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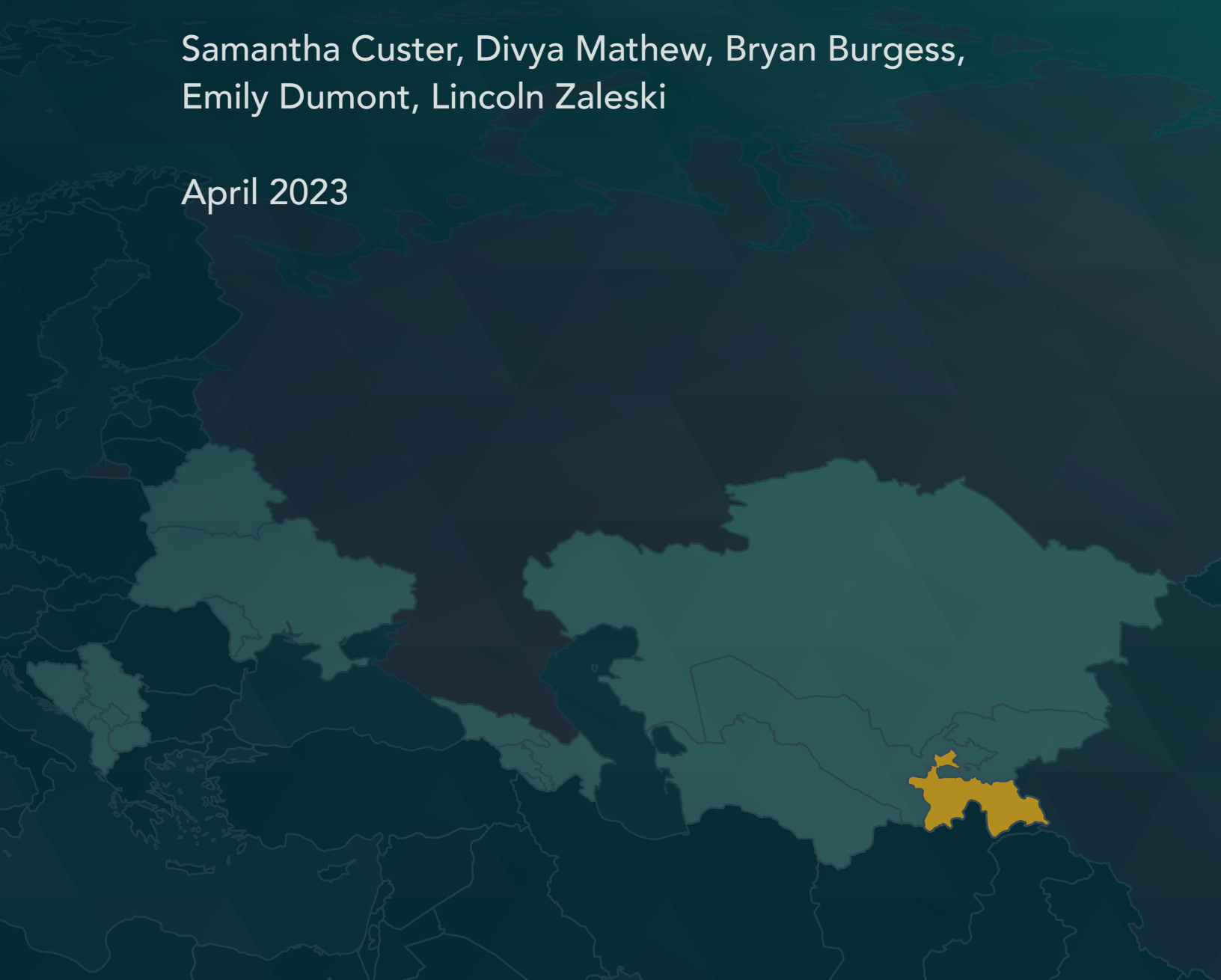
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

# **Tajikistan:** Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and Russian influence

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Tajikistan's civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin's influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in Tajikistan to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions.

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Tajikistan, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Tajik civic space actors were the targets of 142 restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021. Fifty-six percent of these restrictions involved harassment or violence, followed by state-backed legal cases (30 percent), and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (14 percent). Thirty percent of these restrictions were recorded in a single year, 2018. The political opposition was most frequently targeted, and the Tajik government was the primary initiator. Sixteen restrictions involved foreign governments working at the behest of the Tajik government to detain, harass or extradite Tajik opposition political activists.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Forty-seven percent of Tajik citizens were interested in politics in 2020, but the vast majority had no interest in taking part in direct political action. Petitions were the most likely form of political action Tajik respondents had previously engaged in or would

consider doing so in future. Although Tajiks recorded high rates of membership in voluntary organizations (26 percent on average), they had lower levels of confidence in these institutions and their charitable donations to civic organizations trailed regional peers. In 2021, 60 percent of Tajiks reported helping a stranger and 43 percent volunteered. Charitable donations was the weakest performing metric, as only 15 percent of Tajiks reported such activity in 2021—less than half of the regional mean (38 percent).

- Russian-backed Civic Space Projects: The Kremlin supported 27 Tajik civic organizations via 46 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Projects promoted Russian linguistic and cultural ties, engagement with youth groups, and outreach to Russian compatriots. Metropolitan areas attracted most of the Kremlin's attention, particularly Dushanbe (74 percent), followed by Khujand (13 percent). Russian compatriot organizations and formal Tajik civil society organizations received most of the Kremlin's support (80 percent of projects). Although 14 Kremlin-affiliated agencies were involved, Rossotrudnichestvo was most prolific, supporting 23 organizations via 41 projects.
- Russian State-run Media: Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Tajik civic actors 18 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Political parties were the most frequently mentioned domestic actors followed by other community organizations. The overall tone of mentions was largely neutral (60 percent); negative mentions were predominantly directed to the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Coverage of the U.S. and the West was most frequently negative, particularly playing up perceived security failures of the U.S. and allies in the region.

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# A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk

about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Tajikistan? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Tajikistan to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>1</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Tajikistan from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>3</sup> Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an

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<sup>1</sup> The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>3</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Tajik civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.



Although Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Tajikistan and the broader E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects. By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin’s patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2017–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li>● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li>● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2010–2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> </ul>

(January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul>
Russian state media mentions of civic space actors (January 2015–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Tajikistan by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Tajikistan by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Tajikistan by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Tajikistan by Russian state-owned media</li> </ul>

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Tajikistan’s domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Tajikistan

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (de jure) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (de facto). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Tajikistan over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Tajiks engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time

Tajik civic space actors experienced 142 known restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (56 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (30 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (14 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available

information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5).<sup>4</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Tajik Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	17	24	12	26	1	80
Restrictive Legislation	8	4	4	4	0	20
State-backed Legal Cases	10	14	8	10	0	42
Total	35	42	24	40	1	142

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Tajikistan, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Instances of restrictions of Tajik civic space actors were unevenly distributed across this time period (Figure 1). The highest number of restrictions in a year was recorded in 2018 (42 instances), when the media and journalists often came under attack, on the heels of restrictive legislation passed in 2017. There was only 1 restriction recorded in the first quarter of 2021. Members of the political opposition and “other community groups”<sup>5</sup> were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, together accounting for 48 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by journalists and members of the media.

The Tajik government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 77 recorded mentions. Frequently, these restrictions involved police actions to harass opposition political leaders and their families (Figure 3). A domestic non-governmental actor was identified as the initiator in 1 instance of restriction and there were 2 incidents involving unidentified assailants. By virtue of the way that the indicator was defined, the initiators of

<sup>4</sup> Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

<sup>5</sup> Targets categorized as “other community groups” in Tajikistan include political opposition groups established and operating in exile, such as Group 24 and National Alliance of Tajikistan. We distinguish them from formally registered opposition political parties in Tajikistan—categorized “political opposition”—to preserve the comparability of data across countries.

state-backed legal cases are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

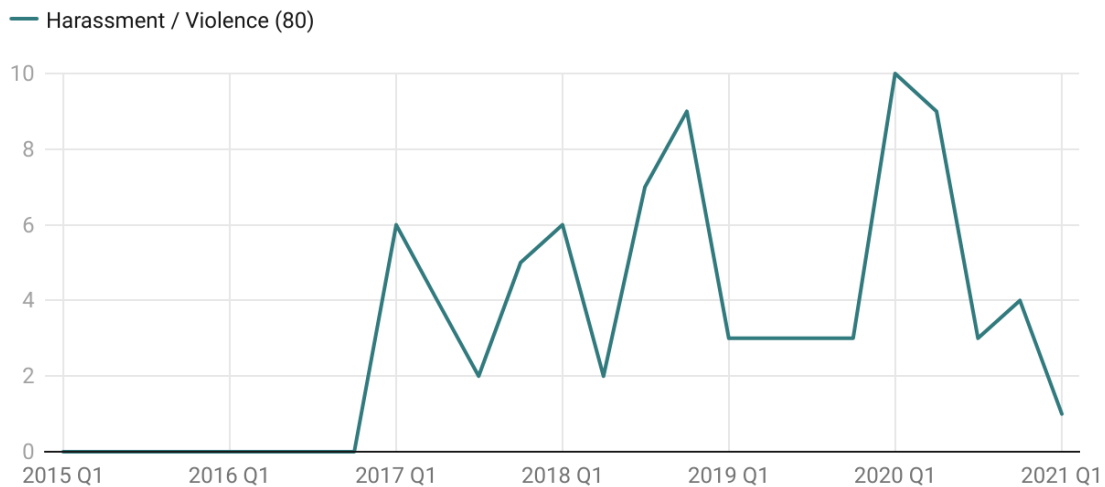
There were 16 recorded instances of restrictions during this period that involved the Tajik government collaborating with foreign governments to detain Tajik opposition activists abroad:

- The Russian government alone accounted for half of these instances, followed by the governments of Turkey (3), Austria (2), and the Belarussian, Greek and Polish governments each involved in 1 instance. In 7 of the 16 cases, there are confirmed reports of the Tajik detainees being extradited to Tajikistan, where they faced further punitive measures for their activism.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan

Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



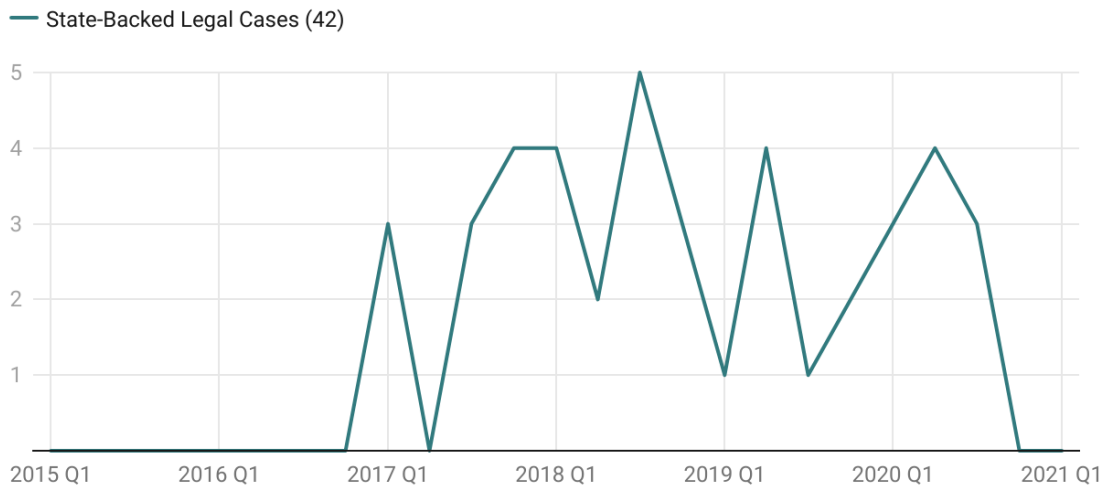
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## Restrictive Legislation



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## State-backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Tajikistan

April 2017	Media is required to refer to President Rahmon by his elaborate, full title "Founder of Peace and National Unity, Leader of the Nation, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, His Excellency Emomali Rahmon".
September 2017	The government's Committee on Religious Affairs distributed a pamphlet this month which regulates how citizens can act at funerals, including bans on black clothes and loud wailing. Hired mourners are

	prohibited and those grieving must not tear their hair or scratch their faces.
February 2018	Parliament approves amendments to the laws on Presidential and Parliamentary elections, enabling the current President to run for more than two consecutive terms and lowering the age of eligibility from 35 to 30. Allowing the President's son, Rustam Emomali, to run in the forthcoming elections is believed to be the primary motivation behind these changes.
August 2018	Prominent human rights lawyer, Shukhrat Kudratov, is freed after spending nearly four years behind bars on embezzlement charges as Western governments and rights groups stepped up pressure on the authoritarian Central Asian country.
May 2019	Three prison guards and 29 inmates are killed in a prison riot in the city of Vahdat. The government blames the riot on Islamic State militants.
August 2019	Security forces launch a second raid on the house of former president Almazbek Atambayev, after a failed attempt to arrest him the previous day led to violent clashes with his followers. Police detain Atambayev for questioning over a corruption case.
March 2020	Tajikistan votes in parliamentary elections, producing a legislature that is loyal to President Rahmon who has run the ex-Soviet Central Asian nation for a quarter of a century. Rahmon's People's Democratic Party won 75% of the seats. Five other parties also won seats, offering different manifestos but uniform support of Rahmon.
April 2020	Rustam Emomali, the eldest son of President Rahmon, is elected speaker in the senate, cementing the family's grip on power in Tajikistan ahead of the Presidential election. Rahmon's daughter, Ozoda Rahmon, is also a senator and serves as the president's chief of staff, while her husband holds the No.2 position at the central bank.

*Notes: These charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in Tajikistan, categorized as: harassment/violence, restrictive legislation, or state-backed legal cases. Instances are disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Tajikistan from January 2017 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Tajikistan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Tajikistan, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Tajikistan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

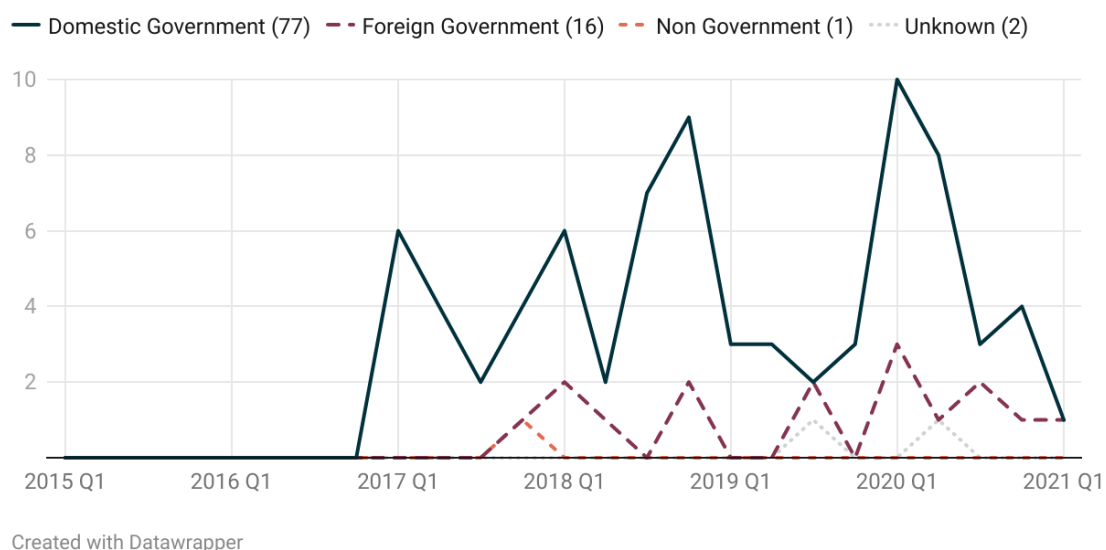
Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	11
Political Opposition	10
Formal CSO/NGO	1
Individual Activist/Advocate	2
Other Community Group	11
Other	8

*Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Tajikistan disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*



Figure 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan by Initiator

Number of Instances Recorded



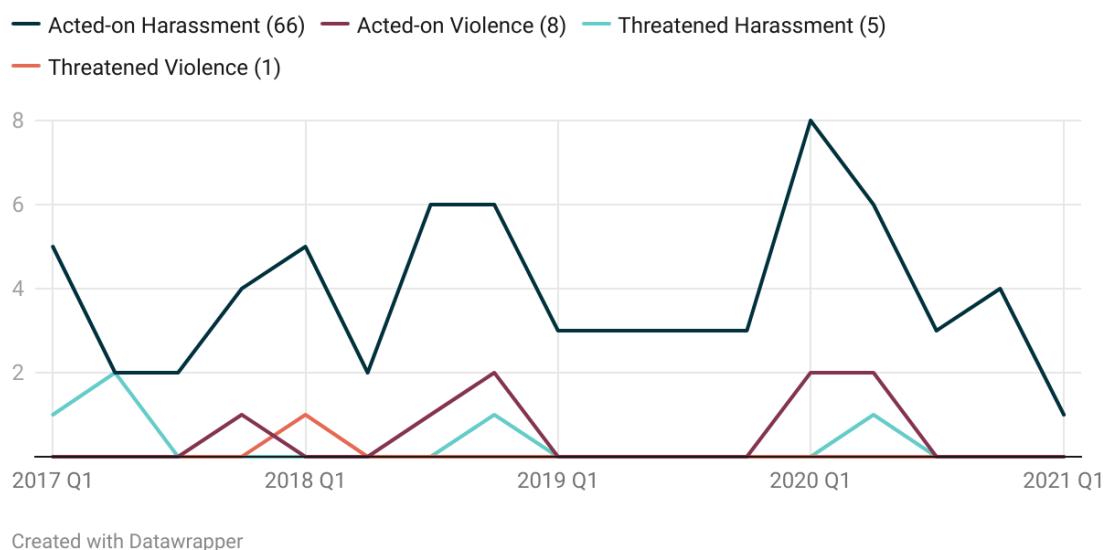
*Notes: The figure visualizes recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Tajikistan, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (5 threatened, 66 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (1 threatened, 8 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (93 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 4). Of the 80 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (83 percent).

Figure 4. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan

Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment of or violence against civic space actors in Tajikistan, categorized by the type of harassment or violence (threatened or acted-on). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (20) in Tajikistan are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

Taking a closer look at instances of restrictive legislation, the Tajik government appears to be taking a three-pronged approach to constrain civic space: (i) increased control over the activities of NGOs; (ii) greater regulation of information and the media, particularly online content; and (iii) curbing

fundamental civic rights such as the right to association and the right to assembly. A few illustrative examples include:

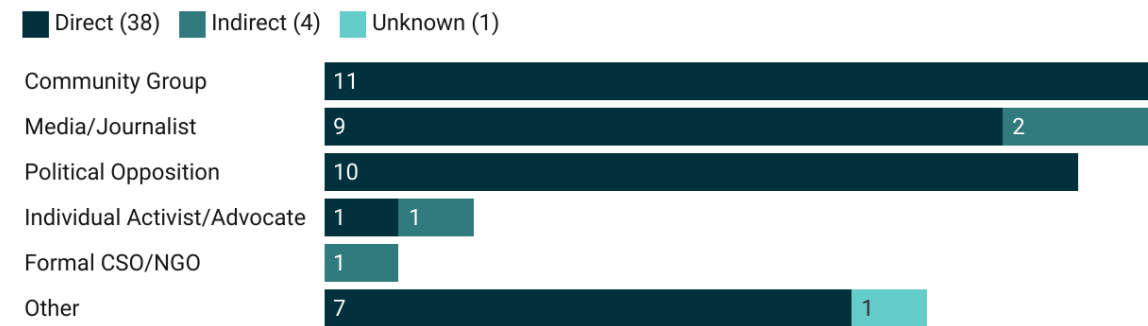
- Amendments to the Public Associations Act that came into effect in January 2017, which introduced new reporting obligations for public associations. The amendments authorized the Ministry of Justice, which oversees the work of these organizations, to inform the authorities of any suspected involvement in financing terrorism or extremist activities. Civil society groups expressed concern that the vague provisions in the legislation could be exploited to unduly restrict the operations of public associations.
- In January 2020, media outlets were ordered, under threat of sanctions, to send weekly emails to the State Inspection for the Supervision of Television and Radio Broadcasting detailing their planned program schedule for the upcoming week. Earlier that month, the Law on Countering Extremism came into force which allows the Government Communication Service, the State Committee for National Security or any other law enforcement agency to block any website or social network without a court decision, if it considers them to be extremist.
- In October 2018, authorities in Khorog published a warning that any gatherings of young people would be regarded as participation in a criminal group. Gatherings in mahallas (neighborhood communities), restaurants, canteens and gyms would be deemed illegal and restaurant owners would face charges if they allowed such gatherings to take place. Those participating in such activities could receive a prison sentence of 8 to 20 years.

Civic space actors were the targets of 42 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021. The highest concentration of these cases (14) occurred in 2018. The Tajik authorities frequently pursued cases against individuals for their membership and activities with religious community groups like the Salafiya movement or Jehovah's Witnesses. As shown in Figure 5, charges in these cases were most often directly (88 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). There were fewer

indirect nuisance charges (9 percent), such as embezzlement or forgery, intended to discredit the reputations of civic space actors and 1 case (3 percent) with insufficient reporting on the nature of the charges.

Figure 5. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Tajikistan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



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Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Tajikistan, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

## 2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Tajikistan

Tajik citizens reported a moderate rate of interest in politics in 2020, but the vast majority had no interest in taking part in direct political action. Although Tajiks recorded high rates of membership in voluntary organizations, they appear to have reservations—as they had lower levels of confidence in these institutions and their charitable donations to civic organizations trailed regional peers. These dynamics could reflect President Emomali Rahmon’s heavy restrictions of civic space, which substantially circumscribe avenues of civic activity available for citizens and inhibit meaningful political opposition. In this section, we take a closer look at Tajik citizens’ interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Tajik involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to

charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Tajik Civic Space

Nearly half of Tajik respondents to the 2020 World Values Survey (WVS)<sup>6</sup> expressed an interest in politics (47 percent), outstripping the regional average<sup>7</sup> by 11 percentage points (Figure 6). But this interest did not translate into a willingness to engage in political action: the vast majority of respondents reported that they “would never” take part in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, or strikes (Figure 7). Of these four forms of political action, Tajik respondents most frequently reported having engaged in petitions (8 percent),<sup>8</sup> and an additional 12 percent indicated that they would consider doing so at some point in the future.

Comparatively, a mere 2-6 percent of Tajik respondents reported engaging in demonstrations, boycotts, or strikes previously, and were fairly hesitant to engage to get involved in these actions in future (Figure 7). The one exception to this trend was the 13 percent of respondents who indicated that they might engage in a demonstration. The survey was conducted in January and February 2020 in Tajikistan, before any COVID-19 restrictions, which may have influenced citizens’ desire to engage in these forms of political action. Tajik respondents were less likely than their regional peers to engage in all four types of political activity (Figure 8).

Political activism may have been muted, but Tajik citizens were more active in their membership in every type of voluntary organization than their regional peers (Figure 9). On average, 26 percent of Tajik respondents to the 2020 WVS were members of each category of voluntary organization, surpassing the

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the 2020 WVS wave here and throughout the profile refers to the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2021 (EVS/WVS Wave 2017–2021) which is the most recent wave of WVS data. For more information, see Section 5.

<sup>7</sup> The Joint EVS/WVS regional means are calculated from the thirteen E&E region countries, which were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this was also the largest difference with regional peers, as Tajik respondents were 9 percentage points less likely than respondents from other E&E countries to report signing a petition.

regional mean by 19 percentage points. The most popular organizations—labor unions, political parties, religious organizations—attracted one-third or more of Tajik respondents among their members (Table 4).<sup>9</sup> Notably, Tajik respondents reported higher rates of membership across the board than their regional peers, even in the least popular voluntary organizations—self-help groups (18 percent), consumer groups (19 percent), and humanitarian groups (21 percent).

It is important to place the high levels of Tajik membership in voluntary organizations in context, given that the government places substantial restrictions on these institutions that constrain their activities. For example, labor unions are hampered by the legal restrictions of freedom of assembly and association noted in Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2021 Report,<sup>10</sup> which likely explains the nearly nonexistent reported participation of Tajiks in strikes. Political parties have limited room to engage in meaningful contestation for power, as the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan has banned or marginalized any legitimate opposition party. Religious organizations are subject to extensive oversight by the Committee on Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CRA), which has banned groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.<sup>11</sup>

Public trust in institutions was also relatively high in 2020 (Table 5): over half of respondents to the WVS said they were confident in their country’s institutions and gave high marks to the government overall<sup>12</sup> (89 percent), the military (86 percent), the police (81 percent), and the parliament (81 percent).<sup>13</sup> Tajik citizens were somewhat less confident, though still exceeding the regional average, in their views of environmental organizations (53 percent) and labor unions (45 percent). The Central Asia Barometer surveys (waves 2-5) conducted between November 2017 and June 2019 found that Tajik trust in the media was high

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<sup>9</sup> Tajik respondents also outstripped regional peers by large margins in their membership in these three voluntary organizations: labor unions (+29 percentage points), political parties (+28 percentage points), and religious organizations (+23 percentage points).

<sup>10</sup> The report notes that the “rights and the right to strike are undermined by general legal restrictions of freedoms of assembly and association.”

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2021>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tajikistan/>

<sup>12</sup> The World Values Survey confidence question includes a general option for “government” in addition to specific branches such as the civil service, courts, parliament, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Tajik confidence in their government and parliament exceeded the regional mean by the largest amounts (+47 percentage points and +45 percentage points, respectively).

overall (Table 5) but varied somewhat by modality with television viewed as most trustworthy, followed by radio, and newspapers.

Figure 6. Interest in Politics: Tajik Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2020

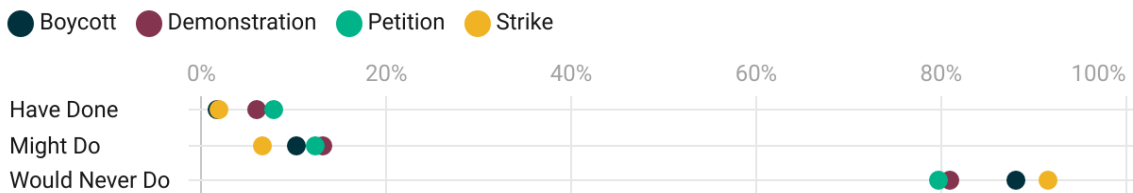


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Tajik respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2020, as compared to the regional average. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 7. Political Action: Tajik Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2020

Percentage of Respondents

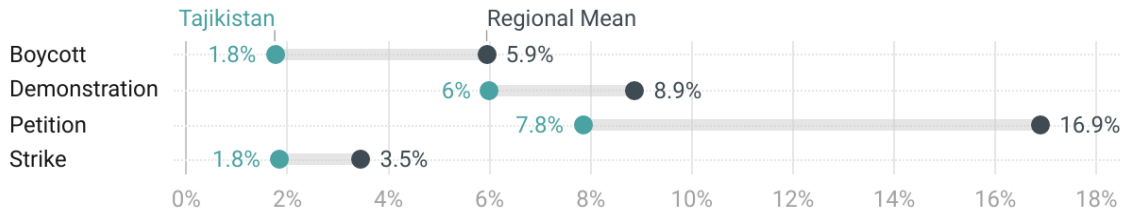


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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Tajik respondents reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and strike—as well as their future willingness to do so. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 8. Political Action: Participation by Tajik Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2020

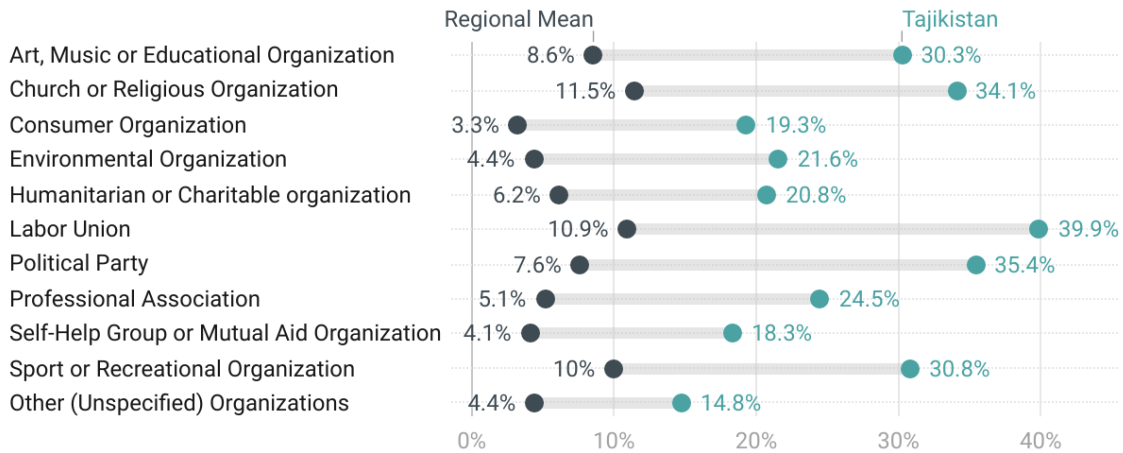
Percentage of Respondents Reporting "Have Done"



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Tajik respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action as compared to the regional average in 2020. Sources: The Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Voluntary Organization Membership: Tajik Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2020



Created with Datawrapper

NOTE: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Tajikistan. "Other community group" is the mean of responses for the following responses: "Art, music or educational organization," "Labor Union," "Environmental organization," "Professional association," "Humanitarian or charitable organization," "Consumer organization," "Self-help group, mutual aid group," "Other organization." Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.



Table 4. Tajik Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type versus Regional Peers, 2020

Voluntary Organization	Tajik Membership, 2020	Regional Mean Membership, 2020	Percentage Point Difference
Church or Religious Organization	34%	11%	+23
Sport or Recreational Organization	31%	10%	+21
Art, Music or Educational Organization	30%	9%	+22
Labor Union	40%	11%	+29
Political Party	35%	8%	+28
Environmental Organization	22%	4%	+17
Professional Association	25%	5%	+19
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	21%	6%	+15
Consumer Organization	19%	3%	+16
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	18%	4%	+14
Other Organization	15%	4%	+10

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Tajik respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2020 versus regional peers. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

Table 5. Citizen Trust in Media Institutions in Tajikistan, 2017 and 2019

Media Type	"Strongly Trust" - Nov. 2017	"Strongly Trust" - June 2019	Percentage Point Change in "Strongly Trust"	"Trust somewhat" - Wave 2 - Nov. 2017	"Trust somewhat" - Wave 5 - June 2019	Percentage Point Change in "Trust Somewhat"
TV	72%	54%	-18	19%	36%	+17
Newspaper	39%	32%	-7	15%	34%	+19
Radio	46%	41%	-5	11%	29%	+18
Average	52%	42%	-10	15%	33%	+18

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Tajik citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>14</sup> Overall, Tajikistan charted the highest civic engagement scores on the index in 2013,<sup>15</sup> 2017, and 2020, with corresponding lows in 2014-15<sup>16</sup> and 2021. Helping strangers was the main index component driving this variability,<sup>17</sup> and appeared to be moderately and positively correlated with overall performance of the economy.<sup>18</sup> When the economy performed better, Tajik citizens may have felt more secure in supporting their neighbors with their time and effort, though interestingly that did not extend to donating money to charitable causes.

Tajikistan surpassed its regional peers by an average of 8 points each year from 2010 to 2020—36 versus 28 points respectively (Figure 10).<sup>19</sup> During this 11-year period, 19 percent of Tajik respondents reportedly gave money to charity, 39 percent volunteered at an organization, and 51 percent helped a stranger. Comparatively, Tajikistan led the regional mean in volunteering and helping strangers by an average of 22 and 8 percentage points, respectively. It trailed its

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<sup>14</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month?, Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a "yes" answer. The country values are then calculated from the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

<sup>15</sup> The GWP recorded an 8-point jump in Tajikistan's Civic Engagement Index in 2013. This jump, driven by increases in charity (+13 percentage points over 2012) and helping strangers (+7 percentage points), was recorded in July, just four months before that year's presidential election. Outside observers and opposition parties recognized well ahead of time that the election would not be legitimately competitive.  
<https://www.ozodi.org/a/views-from-abroad-about-tajikistan-next-presidential-election/25044872.html>

<sup>16</sup> In 2015, coinciding with parliamentary elections, Tajikistan charted its lowest index score since 2010 (30 index points).

<sup>17</sup> Helping strangers was strongly correlated with overall index performance (0.828\*\* at p=0.002).

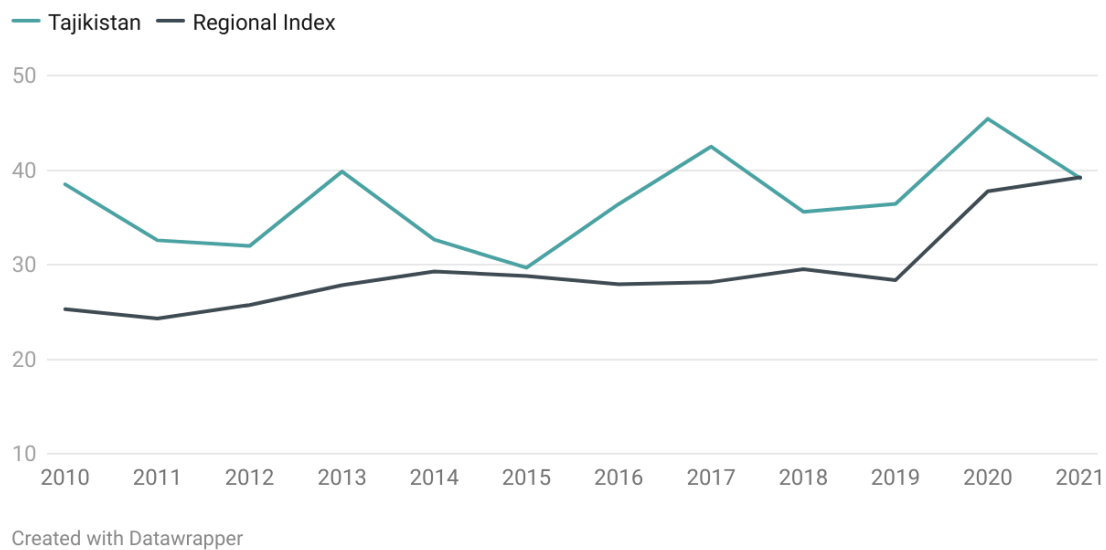
<sup>18</sup> Helping a stranger moderately correlates with GDP (constant Tajikistan Somoni) at 0.758\*, p = 0.022, but charitable contributions and volunteering did not appear to move with the economy.

<sup>19</sup> The regional mean is calculated from all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception, as Gallup World Poll fieldwork was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan in 2020, and Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Montenegro in 2021. For further information, see Section 5.

regional peers in charitable donations by 6 percentage points on average between 2010 and 2020.

Tajikistan’s civic engagement scores peaked in 2020, largely driven by a surge in citizens volunteering (+10 percentage points) and helping strangers (+16 percentage points). This uptick was consistent with increased civic engagement activity across the region possibly related to COVID-19,<sup>20</sup> though may also have been spurred by the Tajik 2020 presidential election. Tajikistan’s civic engagement tapered off in 2021 from the previous year, but the majority of Tajiks still reported helping a stranger (60 percent) and 43 percent volunteered. Charitable donations was Tajikistan’s weakest performing metric, as only 15 percent of Tajiks reported such activity in 2021—less than half of the regional mean (38 percent).

Figure 10. Civic Engagement Index: Tajikistan versus Regional Peers



*Notes: This graph shows how scores for Tajikistan varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2021, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries.*

*Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2021.*

<sup>20</sup> The anomaly of 2020 appears to have improved civic engagement index scores worldwide, despite lockdowns and limitations on gathering. Given the impacts of COVID-19 worldwide, survey values for 2020 are unlikely to be a reliable indicator of trends but speak to reactions to a unique crisis. For nearly all of the E&E countries with survey results from 2020, the Civic Engagement Index improved.

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Tajikistan

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Tajikistan (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Tajikistan's Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 27 known Tajik civic organizations via 46 civic space-relevant projects in Tajikistan during the period of January 2015 to August 2021. Moscow prefers to directly engage and build relationships with individual civic actors, as opposed to investing in broader-based institutional development, which accounted for only two percent of its overtures (1 project). The country attracted the fifth-largest volume of Russian civic space activities, trailing Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Armenia, and Moldova in the number of projects and recipient organizations.

In line with its strategy elsewhere, the Kremlin emphasized promoting Russian linguistic and cultural ties, engagement with youth groups, and outreach to Russian compatriots. There was a high concentration of activity in 2019, before a slight downturn in 2020 and 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 11).

## Figure 11. Russian Projects Supporting Tajik Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (46)	Institutional Development (1)
2015	2	0
2016	6	0
2017	3	0
2018	8	0
2019	17	1
2020	7	0
2021	3	0

Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The Kremlin routed its engagement in Tajikistan through 14 different channels (Figure 12), including government ministries, language and culture-focused funds, youth unions, think tanks, and the Russian Embassy in Dushanbe. The stated missions of these Russian government entities tend to emphasize themes such as education and culture promotion, public diplomacy, and outreach to compatriots living abroad. However, not all of these Russian state organs were equally important. Rossotrudnichestvo<sup>21</sup>—an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a mandate to promote political and economic cooperation abroad—supplied over 89 percent of all known Kremlin-backed support (23 organizations via 41 projects).

<sup>21</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.

Rossotrudnichestvo was the main conduit for projects, with other Russian organizations serving in a secondary role. Rossotrudnichestvo's most common collaborator was the Embassy in Bishkek (13 joint projects). For one-off activities, Rossotrudnichestvo also brought in organizations such as Russkiy Mir, which organized a December 2017 roundtable promoting the Russian language, and the Public Organization "Invalids of the War in Afghanistan" for a World War II (WWII) commemoration. Several organizations also conducted their own projects independently including the Embassy in Dushanbe, the Ministry of Education together with the National Council of Youth and Children's Associations of Russia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Department for Church Charity and Social Service of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In 2019, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs was the only organization to support an activity connected to the institutional development of civic space when it signed cooperation agreements with Tajikistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs. These proposals focused on improved cooperation between Russian and Tajik investigative units and detection of drug trafficking. The Kremlin provided funding to training and the development of institutions surrounding civic space, most prominently law enforcement and judicial authorities. Since drug-related charges are a popular tool of governments across the region to harass political opposition figures and activists, it is plausible that Tajik authorities could weaponize this additional capacity to constrain civic space.

Two Kremlin-affiliated organizations—the Gorchakov Fund<sup>22</sup> and Russkiy Mir<sup>23</sup>—departed from their typical strategies. Frequently on par with Rossotrudnichestvo in both number of projects and partner organizations elsewhere in the E&E region, the Gorchakov Fund did not support any known projects in Tajikistan. This deviation from the Kremlin's playbook, might be a function of the restrictions placed by the Tajik government on foreign funding for non-governmental organizations, as the Fund's primary role in other countries is to write grants for local organizations to host roundtables or other

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<sup>22</sup> Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs.

<sup>23</sup> Formally the Russian World Foundation, founded in 2007 to promote Russian language and the notion of "Russian World" ideology through education projects.

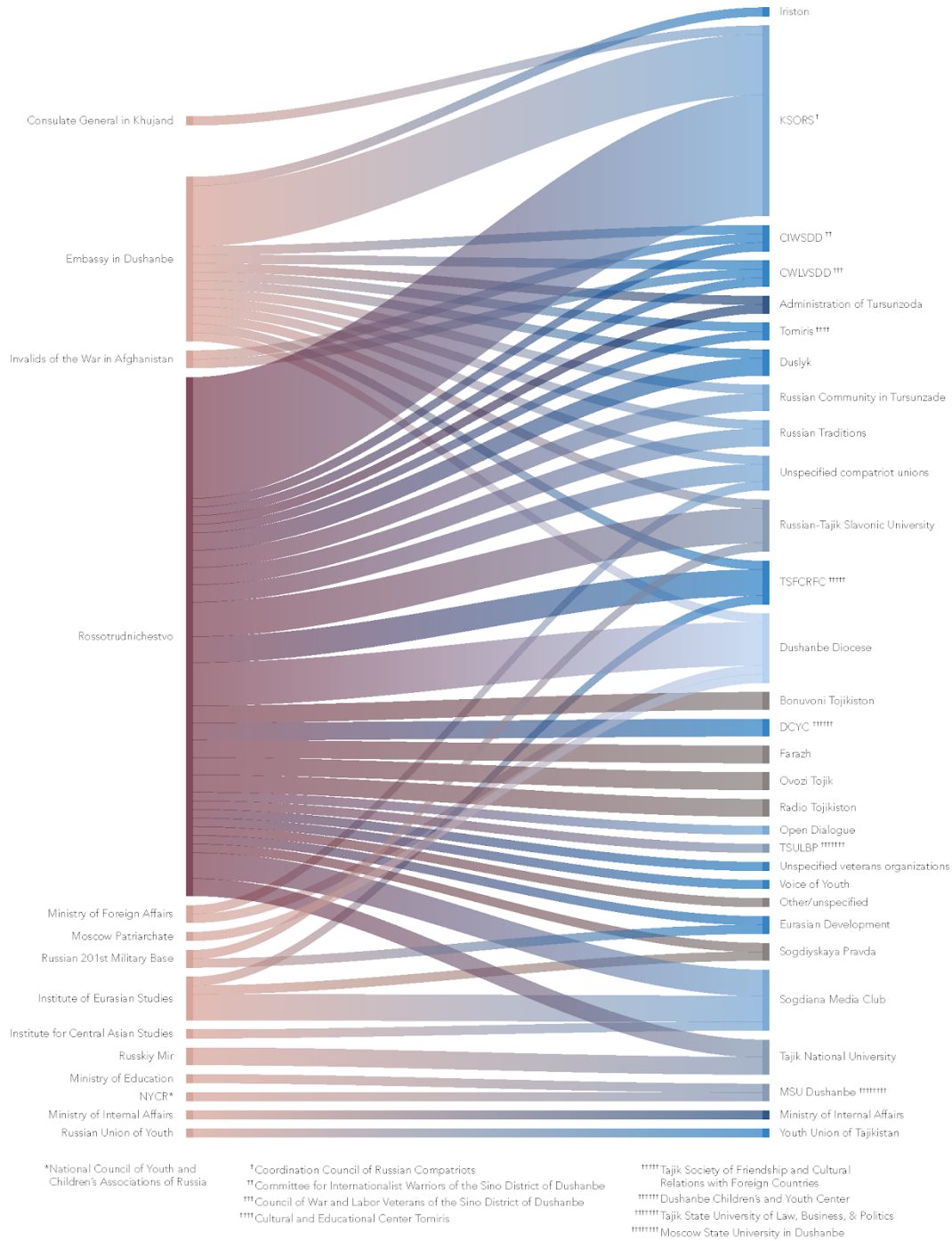
events. Although Russkiy Mir<sup>24</sup> did support two Russian language promotion events in December 2017 and January 2018, subsequently Rossotrudnichestvo took point instead on the vast majority of Russian language-related projects in Tajikistan.

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<sup>24</sup> Russkiy Mir primarily focuses on promoting Russian language, often through opening up language centers, akin to Germany's Goethe-Instituts or China's Confucius Centers.

Figure 12. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Tajik Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects



*such that thicker lines represent a larger volume of projects and thinner lines a smaller volume. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Tajikistan's Civic Space

Compatriot unions<sup>25</sup> and civil society organizations (CSOs) were the two most common beneficiaries of Russian state-backed overtures, named in 50 and 30 percent of identified projects, respectively. Other recipients of the Kremlin's attention included churches, schools, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The largest share of Russian projects was channeled through the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots (KSORS)—an umbrella union for organizations focused on outreach to Russian compatriots—which was involved in up 30 percent of Russian activities (14 projects).<sup>26</sup> The KSORS also served as an initial connection point between several other organizations and the Russian Embassy and Rossotrudnichestvo, helping facilitate their programs. The KSORS partnered with the Cultural and Educational Center Tomiris, the Dushanbe Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the compatriot union “Russian Traditions.” This is generally similar to Russia's partnership with compatriot unions elsewhere in the region.

Among CSO recipients, the Tajik Society of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries attracted the most projects (3) between December 2016 and June 2020. The Dushanbe Children's and Youth Center and Tatar-Bashkir

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<sup>25</sup> Russia has centered compatriot unions within their soft power toolkit since 2013, with these unions funded by Russian agencies and with the Embassy coordinating and approving membership. Through these groups, the Kremlin aims to “organize and coordinate the Russian diaspora living in foreign countries to support the objectives and interests of Russian foreign policy under the direction of Russian departments... to influence decisions taken in the host countries, by guiding the Russian-speaking population, and by using influence operations inherited from the KGB, and also by simply financing various activities.” Estonian Internal Security Service, 2013. pp. 5–6 <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

<sup>26</sup> The KSORS appears to have been founded by Russian organizations but is composed of residents of Tajikistan who elect their own representatives and leadership. However, it should be noted that part of Russia's compatriot policy includes readily issuing Russian passports to “compatriots”, further muddying the ability to distinguish citizens of Tajikistan vs. non-citizens in these compatriot unions. <https://vecherka.tj/archives/19699>

National Cultural Center (TBNKTs) "Duslyk" were each involved in two projects. The Sogdiana Media Club, founded by the Moscow-based Institute of Eurasian Studies and the Sughd region's Russian language newspaper Sogdiyskaya Pravda, was another frequent partner for Russian agencies. The Media Club, whose mission is to deepen Russian ties to Tajik media outlets, co-organized several trainings for the next generation of journalists. For example, in October 2019, it hosted a television journalism course supported by three Russian bodies: the Institute for Eurasian Studies, the Institute for Central Asian Studies, and Rossotrudnichestvo. Other media organizations also received direct Russian support via Russian language courses for their journalists, including magazines Bonuvoni Tojikiston and Farazh, and radio stations Ovozi Tojik and Radio Tojikiston.

Universities were an important channel for Russian outreach to Tajik youth. Via a series of eight projects, Russian agencies hosted events at Tajik universities, sometimes in coordination with a CSO or compatriot union, and covering a variety of topics from Russian language and culture to contemporary security and military issues. Compared to other E&E countries, there was a noticeable lack of direct Kremlin engagement with primary or secondary schools in Tajikistan. Instead, the Russian government opted to host events focused on younger children at its own facilities.

Although only one percent of Tajik citizens follow any form of Christianity, the Dushanbe Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church was still an important recipient of 13 percent of the Kremlin's civic space-oriented projects.<sup>27</sup> However, in a departure from its usual strategy, Rossotrudnichestvo hosted four of six events it co-hosted at its own offices in Dushanbe and Tursunzoda, rather than its typical approach of using Orthodox churches' space.

Two government entities—the Tajik Ministry of Internal Affairs and the municipal government of the city of Tursunzoda—also received support from the Kremlin on projects relevant to Tajikistan's civic space. In 2019, the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced a series of cooperation agreements with Russian counterparts to improve investigative collaboration with the potential to enhance the capacity

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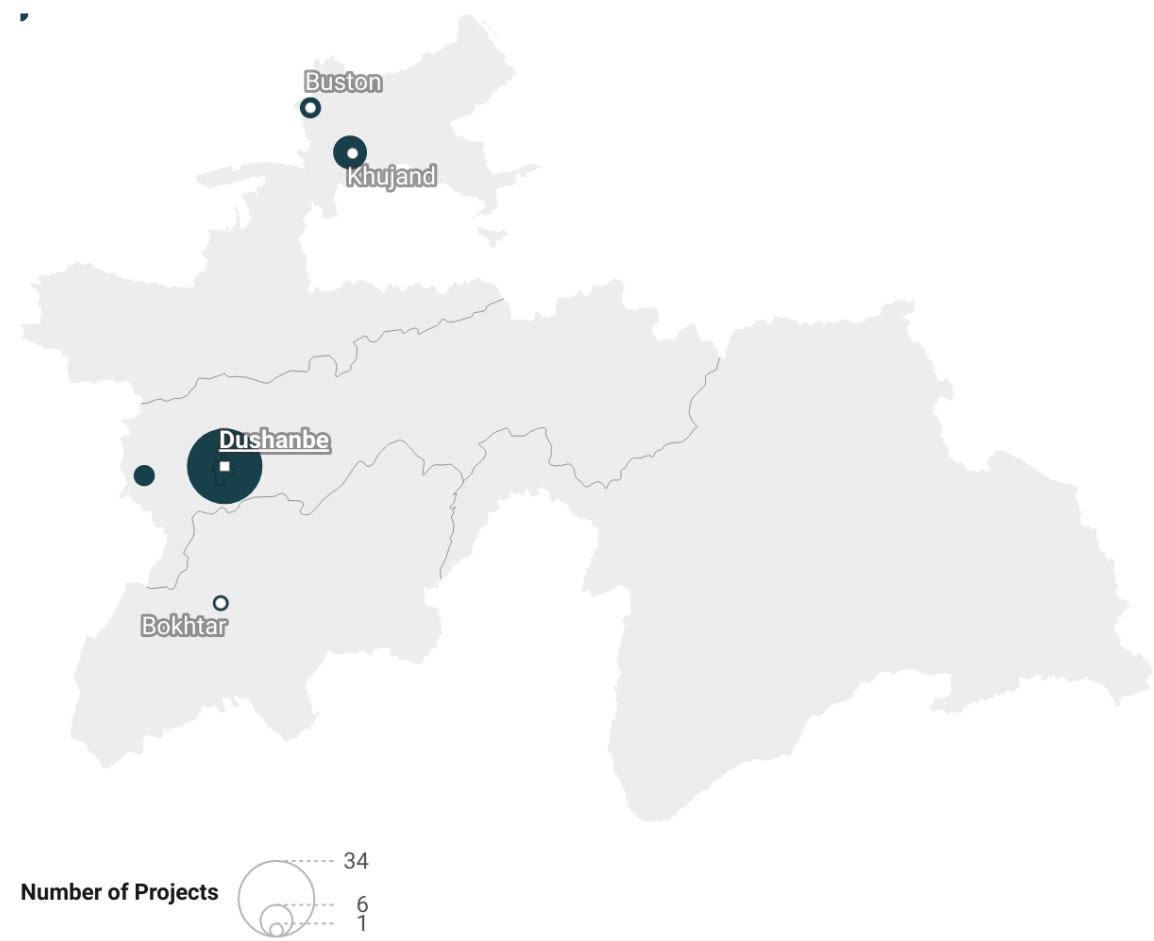
<sup>27</sup> By comparison, in the neighboring Kyrgyz Republic, Russia deprioritized religious outreach, with only 2 percent of total projects in the Kyrgyz Republic benefiting religious organizations.

of Tajik regulators to target civic activists and constrain civic space. In January 2021, municipal leaders of Tursunzoda collaborated with the Russian Embassy, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Dushanbe Diocese, and the “Russian Community in Tursunzade” compatriot union to open a new Rossotrudnichestvo center in the city.

Russian projects were primarily directed to the capital of Dushanbe (74 percent, 34 projects), followed by Khujand (13 percent, 6 projects), and Buston and Tursunzoda which each partnered with the Kremlin on 2 projects (Figure 13). The Kremlin’s preference for concentrating activity in the capital and other major metropolitan areas is consistent across most of the E&E region. We do not observe a similar geographic skew to Russia’s civic space activities favoring autonomous or separatist areas in Tajikistan, that we have observed in other E&E counties.

Figure 13. Locations of Russian Support to Tajik Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Tajikistan. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Tajikistan's Civic Space

The vast majority of Russian state-backed projects to Tajikistan's civic space promoted education and culture (89 percent, 41 projects)—from partnerships with Tajik CSOs to engage youth and the Tatar-Bashkir National Cultural Center (TBNKTs) "Duslyk" to promote Tatar to a broader emphasis on Russian language and culture.

Youth-oriented projects accounted for 35 percent of Russia’s support to civic space in Tajikistan (16 projects). Many of these events were holiday celebrations to teach Tajik children lessons in Russian patriotism. The June 2017 Day of Russia celebration co-hosted by the Tajik organization Iriston, and the Russian Embassy in Dushanbe is one such example. Events also frequently involved round tables where students discussed the relationship between Russia and Tajikistan, like the December 2016 forum for young compatriots hosted by Rossotrudnichestvo and KSORS, with the support of the Embassy. The Kremlin has even facilitated trips for Tajik youth activists to visit Russia, such as bringing Tajik participants to participate in the Youth Forum of Russia and Tajikistan in late April 2019.

Promoting the Russian language was the second-most common theme within Kremlin support (28 percent, 13 projects). Aimed at youth and adults alike, these activities ranged from a celebration of Pushkin’s poetry to advanced training courses for Russian language and literature teachers co-hosted by Rossotrudnichestvo and KSORS. Rossotrudnichestvo hosted meetings to promote Russian as a language of “friendship and dialogue” and of “interethnic communication.”

In addition to Russian culture and language, Rossotrudnichestvo supported two projects promoting Tatar and Bashkir culture. The Russian center partnered with the Tatar-Bashkir National Cultural Center (TBNKTs) "Duslyk" on both of these projects. In June 2019, Rossotrudnichestvo and the Embassy joined Duslyk in hosting a Sabantuy festival. And in February 2021, Rossotrudnichestvo and Duslyk brought together youth activists for an online conference ahead of the World Congress of Tatars.

There was not a major emphasis on religious themes in the Kremlin’s engagement in Tajikistan, even in its collaborations with the Dushanbe Diocese which tended to emphasize cultural rather than religious ties between the two countries.<sup>28</sup> For example, in March 2015, the Dushanbe Diocese, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a conference on lessons from WWII and in 2019 joined in hosting a “summer

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<sup>28</sup> Only four projects identified had overt religious themes.

colors” dance festival. This is somewhat distinct from the profile of the Kremlin’s partnership with the Orthodox church elsewhere in the region, where it makes a show of donating large sums of money or holy relics.

“The Great Patriotic War” is a common feature in the Kremlin’s civic space projects in Tajikistan (9 percent, 4 projects), sometimes in the form of stand-alone roundtables but often included as a theme within broader concerts or language programs. As a case in point: a Kremlin-supported December 2020 festival for Tajik secondary school students entitled “Ural Patterns” was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of Russian victory in WWII.<sup>29</sup> Although these WWII events commemorate the past, the Kremlin also uses these activities to reinforce a narrative that portrays its enemies as contemporary Nazis which creates a pretext for future Russian intervention. Celebrating the heroism of Soviet forces against Nazi Germany primes counterpart audiences to accept that anti-Kremlin forces are fascists and cultivate public sympathy for future Russian actions. In an indication that the theme of Russia as a regional protector is taking root, Tajik organizations hosted similar roundtables even without Kremlin support. For example, in May 2018, Tajikistan’s Center for Strategic Studies and the “Friends of Russia” Public Association hosted a discussion on the “huge contribution” of Tajik and Russian leadership “to providing security and stability in the region.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Tajik civic actors a total of 18 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Half of these mentions (9 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining half (9 instances) consisted of mentions of foreign and intergovernmental civic space actors. Russian state media covered a diverse set of civic actors, mentioning 7 organizations by name as well as 3 informal groups operating in Tajikistan. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/1505498853042696/posts/2788495884742980/>;  
<https://tjk.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/80490>

<sup>30</sup> <http://asiaplus.news/en/news/tajikistan/security/20180529/contribution-of-tajikistan-and-russia-to-providing-security-along-the-cis-southern-borders-discussed-in-dushanbe/>. Notes: due to the lack of a Russian organization supporting this activity, this is not included in this profile’s aggregate figures.

seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Tajik citizens, we also analyzed 32 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with the Tajikistan: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. In this section, we examine Russian state media coverage of domestic and external civic space actors, how this has evolved over time, and the portrayal of democratic institutions and Western powers to Tajik audiences.

### 3.2.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Tajik Civic Space Actors

Roughly half (56 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Tajikistan's civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 3 named domestic actors represent different organizational types, ranging from political parties to media outlets. Political parties are the most frequently mentioned organization type (3 mentions), followed by other community organizations (1 mention) and media outlets (1 mention). The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) accounted for all political party mentions (3 mentions).

Russian state media mentions of specific Tajik civic space actors were mostly neutral (60 percent) in tone and they used Tajik media, the Geophysical Service of Tajikistan's Academy of Sciences, and the state-owned Khovar News Agency as local media sources. However, there was an exception to this rule: 2 "extremely negative" mentions of the IRPT, an opposition party banned from operating in Tajikistan in 2015 after the Tajik government accused the organization of terrorism.<sup>31</sup> In 2018, Russian state media covered Tajik government claims that the IRPT was responsible for a terrorist attack against two tourists, even though the Islamic State (ISIL) took credit for the attack.<sup>32</sup> The designation of IRPT as a terrorist organization is controversial, as the Tajik government did not provide substantive evidence that IRPT engaged in terrorist

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<sup>31</sup> "The Case of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan." Columbia Global Freedom of Expression. Published 2019.  
<https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/case-islamic-renaissance-party-tajikistan/>

<sup>32</sup> "UPDATE - Two Foreign Tourists Stabbed in Tajikistan Remain in Hospital – Health Ministry." Sputnik News Service. Published August 3, 2018.

activities.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Russian state media coverage supported the Tajik government’s narrative about the Islamist opposition party.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 4 generalized mentions of 2 informal civic groups during the same period. Russian state media assigned neutral coverage to “Tajik media” (3 mentions) and “local NGOs” (1 mention).

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Grand Total
Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)	2	0	1	3
Tajik Media	0	0	3	3
Geophysical Service of Tajikistan’s Academy of Sciences	0	0	1	1
Khovar News Agency	0	0	1	1
Non-Governmental Organizations	0	0	1	1

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Tajik Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (9 instances) to external actors in the Tajik civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 2 intergovernmental organizations (2 mentions) and 2 foreign organizations (6 mentions) by name, as well as 1 general foreign actor (1 mention). Intergovernmental organizations monitoring security threats in Tajikistan and foreign media outlets reporting in the country dominated the external mentions. Russian state media mentions of

<sup>33</sup> “Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Tajikistan.” U.S. Department of State. Published 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/tajikistan/>



external civic space actors in Tajikistan were entirely neutral (100 percent) in tone and exclusively focused on Russian-affiliated actors. This included self-mentions of TASS and Sputnik related to interviewing people on the ground in Tajikistan, references to Kremlin-led inter-governmental organizations (i.e., CSTO, CIS), or other foreign media.

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Tajikistan by Sentiment

External Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Grand Total
TASS	0	0	5	5
Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	0	0	1	1
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	0	0	1	1
Sputnik	0	0	1	1
Foreign Media	0	0	1	1

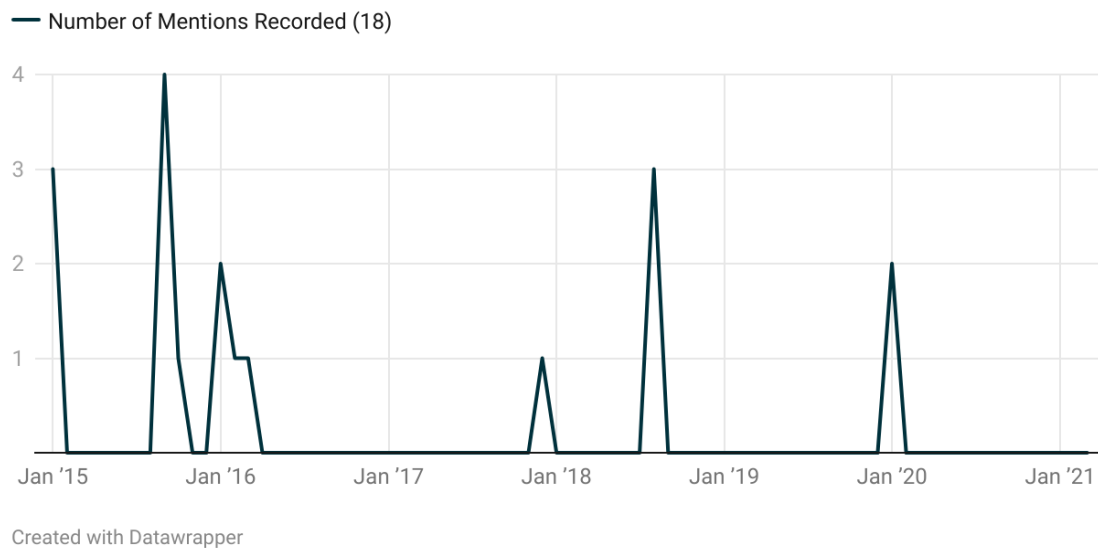
*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Tajikistan between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Tajik Civic Space over Time

Elsewhere in the region, Russian state media mentions of civic space actors spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. However, this general trend does not appear to hold in Tajikistan, as many key civic space events fail to have mentions. Notably, there was no spike in mentions of civic space actors during the 2020 Tajik Presidential election, nor the 2015 or 2020 Parliamentary elections. The largest spike in mentions (4 instances) was in September 2015, when Abduhalim Nazarzoda led an attempted coup against the incumbent government. These mentions are mostly neutral, Except for “extremely negative” mentions of the IRPT, who was accused of assisting Nazarzoda with the coup attempt. The low number of Russian state media mentions of civic actors may say more about the Tajik government’s extensive

restrictions of civil society, rather than a lack of interest on the part of the Kremlin.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 14. Russian State Media Mentions of Tajik Civic Space Actors  
Number of Mentions Recorded



*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Tajik civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Tajik citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Tajikistan.<sup>35</sup> Between January 2015 and March 2021, two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced four of these keywords a total of 32 times with reference to Tajikistan: North

<sup>34</sup> Sultanalieva, Syinat. "Time to Call Out Tajikistan's Human Rights Crackdown." Human Rights Watch. Published November 1, 2021.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/01/time-call-out-tajikistans-human-rights-crackdown#>.

<sup>35</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (19 instances), the United States (8 instances), the European Union (3 instances), and the “West” (2 instances). No mentions of democracy in relation to Tajikistan were recorded.

Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Grand Total
NATO	1	1	17	0	19
European Union	0	1	1	1	3
United States	2	3	3	0	8
Democracy*	0	0	0	0	0
West	0	2	0	0	2

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to four key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021. The term “democracy” received no relevant mentions to Tajikistan in Russian state-owned media during the January 2015–March 2021 timeframe. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Russian state media mentioned NATO most frequently (19 instances) in reference to Tajikistan. The majority of these mentions were neutral (89 percent) and refer to NATO code names for aircraft and military equipment. The negative mentions—1 “somewhat” and 1 “extremely” negative—largely relate to U.S. and NATO missions in Afghanistan. Russian state media emphasized the failures of NATO in Afghanistan, stating “NATO’s poor advances in the alliance’s longstanding anti-terrorist struggle in Afghanistan calls into question its ability to defeat both the Taliban and IS.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Russian state media sought to discredit the role of NATO and the United States as effective counter-terrorism missions in Central Asia to reinforce the narrative that countries in the region should not rely on NATO or the United States for assistance.

The European Union (EU) received 1 neutral mention, 1 “somewhat positive” mention, and 1 “somewhat negative” mention. Russian state media covered the

<sup>36</sup> “Washington Wants to Pour Millions of Dollars in This Country.” Sputnik News Service. Published March 11, 2016.

EU positively for 2019 bilateral talks between Tajikistan and the EU focused on improving relations. However, Russian state media in 2016 covered the EU negatively for development aid to Tajikistan that Russia claimed was to “wean Tajikistan away from Russia.”<sup>37</sup> Consistent with other findings from countries in this region, the Russian government perceives closeness between Tajikistan and the West as directly contrary to Russian interests and uses their state media to reflect this.

Russian state media coverage of the United States was most frequently negative (63 percent of mentions), particularly playing up perceived American failures in the region. One illustrative article stated, “With the U.S.-led Western coalition having failed to restore peace in Afghanistan, Russia is supplying its military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with modern weapons and is strengthening cooperation with its SCO partners.”<sup>38</sup> Here, Sputnik makes a direct comparison between the U.S. and Russia, using its state media to signal to Tajikistan that closeness with the United States is not an option.

Russian state media coverage of “the West” was also “somewhat negative” in the context of building a broader narrative of Western failures, similar to that described with the U.S. and NATO coverage.

In sum, Russian state media fails to report on many major civil society events in Tajikistan but makes a major effort to highlight the failures of U.S. and Western involvement in Central Asia. Russian state media reinforces the Tajik government’s preferred narratives by calling IRPT a terrorist organization, and then promotes messaging that Western counter-terrorist campaigns are weak.

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<sup>37</sup> “Washington Wants to Pour Millions of Dollars in This Country.” Sputnik News Service. Published March 11, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> “Collective East’: Why Russia is Reinforcing Its Military Bases in Central Asia.” Sputnik News Service. Published June 11, 2017.

## 4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Tajikistan and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Tajikistan and discredit voices wary of its regional ambitions.

The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in mutually reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S. and the West, as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy. It used its cultural and language programming to bolster ties with Tajik youth and Russian compatriots. In parallel, Russian state media sought to discredit the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and amplify narratives of perceived security failures of the U.S. and allies in the region.

Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org).

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from three primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Tajikistan; and (ii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions.

Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2017 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions, such that we may find additional instances that took place in the period in future updates. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

Survey data on citizen perceptions of civic space were collected from three sources: the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021, the Gallup World Poll (2010-2021), and the Central Asia Barometer Waves 2 through 5. These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the three surveys and the exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 7 in Tajikistan was conducted in Tajik and Russian between January and February 2020 with a nationally representative sample of

1200 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>39</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable “computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases.”<sup>40</sup>

The E&E region countries included in the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 dataset, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested have you been in politics over the last 2 years?” were first collapsed from “Very interested,” “Somewhat interested,” “Not very interested,” and “Not at all interested” into the two categories: “Interested” and “Not interested.” Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

Regional means for the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group, etc.). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. For our analysis purposes, we collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to

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<sup>39</sup> See

<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>.

<sup>40</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ss0ar.70110>.

“Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service, etc.). Respondents to the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>41</sup>

The Central Asia Barometer Wave 2 was conducted in Tajikistan between October and November 2017, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. Central Asia Barometer Wave 5 was conducted in Tajikistan between May and June 2019, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. The Central Asia Barometer trust indicator uses the question “In general, how strongly do you trust or distrust (Insert Item) media? Would you say you...” with respondents provided the following choices: “Strongly trust,” “Trust somewhat,” “Distrust somewhat,” “Strongly distrust,” “Refused,” and “Don’t Know/Not sure” for Television, Newspaper, and the Radio.<sup>42</sup>

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2010-2021, except for the countries that did not complete

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<sup>41</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

<sup>42</sup> For full documentation of Central Asia Barometer survey waves, see: <https://ca-barometer.org/en/cab-database>



fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. In 2018, the survey was conducted with 3,000 adults, and in 2019 the survey was conducted with 1,080 adults rather than 1,000. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The survey was conducted in Tajik and Russian each year from 2010 to 2015, and Tajik only from 2016 on.

The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens' willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: "Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Tajikistan's country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

### 5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants,

joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources.

While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

## 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData, during an initial round of pilot coding, was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Tajikistan. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news.

Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. These numbers and the sentiment distribution are subject to change as AidData refines its methodology. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.