated after losing cases in a corrupt judicial system. Developers often turned off gas, electricity, and water to evict homeowners from their properties.

Civil society and media, especially bloggers, reported on continuing forced labor in the education system, particularly school administrators forcing teachers and students to perform unrelated public works. During the year, teachers and the public reported incidents of forced labor via an online platform, @iamnotaslave_bot, which posted pieces documenting evidence of compulsory labor among teachers which were reposted by media outlets. As a result, in November the Ministry of Public Education issued a statement banning forced labor, and in early 2023 the president decreed stiffer penalties for forced labor and teacher assault.

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

In theory, civil society and media play multiple roles and serve as important sources of information for the government and the public. In practice, however, civil society and the media’s roles are constrained in Uzbekistan, even though laws provide for freedom of speech and association, and the government has signaled readiness to engage and allow them to serve as a check on its power. A requirement that officials upload government information online and engage with civil society and media through press conferences by each July is observed.

The government rarely engages with civil society to make policy, as when it passed the regulation requiring NGOs to have a government partner when working on a foreign-funded project. There were no media or civil society reports on government engagement with civil society in developing the constitutional amendments of 2022.

“ People strongly believe that their votes do not influence election outcomes or are convinced that ballots are replaced by pre-prepared ballots.

There are no pluralistic debates among politicians, in parliament, or any other formal setting. Politicians do not use distortion or lies when presenting arguments; rather, they quietly go about completing the tasks assigned by their administration. Criticizing or presenting opposing views on issues is not in their nature. Outspoken politician Rasul Kuserbayev resigned in late December 2022 after he was denied participation in budget discussions, and Ulugbek Inoyatov, the deputy speaker, did not give him a chance to voice his opinions. Kuserbayev, who has gained exposure and popularity for his opposing views and comments on hot issues such as the cost to rent school textbooks, at one point wrote: “It is better not to have a deputy speaker who zips the lips of deputies.”

There are examples, though, of officials acting in response to media reports or social media controversies. After years of homeowners’ fights against unlawful land seizures and property demolition, heavily covered by online media outlets, President Mirziyoyev signed a law in June that governs the seizure of land and agreements with owners. In November, he signed another law that regulates the state registration of property ownership. Additionally, media outlets and bloggers reported on violence against emergency medical professionals by relatives of patients who claimed the physicians failed to provide immediate aid. Videos of violence and photos of injured nurses and physicians on social media sparked a public discussion. As a result, the president signed a law in 2023 that introduced additional fines and arrests for perpetrators, though laws against assault in general are not enforced.

Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic rights.

Human rights groups and online news sites reported significant human rights and civil liberty violations, unlawful evictions, gender-based violence, and the persecution and arrests of people on charges of religious extremism. The U.S. Embassy’s 2022 report on human rights in Uzbekistan cited 75 deaths in detention facilities. In November, after a 15-year-old boy died at a Ferghana youth detention facility, Kun.uz wrote, “It is becoming common for law enforcement agencies, especially internal affairs bodies, to discharge the corpses of detainees

out of their buildings.” In 2022, several prisoners attempted suicide, including Alisher Yakubov, who described his experience of torture and harassment in his suicide note. Prosecutors dropped Yakubov’s citing lack of evidence.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has passed a series of anti-corruption measures, set up watchdog agencies, and allowed anti-corruption NGOs to operate. An anti-corruption plan seeks to facilitate civil society, media, and citizen participation in the investigation and prevention of corruption, among other measures.

The government’s Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) receives information and complaints on corruption cases, including embezzlement, fraud, and abuse of official power and bribery, from citizens through the President’s Virtual Reception and public reception centers. Additionally, the National Anti-Corruption Council, a non-governmental organization founded in December 2021, works through its regional offices to investigate and report on corruption in national and local government bodies. The government responds to these cases with arrests and dismissals but has not managed to eliminate the underlying cause of corruption: abuse of power. In 2022, the ACA named healthcare, education, banking, and internal affairs the most corrupt sectors. Moreover, in 2022 Tashkent city courts reviewed 9,807 criminal corruption cases against 12,141 employees in the education sector. About 3,116 officials were prosecuted on charges of corruption last year.

With support from an international civil society coalition, the Uzbek Forum for Human Rights and Transparency International-Russia published a report on the country’s progress in implementing the UN Convention Against Corruption. It found that the ACA, which issues warnings to state entities, is influenced by the president’s office and lacks the independence and power to enforce those warnings. According to the report, authorities use government-organized NGOs (GONGO) to simulate civil society participation on anti-corruption issues. It also said the Justice Ministry hinders civil society participation through difficult registration and grant-authorization procedures for NGOs.

Despite these bureaucratic and political hurdles, people formed

informal community groups and posted videos on social media of illegal construction, tree cutting, and land seizures in 2022. The government responded to some of these cases, but it has no systematic and structured cooperation with civil society and community groups. In March, the ACA reported that 80 of 135 government bodies, 60 percent, did not disclose on their websites or the open data platform information on public procurement; the costs of business trips and receptions for foreign visitors; and information on licensing, permits, cars, and services. There was no discussion on My Opinion, a bilingual online platform meant to engage civil society, media, and citizens in monitoring public and state affairs.

Despite reforms in public procurement, conflicts of interest, and public contracting, enforcement of new rules is weak. Public procurement of goods and services to firms which officials indirectly own through their close contacts is common practice. An incident with a foreign investor shed a bad light on Uzbekistan's laws and investment climate. In 2022, the then-mayor of Tashkent was involved in a scandal with Murari Lal Jalan, a developer of two major projects in Tashkent. In a November 2022 interview with Kun.uz, the Indian businessman accused the the-mayor of extortion. "I was left with two choices: either to abandon one of my projects, for example, Lake City, or to deposit \$100 million in the bank," he said. The then-mayor accused the businessman of defamation and appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office to review the case.

Due to increased self-censorship among content producers and limited training in investigative journalism, only a small number of independent journalists, media outlets, and bloggers report on corruption cases, and those who report on corruption receive threats and pressure to remove their content. Last April, Gazeta.uz wrote that Rost24.uz had been pressured to remove investigative content about Jakhongir Usmanov, whose name appeared in the Pandora Papers in 2021. The son of a late senator, former deputy prime minister in charge of trade and the head of the Football Federation and the National Olympic Committee Mirabrор Usmanov, Jakhongir Usmanov launched a charitable foundation in 2017 which was exempt from taxes, received funds from foreign individuals and legal entities, and had financial transactions with offshore companies. Over the course of five years, the foundation

neither published activity reports nor supported nursing homes, as was indicated in its charter. The Rost24.uz journalist removed the video content from the website and YouTube channel but published it on their Facebook page.

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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