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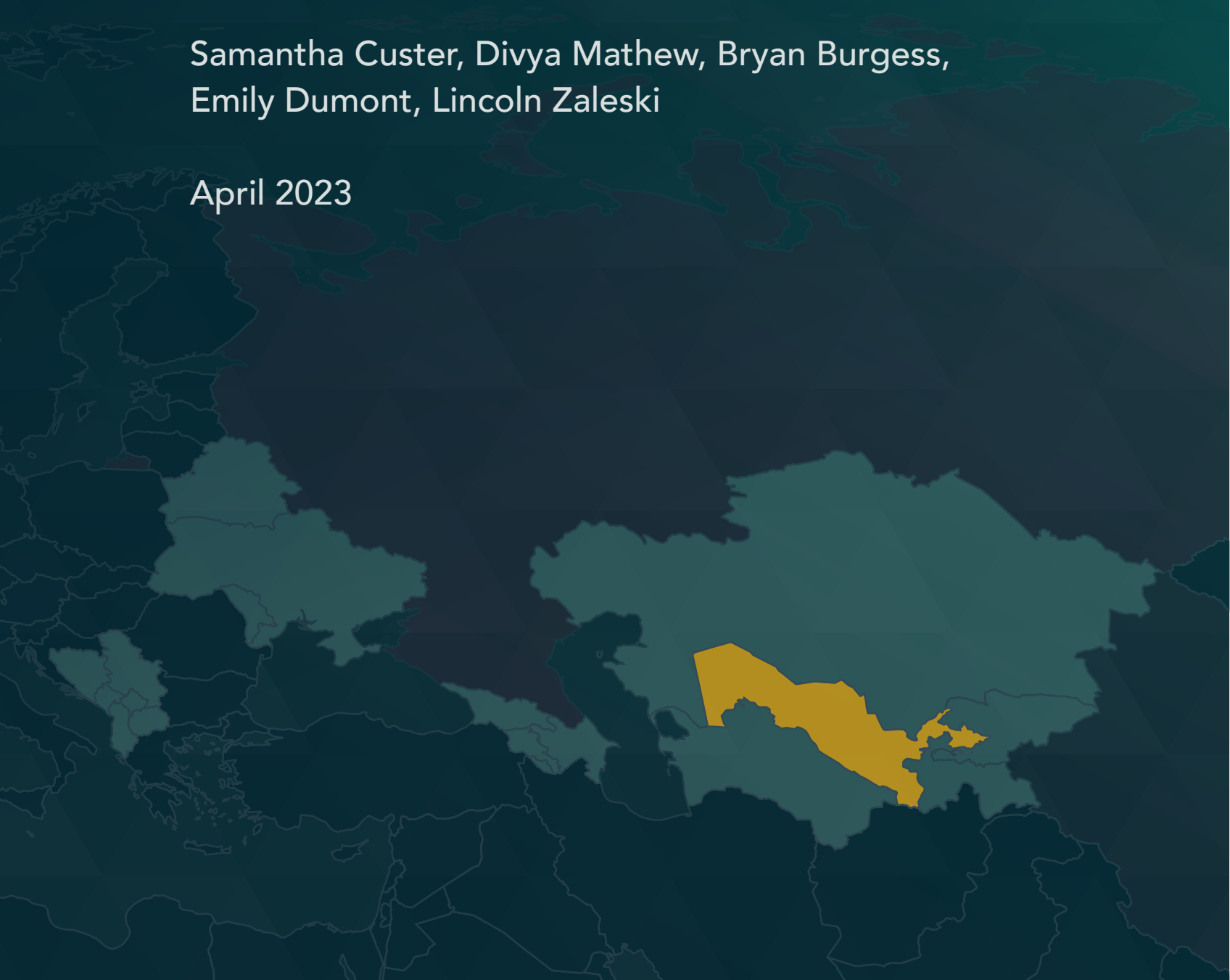
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

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

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Uzbekistan'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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Uzbek civic space actors were the targets of 99 restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021. Seventy-six percent of these restrictions involved harassment or violence, followed by state-backed legal cases (16 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (8 percent). Over one-third of the cases were recorded in 2017 alone. Journalists were the most frequently targeted (36 percent) and the Uzbek government the primary initiator. One restriction involved Kyrgyz authorities working at the behest of the Uzbek government to extradite and harass a known Uzbek activist.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Seventy-nine percent of Uzbek respondents "strongly" or "somewhat" trusted the media in 2017 and 2019; however, there was some shifting from reporting strong trust (-14 percentage points) to a more lukewarm response of "somewhat" trust (+14 percentage points) between the two years. Citizens generally trusted

television most (95 percent), with trust in newspapers and radio at approximately 70 percent. Uzbek citizens reported higher apolitical civic engagement than regional peers (+14 points on average) from 2010 to 2019. During this ten-year period, 38 percent of Uzbek respondents on average gave money to charity, 30 percent volunteered, and 56 percent helped a stranger. There was no data available to assess the level of more political forms of civic engagement or public trust in institutions other than the media.

- Russian-backed Civic Space Projects: The Kremlin supported 16 Uzbek civic organizations via 22 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Projects promoted Russian linguistic and cultural ties, along with outreach to Russian compatriots. The preponderance of the Kremlin's attention was focused on Tashkent, which accounted for 95 percent of its activities. Civil society organizations received most of the Kremlin's support (36 percent). Although 12 Kremlin-affiliated agencies were involved, Rossotrudnichestvo was most prolific, supporting 10 organizations via 14 projects.
- Russian State-run Media: Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Uzbek civic actors 68 times from January 2015 to March 2021; however, the majority of these mentions (62 percent) related to foreign and intergovernmental actors operating in the country. Of the domestic organizations mentioned by name, political parties were most frequently mentioned, followed by other community organizations. Eighty percent of Russian state media mentions of specific Uzbek civic space actors were neutral in tone.

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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 Uzbekistan? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> Due to the challenging survey environment of Uzbekistan, and logistical difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some indicators used in other E&E countries were unavailable.

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 opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Uzbek civic space, we examined two

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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.

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 Uzbekistan 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 (July 2010–July 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics [unavailable]</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) [unavailable]</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 [unavailable]</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 [only trust in media is available]</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>
<p>Russian state media mentions of civic space actors</p> <p>(January 2015–March 2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Uzbekistan by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan by Russian state-owned media</li> </ul>

*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Uzbekistan’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 Uzbekistan

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 Uzbekistan over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Uzbeks engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

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

Uzbek civic space actors experienced 99 known restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (76 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (16 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (8 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 Uzbek Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q 1	Total
Harassment/Violence	30	14	17	7	7	75
Restrictive Legislation	2	1	1	3	1	8
State-backed Legal Cases	6	5	4	1	0	16
Total	38	20	22	11	8	99

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Uzbekistan, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Uzbekistan 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 Uzbek civic space actors were unevenly distributed across this time period (Figure 1). Over a third of the cases were recorded in 2017 alone. There were only 8 restrictions recorded in the first quarter of 2021. Journalists and other members of the media were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, featuring in 36 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by individual activists and advocates (21 percent).

The Uzbek government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 66 recorded mentions. The majority of restrictions involved police actions to harass journalists and detain activists who criticized the authorities (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 3 restrictions and there were a number of incidents involving unidentified assailants (7 mentions). By virtue of the way that the indicator was defined, the initiators of 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).

<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.

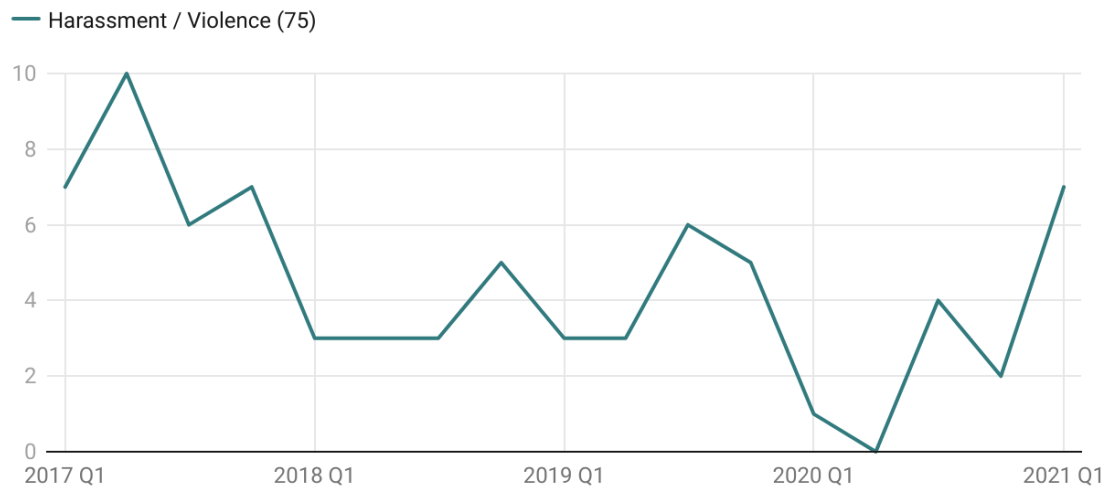
There was one recorded instance during this period, where the Uzbek government collaborated with a foreign government, to harass a civic space actor:

- In August 2020, the Kyrgyz Republic extradited Uzbek journalist, Bobomurod Abdullayev, despite international human rights groups raising concerns that Abdullayev could be tortured and persecuted upon his return to Uzbekistan. Abdullayev had originally been detained by Kyrgyz authorities for unspecified crimes, at the request of the Uzbek government. He was interrogated by the Uzbek Security Committee and placed under house arrest upon his arrival in Tashkent.

## Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Uzbekistan

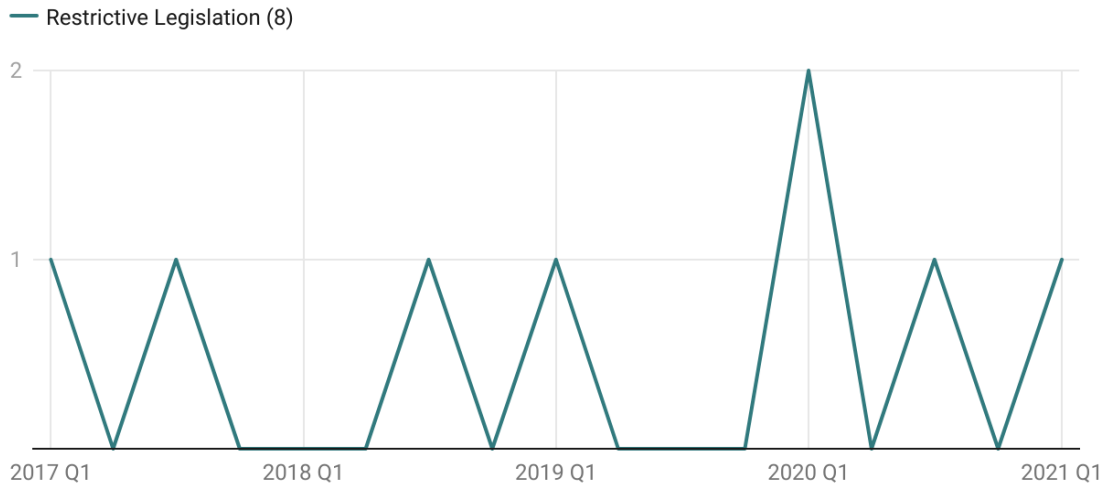
Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



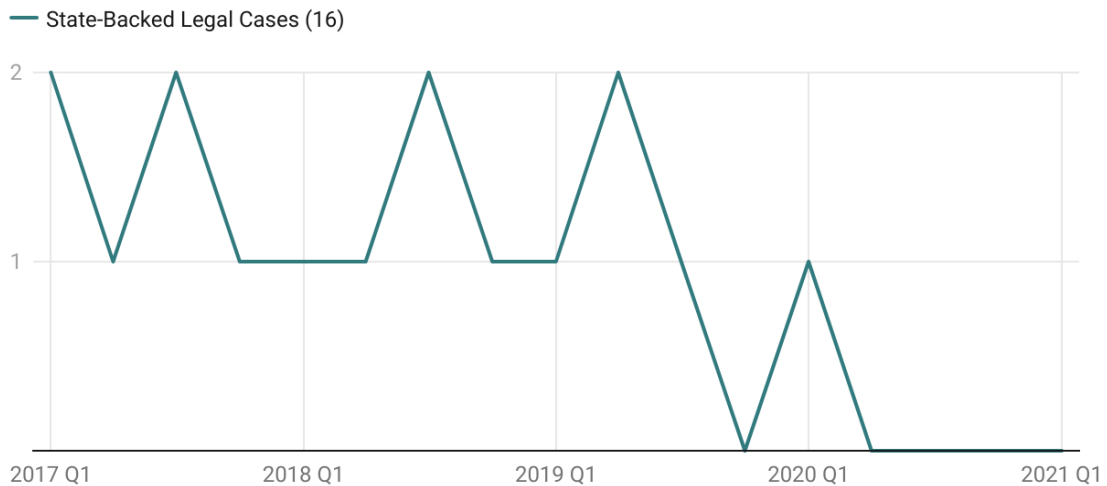
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## Restrictive Legislation



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## State-backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Uzbekistan

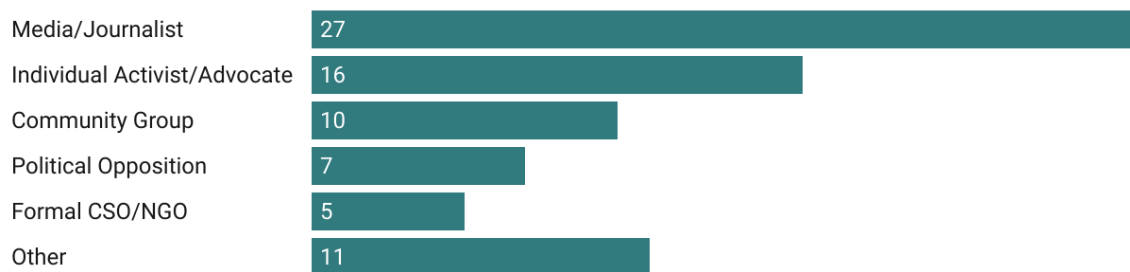
January 2017	Uzbekistan's Supreme Court grants a mass amnesty to 39,748 convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial. The amnesty was passed by parliament last October and entered force this month.
June 2017	Following a leaked audio recording in which President Shavkat Mirziyoyev harshly criticizes officials in charge of finance and banking, he dismisses key rival Rustam Asimov from the post of first deputy prime minister.
December 2017	Uzbekistan's state news agency UzA reported that the Finance Ministry

	has sacked 562 employees after President Mirziyoyev ordered it to root out inefficiency and get rid of what he had called "rats" tarnishing its reputation.
October 2018	President Mirziyoyev makes his first trip to an EU country, meeting President Macron in Paris and signing partnership agreements with French companies including nuclear company Orano. Shortly after, Russian President Putin visits President Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan and work begins at the country's first nuclear power plant, costing \$11 billion and set to begin operations in 2028.
April 2019	Saida Mirziyoyeva, the President's elder daughter, is appointed deputy head of a newly established state agency in charge of communications and media regulation. September 2019 The murder of Shokir Shavkatov, a gay man who was found stabbed to death inside his flat in Tashkent, casts the spotlight on the treatment of LGBT+ people in the country.
March 2020	Uzbekistan says it will become an observer in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) before deciding if it wants to become a full member of the trade bloc.
May 2020	Authorities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan evacuate thousands from the Syr Darya basin after the Sardoba dam on the Uzbek side bursts, flooding large areas in both countries. Six people are killed and over 100,000 displaced, with damages estimated at \$1 billion. Journalists looking into the collapse are harassed and fired.

*Notes: These charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in Uzbekistan, 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 Uzbekistan from January 2017 through March 2021.*

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

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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan and Factiva Global*

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

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

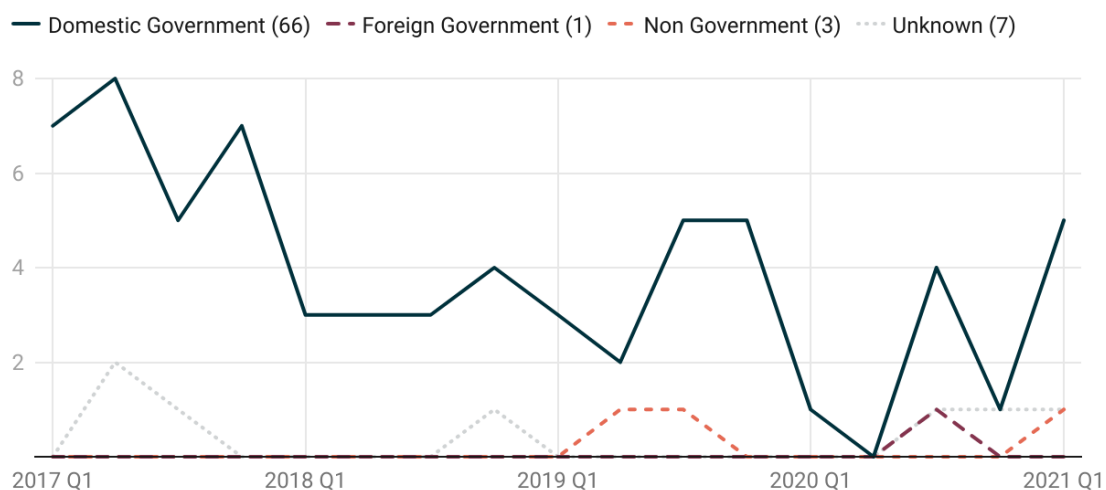
Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	5
Political Opposition	1
Formal CSO/NGO	1
Individual Activist/Advocate	7
Other Community Group	1
Other	2

Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan

Number of Instances Reported



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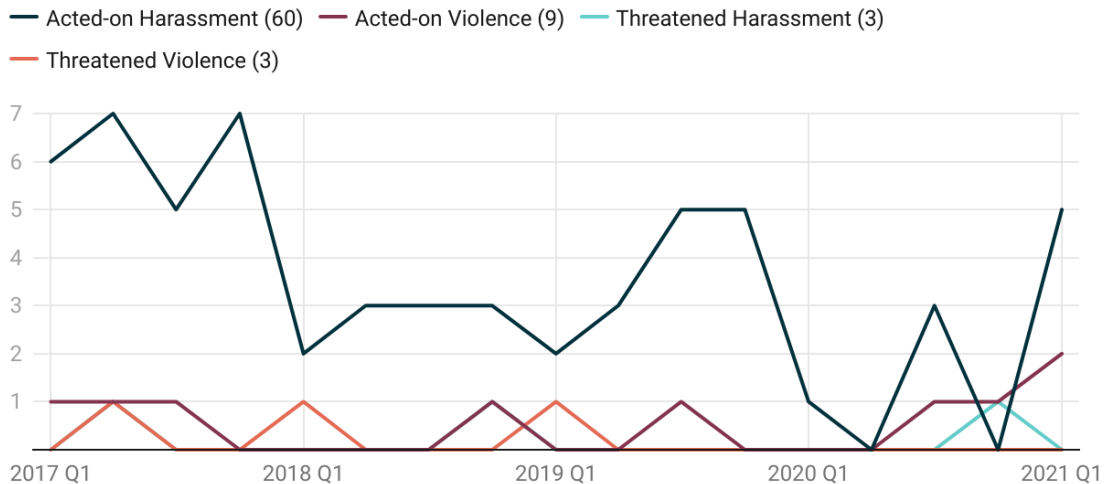
Notes: The figure visualizes recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Uzbekistan, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Uzbekistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring 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 (3 threatened, 57 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (3 threatened, 12 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (70 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 99 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (58 percent).

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

Number of Instances Recorded



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Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment of or violence against civic space actors in Uzbekistan, categorized by the type of harassment or violence (threatened or acted-on). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Uzbekistan and Factiva Global News Monitoring

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (8) in Uzbekistan 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.

A close look at instances of restrictive legislation in Uzbekistan highlights two trends: (i) increasing control over the activities of NGOs and the media and (ii) shrinking space for dissent. In January and March 2020, the Uzbek government passed two laws which created numerous barriers to the registration and day-to-day operations of NGOs, including restrictions of the location of their offices, and requirements to supply detailed information on any planned events to the authorities. In August 2017, the Prime Minister ordered an end to all live broadcasts, except the news. In September 2018, parliament passed a bill which allowed the authorities to shut down media promoting “extremist propaganda or hateful content<sup>5</sup>” online, without a court order. International human rights watchdogs raised concerns about the vaguely worded provisions.

While the laws above targeted NGOs and media outlets specifically, the Uzbek government drafted more far-reaching legislation in August 2020 to inhibit public assembly. Per the legislation, authorities will permit rallies only on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., to last no longer than two hours, and applications for permission must be submitted two weeks in advance. The government sought to portray this legislation as granting Uzbeks the right to hold public demonstrations, while strictly regulating how and where these events can happen.

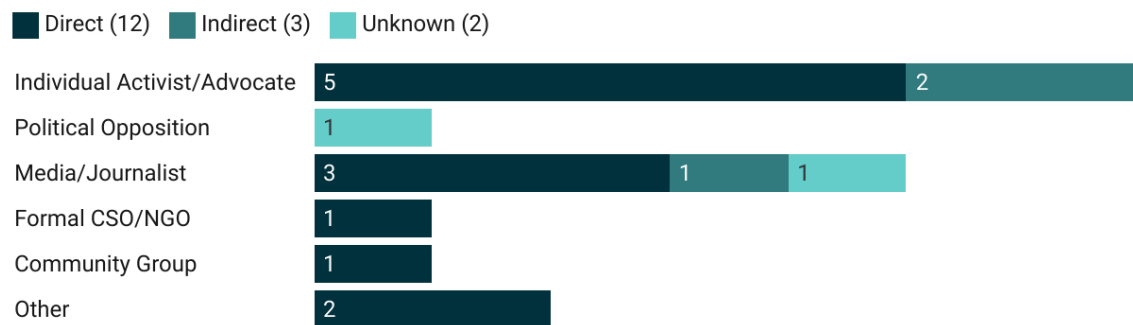
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<sup>5</sup> CIVICUS Monitor. 25 October 2019. "UZBEKISTAN: REFORMING OR REDECORATING?".

Civic space actors were the targets of 16 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021. The highest concentration of these cases (6) occurred in 2017. Most frequently Uzbek authorities pursued cases against activists or journalists who voiced dissent against the government by participating in peaceful protests or writing reports deemed libelous and insulting. As shown in Figure 5, charges in these cases were most often directly (71 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). There were relatively fewer indirect nuisance charges (18 percent), such as extortion or hooliganism, intended to discredit the reputations of civic space actors. There were also a few cases (11 percent) where we were unable to determine the nature of the charges.

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

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 Uzbekistan, 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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan

Due to the challenging survey environment of Uzbekistan, and logistical difficulties due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many of the indicators used to assess citizen attitudes towards civic space and institutions in other E&E

countries were unavailable here.<sup>6</sup> In this profile, we instead exclusively focus on citizens' trust in media per the Central Asian Barometer<sup>7</sup> and the extent of apolitical forms of civic engagement via the Gallup World Poll's Civic Engagement Index. Trust in the media remained high, but lessened somewhat between 2017 and 2019, perhaps influenced by the greater access to international media websites as alternative sources.<sup>8</sup> Uzbek citizens reported higher apolitical civic engagement than regional peers every year until 2021. In this section, we take a closer look at Uzbek citizens' trust in media outlets. We also examine how Uzbek involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1 Trust in Information via Television, Newspapers, and Radio

Citizens' overall trust in the media was surprisingly strong in Uzbekistan—79 percent of Uzbek respondents to the Central Asia Barometer said they “strongly” or “somewhat” trusted the media across surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019 (Table S5.1).<sup>9</sup> This was on par or higher than Central Asian peers such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.<sup>10</sup> However, this confidence in the media lessened somewhat between the two survey waves with respondents shifting from reporting strong trust (-14 percentage points) to a more lukewarm response of “somewhat” trust (+14 percentage points). These aggregate measures obscure a deeper insight that Uzbek citizens' overall trust varied somewhat by type of media. Between the two survey waves, citizens trusted television the most (95 percent), with trust in newspapers and radio at approximately 70 percent. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the results by survey wave and type of media. It is important to note that while the survey questions

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the challenging survey environment of Uzbekistan, the World Values Survey data was not available for either of the two most recent waves of the survey: WVS Wave 6 in 2011 or WVS Wave 7 in 2017–2021. The survey was WVS Wave 7 was planned for 2021, but this collection was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and data is not available at time of this writing. (For further information, see: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>). Therefore, we were unable to draw on these sources to examine citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions.

<sup>7</sup> While these questions do not distinguish between specific media outlets, they serve as a useful indicator of how Uzbek citizens receive and process the news in general.

<sup>8</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2020>

<sup>9</sup> Average trust across TV, Newspaper, and Radio.

<sup>10</sup> On CAB Wave 5, Kazakhstan averaged 58 percent trust (both “Strong” and “Somewhat”) across all three types of media, Tajikistan averaged 75 percent trust, and Turkmenistan averaged 79 percent trust.

gauge levels of public trust, they do not speak to the accuracy or independence of the media.<sup>11</sup>

Table 4. Citizen Trust of Media Institutions in Uzbekistan, 2017 and 2019

Media Type	"Strongly Trust" Wave 2 - December 2017	"Strongly Trust" Wave 5 - May 2019	Percentage Point Change in "Strongly Trust"	"Trust somewhat" Wave 2 - December 2017	"Trust somewhat" Wave 5 - May 2019	Percentage Point Change in "Trust Somewhat"
TV	69%	56%	-13	25%	39%	13
Newspaper	48%	30%	-17	25%	37%	13
Radio	52%	41%	-11	18%	33%	15
Average	56%	43%	-14	23%	36%	14

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Uzbek respondents that responded to 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. Sources: Central Asia Barometer Waves 2 and 5. Source: Central Asian Barometer, Waves 2 (October-December 2017) and 5 (April-May 2019).*

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Uzbek 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>12</sup> Overall, Uzbekistan charted the

<sup>11</sup> A free and independent media is related to citizens' trust of the information it publishes, but one may not necessarily be a precondition for the other. Uzbekistan has severely restricted media independence. Indeed, Freedom House's 2020 Freedom in the World report notes that Uzbekistan's media, while now able to "cautiously discuss social problems and criticize local officials" are still largely controlled by the state and avoid criticizing President Mirziyoyev's government directly. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2020>

<sup>12</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.

highest civic engagement scores on the index in 2015 and 2018, with lows in 2012 and 2017.

Uzbekistan surpassed its regional peers by approximately 14 points each year from 2010 to 2019—an average of 41 versus 28 points respectively (Figure 6).<sup>13</sup> During this ten-year period, 38 percent of Uzbek respondents on average gave money to charity, 30 percent volunteered, and 56 percent helped a stranger. Nevertheless, this average masks a high degree of volatility during the period: Uzbekistan's civic engagement scores dipped in 2012,<sup>14</sup> rebounded in 2015,<sup>15</sup> declined again in 2017,<sup>16</sup> before recovering in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Many outside observers hoped that Uzbekistan was opening up in 2018, as President Mirziyoyev began anti-corruption crackdowns, and the state released the last two of its imprisoned journalists.<sup>18</sup> But the index declined slightly over the next three years, sitting at 38 points in 2021.

Elsewhere in Central Asia, donating to charity and helping strangers appeared to be weakly and positively correlated with the overall performance of the economy. However, in Uzbekistan, we observed no statistically significant link between these facets of civic engagement and the economy. Instead, rates of volunteering were strongly and negatively correlated with the overall performance of the economy.<sup>19</sup> This may indicate that when Uzbek citizens feel

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<sup>13</sup> The regional mean is generally calculated from the index values of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. For further information, see the technical annex.

<sup>14</sup> Citizens' reported rates of donating to charity dropped 8 percentage points (to 20 percent) in 2012 from the previous year, while volunteering also dropped 8 percentage points (to 38 percent), and the share who reported helping a stranger dropped by 4 percentage points (to 50 percent).

<sup>15</sup> In 2015, Uzbekistan improved 8 points on the Civic Engagement Index from the previous year, with gains in citizens contributing to charity (+31 percentage points) and helping strangers (+8 percentage points). Volunteering moved opposite to these two areas, declining by 16 percentage points from 2014 (to 27 percent). This was the same year that elections were held for Islam Karimov's fourth term.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/uzbeks-vote-on-expected-4th-term-for-authoritarian.html>.

<sup>16</sup> This coincided with the first full six months of Shavkat Mirziyoyev's term as president.

<sup>17</sup> In 2018, 58 and 56 percent of respondents reported donating to charity or helping a stranger, respectively, though only 12 percent of Uzbek respondents reported volunteering their time that year.

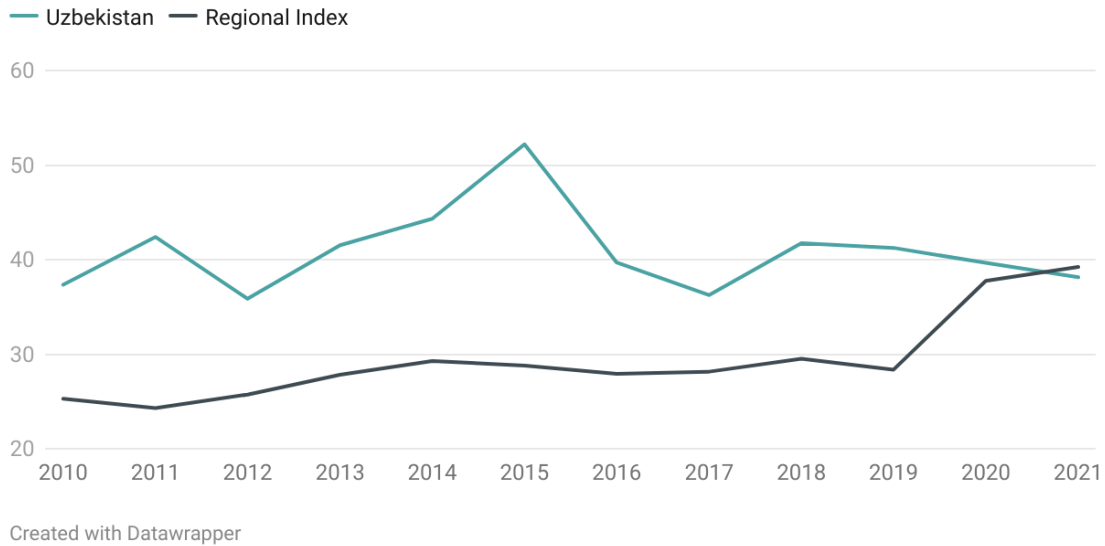
<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/25/world/asia/uzbekistan-politics.html>,

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2019>

<sup>19</sup> Volunteering correlates with GDP (constant Uzbekistani Soum) at  $-0.898^{**}$ ,  $p = 0.004$ .

more financial stress, they commit more of their time to groups to support one another. Unlike the uptick in civic engagement observed in other E&E countries in 2020-2021,<sup>20</sup> Uzbekistan's performance on the index declined during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 6. Civic Engagement Index: Uzbekistan versus Regional Peers



*Notes: This graph shows how scores for Uzbekistan varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Engagement between 2011 and 2019, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2021.*

<sup>20</sup> In other E&E countries, pandemic-induced economic and social stresses were associated with an increase in citizens donating and helping strangers. That did not appear to be the case in Uzbekistan.

<sup>21</sup> Uzbekistan had relatively lower per capita rates of COVID-19 infection and death compared to other E&E countries, and a steadily increasing GDP in 2020 and 2021. <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/uzbekistan/>

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

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 Uzbekistan (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 Uzbekistan's Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 16 known Uzbek civic organizations via 22 civic space-relevant projects in Uzbekistan 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 nine percent of its overtures in Uzbekistan (two projects).

In line with its strategy elsewhere, the Kremlin emphasized promoting Russian linguistic and cultural ties, along with outreach to Russian compatriots. There was a high concentration of activity in 2018 and 2019, before a slight downturn in 2020 and 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 7).



## Figure 7. Russian Projects Supporting Uzbek Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (20)	Institutional Development (2)
2015	1	0
2016	2	1
2017	3	0
2018	4	1
2019	6	0
2020	1	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 Uzbekistan through 12 different channels (Figure 8), including government ministries, language and culture-focused agencies, charitable foundations, courts, and the Russian Embassy in Tashkent. 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>22</sup>—an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a mandate to promote political and economic cooperation abroad—supplied 64 percent of all known Kremlin-backed support (10 organizations via 14 projects).

<sup>22</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, primarily focusing on Russian culture and language promotion,<sup>23</sup> with other Russian organizations serving in a secondary role. Although its main collaborator was the Embassy in Tashkent (4 joint projects), Rossotrudnichestvo also partnered with other Russian organizations for one-off activities including the Leo Tolstoy Information Resource Center (TPKPS) and the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly. In parallel, several other organizations conducted their own projects independently: the Embassy in Tashkent, the Gorchakov Fund, the Russian Union of Youth, the Ombudsman for Human Rights, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Supreme Court.

Often on the forefront of the Kremlin's engagement in other countries, the Gorchakov Fund<sup>24</sup> was less prolific in Uzbekistan, supporting only two activities. The first activity was a December 2019 youth conference—the “International Forum of Leaders of and Youth Organizations Cooperation without Borders”—held in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Although the Gorchakov Fund did not directly partner with a local civic organization, it convened Uzbek youth leaders to improve “interstate relations” and “international youth cooperation.”<sup>25</sup> The second activity was a grant to support the Uzbek branch of the Total Dictation Foundation in a project to develop youth ambassadors for the Russian language.<sup>26</sup>

Russia's Ombudsman for Human Rights and the Russian Supreme Court preferred to engage directly with regulators of Uzbek's civic space. In October

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<sup>23</sup> This included opening three separate Russian language centers at three Uzbek universities: Tashkent Medical Academy (TMA), Tashkent University of the Uzbek Language and Literature (TDO'TAU), and the Uzbek State University of World Languages (UzSUWL).

<sup>24</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. Although the Gorchakov Fund is frequently on par with Rossotrudnichestvo in both number of civic space-relevant projects and partner organizations in other E&E countries, its engagement in Uzbekistan was far more limited.

<sup>25</sup>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201021064642/https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/view/sotrudnichestvo-bez-granits-obedinilo-molodykh-liderov-semi-gosudarstv/>

<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/v-uzbekistane-pri-podderzhke-fonda-startoval-proekt-ambassadors-russkogo-yazyka/>. Despite originating in Novosibirsk, the Total Dictation Foundation project is sufficiently decentralized for us to consider the Uzbek branch an independent entity. For further information on the project, see: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/total-dictation-popular-russian-language-event-resists-state-takeover>.

2016, the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation met with the Uzbek Commissioner for Human Rights to launch a “joint information and educational project” which aimed to improve cooperation on human rights and share lessons learned from Russia’s experience.<sup>27</sup> In June 2018, delegates from the Russian and Uzbek Supreme Courts signed a similar cooperation agreement to improve their judicial systems and train judges.<sup>28</sup>

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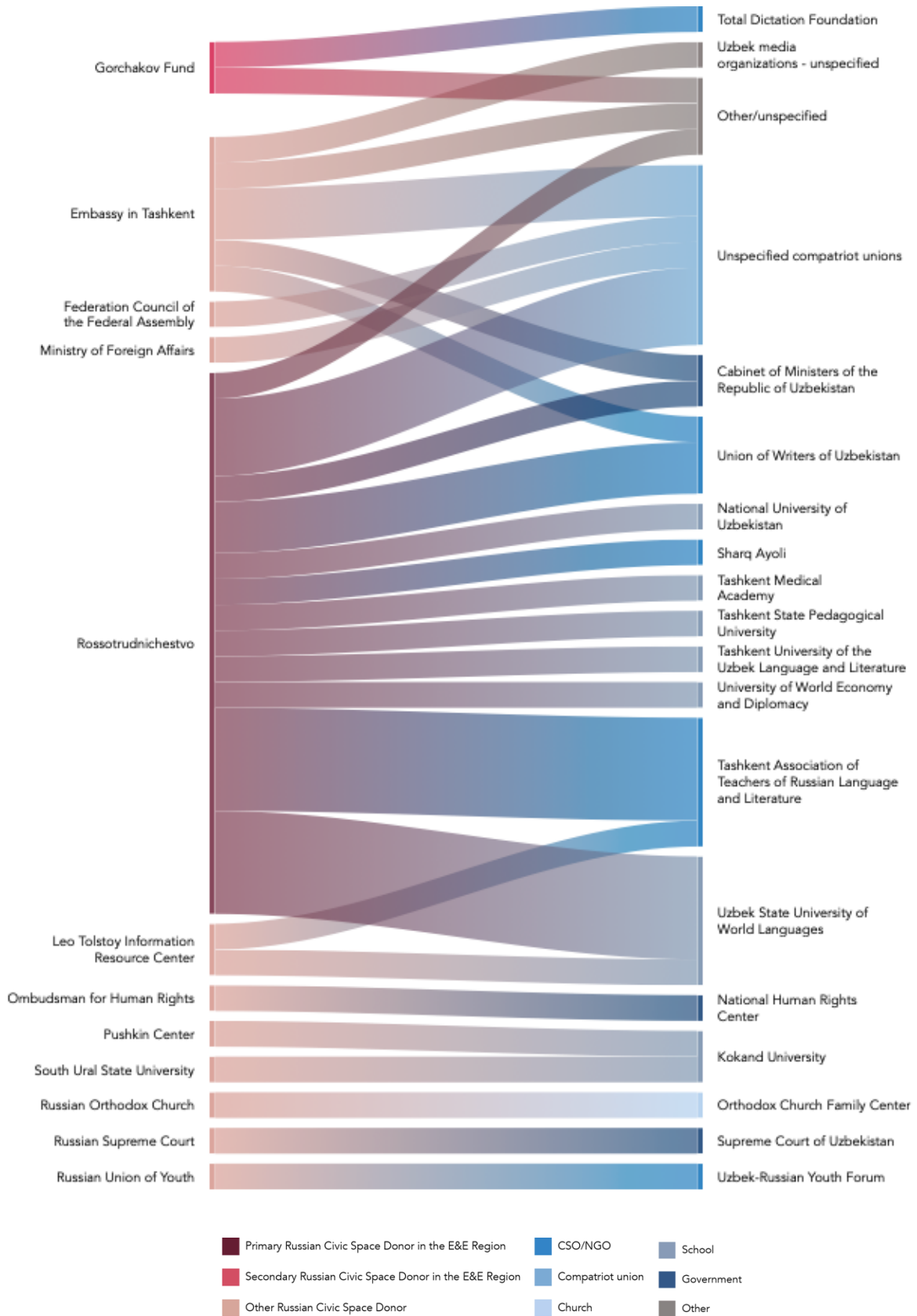
<sup>27</sup>

[https://ombudsmanrf.org/news/novosti\\_upolnomochennogo/view/nachala\\_rabotu\\_mezhdunardnaja\\_konferencija\\_posvjashhennaja\\_20letiju\\_nacionalnykh\\_institutov\\_po\\_pravam\\_cheloveka\\_uzbekistana](https://ombudsmanrf.org/news/novosti_upolnomochennogo/view/nachala_rabotu_mezhdunardnaja_konferencija_posvjashhennaja_20letiju_nacionalnykh_institutov_po_pravam_cheloveka_uzbekistana)

<sup>28</sup> BBC Monitoring Central Asia, via Factiva

Figure 8. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Uzbek 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 Uzbekistan's Civic Space

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are not the only type of civic space actors in Uzbekistan, but they were the most common beneficiaries of Russian state-backed overtures, named in 36 percent of identified projects (8 projects). Other non-governmental recipients of the Kremlin's attention included schools, compatriot unions for the Russian diaspora, and direct outreach to youth for political conferences.

The Tashkent Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (TOPRYAL) attracted the greatest number of projects of any CSO, partnering with Rossotrudnichestvo on four projects between 2016 and 2019. These projects focused on Russian literary figures including Dostoevsky and Sumarokov, as well as a December 2019 youth forum for high school and university students. Most other CSO recipients were also language-focused, except for Sharq Ayoli International Women's Public Foundation. Sharq Ayoli joined in a June 2021 roundtable with Rossotrudnichestvo to discuss volunteer projects in Uzbekistan.

Uzbek schools were the second-most frequent recipient, involved in nearly a third of all Russian projects. Most of these projects involved Rossotrudnichestvo opening up Russian language centers to teach university students and foster connections with Russia. But in April 2021, South Ural University partnered with the Pushkin Institute to open a Pushkin language center at Kokand University. These centers represent an important entry point for Russia to influence the next generation of leaders.

Several government bodies conducted civic space-relevant projects with the support of Russian organizations. As mentioned above, cooperative agreements brokered between the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan, the National Human Rights Center (NHRC), and their Russian counterparts allows the Kremlin to influence these civic space regulators to adhere to Moscow's standards. In addition, the Uzbek Committee on Interethnic Relations and Friendly Relations with Foreign Countries under the Cabinet of Ministers joined with Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian Embassy, and the Union of Writers in Uzbekistan to host a June 2019 celebration of Pushkin's life and work.

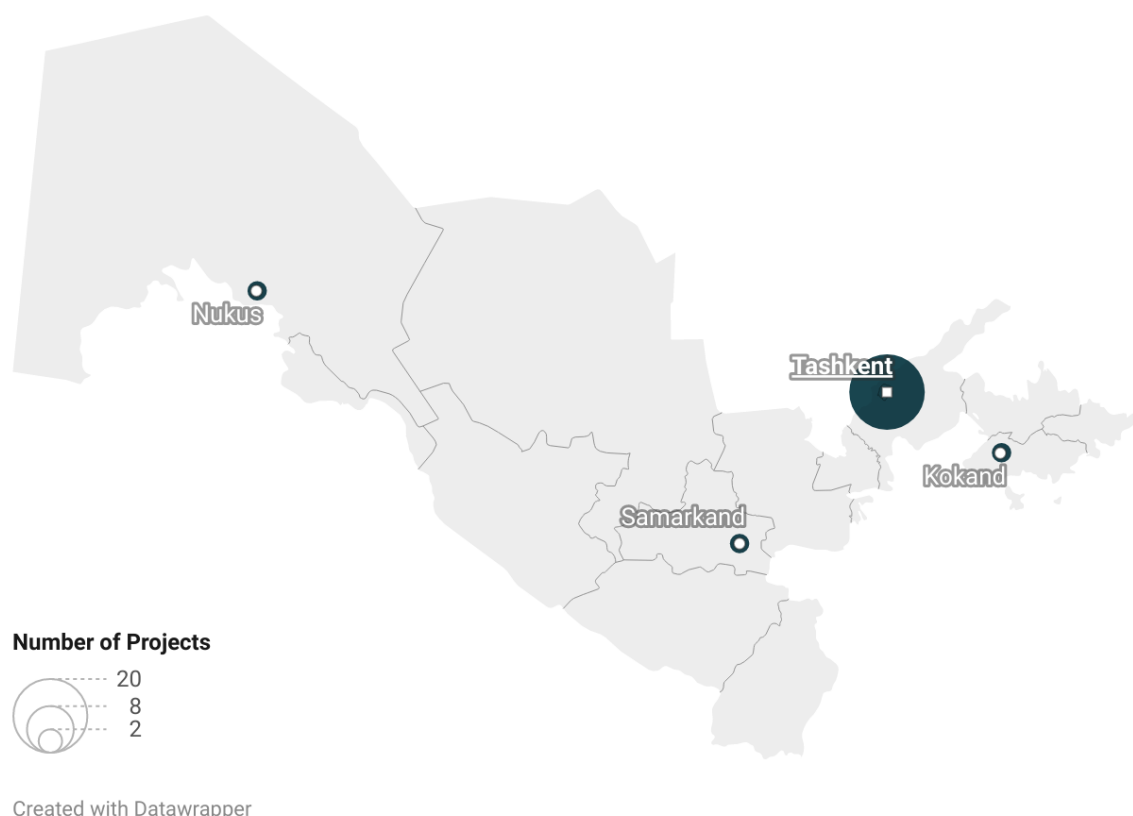
Russian projects were primarily directed to the capital of Tashkent, which alone accounted for 95 percent of all Kremlin activity (21 projects). The cities of Kokand, Nukus, and Samarkand each received one project (Figure 9), all focused on Russian language promotion.<sup>29</sup> The Kremlin's preference for concentrating activity in populous urban areas is consistent with its approach elsewhere; however, there appears to be less of an emphasis on specific enclaves of ethnic Russians or break-away regions in Uzbekistan, as compared to other countries with autonomous or separatist areas. Only one project was directed to cities within the Republic of Karakalpakstan (Nukus), and that event was part of an Uzbekistan-wide Russian language promotion effort.

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<sup>29</sup> The South Ural State University supported a new Pushkin Center for language in Kokand and the Gorchakov Fund supported Total Dictation events in Nukus, Samarkand, and Tashkent in April 2021.

Figure 9. Locations of Russian Support to Uzbek Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



*Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Uzbekistan. 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 Uzbekistan's Civic Space

The majority of Russian state-backed projects to Uzbekistan's civic space promoted education and culture (68 percent of identified projects), primarily Russian language and culture.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to its playbook in other parts of the E&E region, the Kremlin's activities in Uzbekistan were somewhat less focused on themes of youth engagement, "The Great Patriotic War," and religion.

<sup>30</sup> Projects specifically focused on Russian language promotion accounted for 45 percent of the Kremlin's engagement with Uzbek civic space (10 projects). Many of these events were celebrations of writers, or opening language centers at universities for longer-term engagements, such as when Rossotrudnichestvo and the Uzbek State University of World Languages opened a Russian language center in March 2017.

The Kremlin still oriented four of its projects towards investing in the next generation of Uzbek leaders and used events to build personal connections and positive sentiment towards Russia. For example, the Kremlin sponsored two events in December 2019—the “International Forum of Leaders and Youth Organizations Cooperation without Borders” and the “Youth Forum of Compatriots: The Future is Ours”—which brought together high school and university students to build cross-border relations and facilitate “international youth cooperation.”<sup>31</sup>

The Russian government only sponsored one project along the theme of “The Great Patriotic War” in Uzbekistan: a May 2019 Victory Day parade which mentioned the Second World War. In contrast to the prominence of WWII commemoration in promoting the Soviet Union’s role in defeating the Nazis in other E&E countries,<sup>32</sup> the Kremlin’s avoidance of such activities in Uzbekistan could reflect a recognition that this theme would be less effective with the Uzbek population and/or the need to lead with less controversial projects, such as benign language promotion, to avoid antagonizing local authorities.

Finally, the theme of religion was notably absent from the vast majority of Russian projects in Uzbekistan, as compared to other E&E countries,<sup>33</sup> with only one project involving religious organizations. In August 2018, the Russian Orthodox Church opened up an Orthodox Church Family Center in Tashkent. However, the stated goals of the project were noteworthy as they emphasized promoting family values and preventing domestic violence,<sup>34</sup> as opposed to promoting Orthodox Christianity to the population at large, or even public celebrations of Orthodox holidays. This choice to downplay its typical emphasis on the Orthodox Church likely makes strategic sense for the Kremlin in

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<sup>31</sup>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201021064642/https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/view/sotrudnichestvo-bez-granits-obedinilo-molodykh-liderov-semi-gosudarstv/>

<sup>32</sup> In other E&E countries, the Kremlin has gone to great lengths to portray its enemies as contemporary Nazis, which arguably 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.

<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere in the region, the Kremlin uses the Russian Orthodox Church and religious events to promote narratives of shared identity and cultural ties with Russia.

<sup>34</sup> BBC Monitoring Central Asia, “Highlights from Uzbek press, websites 20 Aug 18.” via Factiva.



Uzbekistan, as 88 percent of the Uzbek population identifies as Muslim, and the Uzbek government heavily scrutinizes religious activities.<sup>35</sup>

## 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Uzbek civic actors a total of 68 times from January 2015 to March 2021. The majority of these mentions (42 instances) were of foreign and intergovernmental civic space actors, while the remaining portion (26 instances) referred to domestic actors. Russian state media mentioned 22 civic space organizations by name, as well as 8 informal groups operating in Uzbekistan. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Uzbek citizens, we also analyzed 25 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with Uzbekistan: 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 Uzbek Civic Space Actors

Roughly half (58 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Uzbekistan's civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 9 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from community organizations to media outlets. Political parties are the most frequently mentioned organization type (10 mentions), followed by other community organizations (4 mentions). Political parties were largely mentioned in conjunction with the 2019-2020 Uzbek parliamentary election, as Russian state media attempted to speculate which parties would win the election.

Russian state media mentions of specific Uzbek civic space actors were mostly neutral (80 percent) in tone, though two organizations received exclusively positive coverage: the Center of Islamic Civilization (1 positive mention) and the

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<sup>35</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2020>

Institute for Strategic and Interregional Research (2 positive mentions). These two organizations are under the auspices of the Cabinet of Ministers and the President of Uzbekistan respectively. Aside from named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 11 generalized mentions of 6 informal groups, local media, and political parties. Coverage was mostly neutral (73 percent of mentions) in tone, with 2 “somewhat positive” and 1 “somewhat negative” mentions.

As it does in many Central Asian countries, Russian state media largely positioned itself to reinforce the Uzbek government’s propaganda and preferred narratives. However, Russian state media did deviate somewhat from this position with regard to a positive mention of the political opposition following the death of longtime Uzbek leader Islam Karimov in 2015, with Russian state media showing support for political prisoners.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Russian state media lauded the Uzbek government for seeking to improve its human rights record, stating “the announced closure of Uzbekistan’s Jaslyk prison linked to inmates’ torture is an opportunity for the Central Asian nation to set its human rights record straight...”<sup>37</sup> Although the Kremlin did not directly criticize the incumbent Uzbek government, there is implicit criticism of Karimov’s past actions.

Nevertheless, this should not be taken to mean that Russian state media was supportive of political opposition or human rights writ large. In the same article as the critique of Karimov, Russia also supported the Uzbek government’s narrative about the 2005 Andijan massacre, stating “The Andijan demonstration, organized by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (a radical group now officially affiliated with Daesh) has been described by Tashkent as a successful effort to prevent a color revolution from breaking out in the country.”<sup>38</sup> This approach of portraying protesters as radicals attempting to foment a color revolution is very much aligned with the Kremlin’s playbook for undercutting the credibility of protests that threaten Russia’s regional interests.

When looking at the domestic civic actors in Uzbekistan as a whole, the top mentioned groups center around the 2016 presidential elections and the

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<sup>36</sup> “Great Geopolitical Game: Uzbek Leader’s Passing and the Future of Central Asia.” Sputnik News Service. Published September 5, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> “Rights Group Praises Uzbekistan’s Plan to Shut Notorious Jaslyk Prison.” Sputnik News Service. Published April 27, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> “Great Geopolitical Game: Uzbek Leader’s Passing and the Future of Central Asia.” Sputnik News Service. Published September 5, 2015.

2019-2020 parliamentary elections. Political parties from the parliamentary elections, as well as media outlets reporting on the elections make up the majority of top mentions of domestic actors. Notably, coverage of the elections was largely neutral in our sample, with both political parties and media organizations receiving entirely neutral coverage.

Table 5. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Uzbekistan by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Grand Total
Uzbek Media	0	4	0	4
Journalists	0	3	0	3
Ecologic Party of Uzbekistan	0	2	0	2
Justice Social Democratic Party	0	2	0	2
Liberal Democratic Party	0	2	0	2
The Institute for Strategic and Interregional Research	0	0	2	2
The People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan	0	2	0	2
Uzbekistan National Revival Democratic Party	0	2	0	2

*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 Uzbek Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (42 instances) to external actors operating in Uzbekistan's civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 6 intergovernmental organizations (20 mentions) and 7 foreign organizations (18 mentions) by name, as well as 2 general foreign actors (4 mentions). Intergovernmental organizations monitoring elections in Uzbekistan and foreign media outlets reporting on the election dominated the external mentions. Russian state media coverage of these actors was entirely neutral in tone.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Uzbekistan by Sentiment

External Civic Group	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Grand Total
Novaya Gazeta	0	6	0	6
Central Asia Online	0	5	0	5
CIS	0	5	0	5
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)	0	5	0	5
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	0	5	0	5

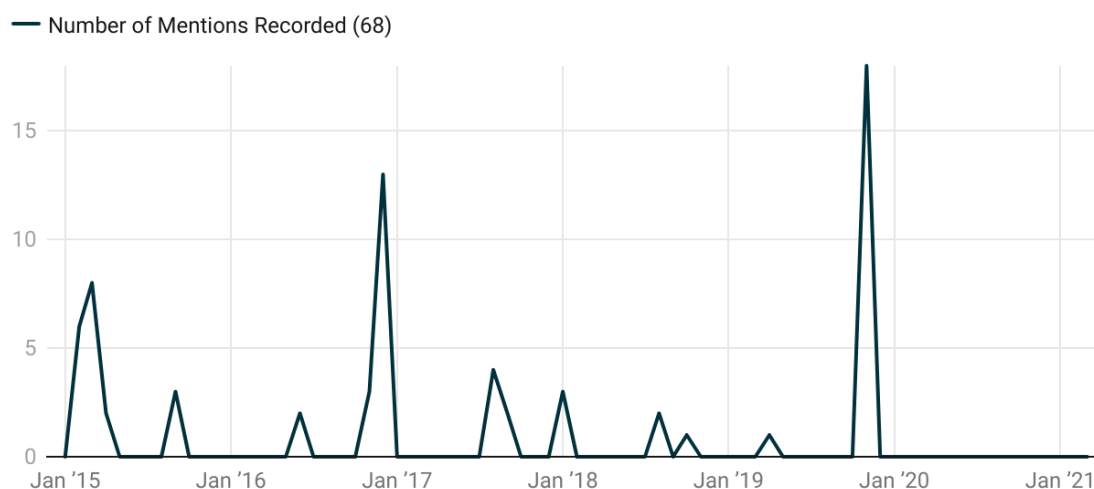
*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Uzbekistan between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and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

### 3.2.3 Russian State Media’s Focus on Uzbek 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. This general trend appears to hold true in Uzbekistan, as the preponderance of media mentions (57 percent) spike around three events: the Uzbekistan presidential elections in March 2015 and December 2016, and the 2019-2020 parliamentary elections. The elections and various candidates received overwhelmingly neutral coverage (95 percent) by Russian media. Equal support was given to both Western-backed election observers, such as the OSCE, and Russian-backed election observers, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Figure 10. Russian State Media Mentions of Uzbek Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Uzbek 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 Uzbek citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Uzbekistan.<sup>39</sup> Between January 2015 and March 2021, two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced three of these keywords a total of 25 times with regard to Uzbekistan. This included: the United States (18 instances), the European Union (6 instances), and democracy (1 instance) with reference to Uzbekistan. No mentions of the “West” or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were recorded.

<sup>39</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

Table 7. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
NATO*	0	0	0	0	0	0
European Union	0	0	6	0	0	6
United States	1	4	10	2	1	18
Democracy	0	0	0	1	0	1
West*	0	0	0	0	0	0

\* Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to three key words—the European Union, the United States, and democracy—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Uzbekistan. The terms “NATO” and “West” received no relevant mentions to Uzbekistan 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.

The United States was the most frequently mentioned keyword, and the majority of that coverage was neutral in sentiment (56 percent). Instances of non-neutral coverage of the United States typically pertained to the conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan, as Russian state media often reported on both conflicts from Tashkent. The U.S. received negative coverage (5 mentions) for military intervention in Syria, with Russian state media comparing a U.S. attack on a Syrian airfield to the invasion of Iraq.<sup>40</sup> However, the U.S. received positive coverage (3 mentions) for its willingness to negotiate with the Russian government regarding Afghanistan and Syria. The following quote is one such example, “the constructive interactions by Russia and the United States are a clear example that such cooperation is not only possible, but also effective.”<sup>41</sup> Coverage of U.S. relations with Uzbekistan was predominantly neutral, with Russian state media reporting that U.S. and Russian interests were not in competition.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Russia to Seek Truth Behind Decision-Making in U.S. Missile Attack on Syria Airfield -Lavrov.” Sputnik News Service. Published April 7, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> “Russian-US Cooperation on Syria Constructive - Russian Security Council Head.” Sputnik News Service. Published April 13, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> “US Does Not See Relations With Uzbekistan as Competition With Russia - Senior Official.” Sputnik News Service. Published May 16, 2018.

Russian state media coverage of the European Union (EU) in Uzbekistan was neutral, including references to the 2018 Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan, attended by EU representatives, and a transport corridor linking Pakistan, Afghanistan, the European Union, and Central Asia. The term “democracy” was mentioned only once and received “somewhat positive” (1 mention) coverage. Russian state media characterized Uzbekistan’s 2016 presidential elections as “open, democratic and compliant with international norms.”<sup>43</sup> That said, it is important to note that OSCE election observers did not consider the 2016 Uzbek presidential election to be open or democratic.<sup>44</sup> Russian state media’s use of “democracy” to portray the Kremlin’s allies in a favorable light, regardless of actual democratic practices on the ground, is consistent with its approach throughout the E&E region of using coverage to support and amplify the preferred narratives of aligned governments.

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<sup>43</sup> “Uzbekistan Presidential Elections Open, Democratic - SCO Observer Mission.” Sputnik News Service. Published December 5, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> “Republic of Uzbekistan Early Presidential Election 4 December 2016 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report.” OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Published March 21, 2017. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/2/306451.pdf>

## 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 Uzbekistan 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 Uzbekistan 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., 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 Russian compatriots. In parallel, Russian state media, as in many Central Asian countries, largely positioned itself to reinforce the Uzbek government's propaganda when it aligned with the Kremlin's preferred narratives.

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 two primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Uzbekistan; 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. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

The World Values Survey was not conducted in Uzbekistan for either of the two most recent waves of the survey: WVS Wave 6 in 2011 or WVS Wave 7 in 2017-2021. Therefore, we were unable to draw on these sources to examine citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions.

The Central Asia Barometer Wave 2 was conducted in Uzbekistan in October-December 2017, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. Wave 5 was conducted in Uzbekistan in April-May 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>45</sup>.

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in the E&E region countries from 2009-2020, except for the countries that did not complete 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. The data are weighted to be nationally representative.

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. Uzbekistan'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 and 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 data is only available for Ukraine and Serbia for 2021.

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<sup>45</sup> For full documentation of Central Asia Barometer survey waves, see: <https://ca-barometer.org/en/cab-database>

## 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 31, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training, etc.), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to the 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 Uzbekistan. 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.