



MIRZIYOYEV'S UZBEKISTAN: DEMOCRATIZATION OR AUTHORITARIAN UPGRADING?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the death of the first President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in 2016, came the death of the paternalistic 'Uzbek Path'. Years of isolationism and widespread repression left Karimov's successor Shavkat Mirziyoyev facing a stagnant economy and an authoritarian political system. Instead of following his predecessor's path, Uzbekistan's new president surprised onlookers, embarking on a four-pronged reform strategy aimed at economic liberalization, bureaucratic reform, political relaxation, and foreign policy diversification. Yet while these changes have produced genuine benefits for the population, Mirziyoyev's reform agenda primarily serves the elite. His platform does not entail true democratization, but authoritarian upgrading: the transition to a softer authoritarian regime that relies more on persuasion than coercion.

KEY INSIGHTS

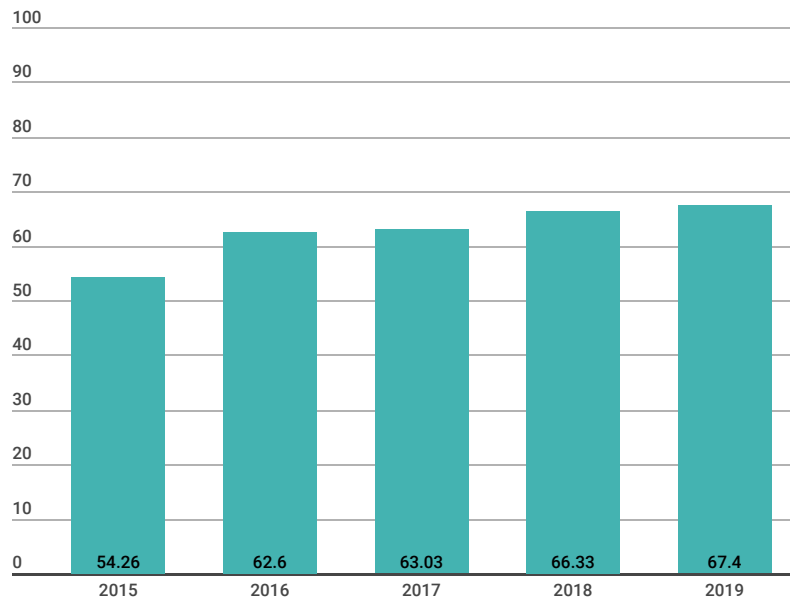
- ✿ Economic reforms, such as currency liberalization, tariff reduction, and tax reform, have led foreign investment to double. However, as the state remains the predominant economic actor, it is ultimately regime elites who capture the greatest share of these economic benefits.
- ✿ Breaking from the Karimov-era belief in the "stability of the cadres," Mirziyoyev has purged all government institutions and state-owned enterprises. His promotion of young technocrats ostensibly serves to bolster bureaucratic efficiency, but its real purpose is to create a loyal elite.
- ✿ Regarding human rights, Mirziyoyev has pardoned prisoners, relaxed censorship, permitted religious practices, and banned child labor. These measures signal that the new regime is less repressive, but Uzbekistan remains a de-facto one party state with limited political freedom.
- ✿ Mirziyoyev has sought to end Karimov's long-standing policy of isolationism by rebuilding trade and diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan's neighbors. By opening the economy to outside investment and reestablishing regional hegemony, Mirziyoyev can bolster regime legitimacy and dampen calls for broader political liberalization.

Uzbekistan: Freedom Score

	National Democratic Governance	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	Local Democratic Governance	Judicial Framework & Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score
2017	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.75	7.00	7.00	6.96
2018	7.00	7.00	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	6.89

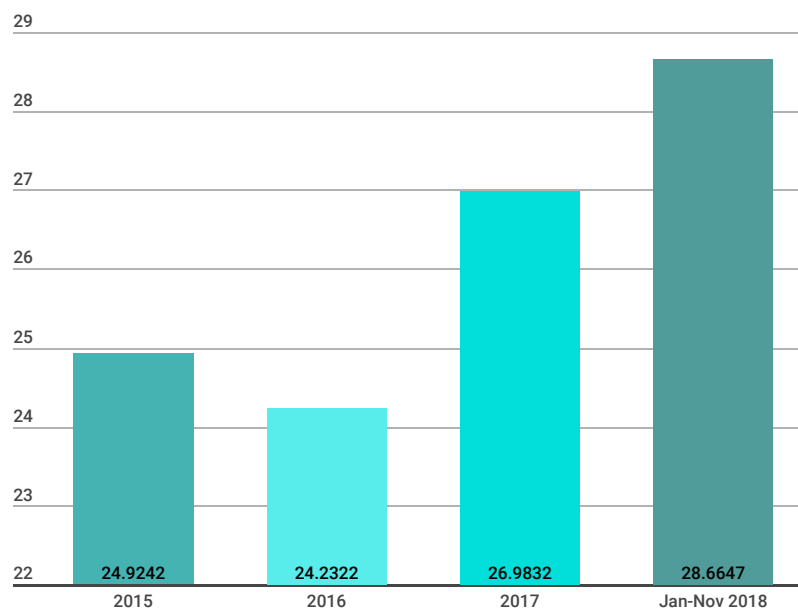
The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.
Source: Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2018_Uzbekistan.pdf

Uzbekistan: Ease of Doing Business



An economy's ease of doing business score is reflected on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 represents the lowest and 100 represents the best performance. Source: World Bank "Doing Business"

Foreign Trade Turnover (USD billions)



Source: The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan Statistics