



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICY FOR STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AND IMPROVING WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT (WJP) RULE OF LAW INDEX INDICATORS

Sunnatillo Azim ugli Khamzakhonov

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a strategic analysis of the state policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding the strengthening of the rule of law and the improvement of the country's standing in the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index. The study examines key achievements and challenges in ensuring the transparency of state institutions, combating corruption, and fostering institutional development. Particular emphasis is placed on analyzing factors that influence the efficacy of legislative and administrative reforms, including public procurement transparency, public oversight mechanisms, asset declarations, and the protection of citizens' rights. The research underscores the necessity of proceeding with "second-generation" reforms aimed at bolstering judicial independence, enhancing the digital literacy and qualifications of civil servants, and establishing sustainable checks and balances.

Institutional Transformation in the Republic of Uzbekistan

The institutional transformation of the Republic of Uzbekistan over the past decade constitutes one of the most significant shifts in the political and economic landscape of Central Asia. Since assuming office in late 2016, the administration of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has pursued a multi-vector agenda characterized by progressive modernization. This agenda aims to dismantle isolationist mechanisms and replace them with a state model that is more integrated, economically liberal, and administratively efficient.

In this context, the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index is viewed not merely as an external performance metric, but as a critical benchmark for the realization of the "New Uzbekistan" strategy. Within this strategic framework, the rule of law is defined as a fundamental prerequisite for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), securing accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and forging a social contract based on human dignity and administrative accountability.

Current Standing and Comparative Analysis

The 2025 WJP Rule of Law Index ranks the Republic of Uzbekistan **81st out of 143 states** globally.¹ This position reflects both tangible progress in legal and administrative reforms and the persistence of structural barriers preventing the country's transition into the upper tier of transition economies. Although Uzbekistan is among a select group of nations demonstrating growth in its aggregate score amidst a global rule of law recession, this progress is tempered by a steady constriction of civic space and ongoing challenges in expanding checks and balances within the state power system.

The WJP methodology structures the rule of law across eight primary factors, each comprising specific sub-factors derived from expert assessments and general population polls. Uzbekistan's performance across these dimensions reveals a distinctly dualistic governance character: the country occupies a leading global position in **Order and Security**, yet ranks among the lowest in institutional constraints on executive power.

Table 1: Comparative Indicators (2024–2025)

Category	Rank (2024)	Rank (2025)	Index Score	Regional Rank (EE & Central Asia)
Overall Rule of Law	83 / 142	81 / 143	0.50	8 / 15
Order and Security	8 / 142	9 / 143	0.45	1 / 15
Constraints on Gov. Powers	116 / 142	116 / 143	0.19	11 / 15
Absence of Corruption	68 / 142	68 / 143	0.24	6 / 15
Open Government	117 / 142	117 / 143	0.19	14 / 15
Fundamental Rights	108 / 142	105 / 143	0.22	12 / 15
Regulatory Enforcement	95 / 142	73 / 143	0.23	8 / 15
Civil Justice	78 / 142	68 / 143	0.26	8 / 15
Criminal Justice	77 / 142	65 / 143	0.23	7 / 15

The stability of the aggregate score at **0.50** suggests that the Republic has reached a plateau within the current reform model. While substantial improvements in **Regulatory Enforcement** and **Civil Justice** indicate that the technical and digital components of judicial reform are yielding measurable results², the stagnation in **Constraints on Government Powers** highlights a core dilemma: the institutional difficulty of establishing robust checks and balances against the very executive authority that serves as the primary driver of the reform process.³

Given the complex nature of constitutional reform, the most viable path for immediate improvement in the Index lies in addressing targeted issues, such as transparency and the mitigation of petty corruption.⁴

Strategic Initiatives: "Islands of Integrity"

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² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/nations-transit/2024>

³ <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/networks/rule-law-centre/news/tracking-rule-law-uzbekistan-constitutional-reform-and-coming-challenges>

⁴

https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1139&context=international_immersion_program_papers

International and regional organizations play a pivotal role in advancing anti-corruption strategies, and the Government of Uzbekistan has shown openness to adopting proven methodologies. A key recommendation for improving **Factor 2 (Absence of Corruption)** is to scale the "Islands of Integrity" approach. Successfully piloted in Tashkent and the Vobkent district⁵ with the support of the UNDP and the European Commission, this methodology recognizes that corruption is often "deeply rooted at regional and local levels".

Table 2: Implementation Strategy for Integrity Zones

Stage	Objective	Expected Outcome
Situational Analysis	Identification of corruption-prone zones (permitting, procurement).	Targeted reduction of corruption risks.
Strategy Development	Formulation of ethical codes and transparent procedures.	Reduction of administrative discretion.
Public Consultations	Engagement of citizens and business in monitoring.	Enhanced social responsibility.
Digital Oversight	Implementation of AI-assisted and independent supervision mechanisms.	Minimization of the "human factor" in tenders.

The Vobkent pilot, guided by international experts, resulted in a "Strategic Roadmap for 2025–2026" focused on transparent public procurement and utility management. ⁶To impact the national WJP ranking, this model must be standardized across all local executive authorities (*khokimiyats*) rather than remaining an isolated experiment.

Asset Declaration and Conflict of Interest

The Anti-Corruption Agency's initiative to introduce an asset declaration system—previously endorsed by the IMF—is critical for improving the national rating. However, despite the Agency's efforts, a comprehensive Law on Asset Declaration and a fully transparent reporting system for conflicts of interest have yet to be adopted. Although the Senate approved the Law "On Anti-Corruption Expertise of Normative Legal Acts" in 2023, the mandatory declaration of income by civil servants remains unimplemented.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has emphasized that an effective income declaration system is a "macro-critical"[1] necessity for improving the investment climate.

⁵ <https://sdglocalaction.org/uzbekistan-islands-of-integrity/>

⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/uzbekistan/uzbekistan-deepens-its-anti-corruption-efforts-through-series-thematic-discussions_en

Instances of high-ranking officials, including district *khokims*, holding equity in private entities underscore the urgency of these reforms.

The Paradox of Open Government

Uzbekistan's position in **Open Government (Rank 117)** presents a paradox. The country possesses one of the region's most advanced open data portals and scores highly on "Statistical Capacity"⁷. However, the WJP assessment remains low because the Index evaluates the practical utility of data for civic participation and the actual realization of the "right of access to information," rather than mere formal availability^[1].

A primary mechanism for expanding access to information is the automation of critical state sectors, including real-time updates on public procurement, corporate histories, and revenue data for both foreign and local entities. Currently, **Sub-factor 3.3 (Civic Participation)** suppresses the overall score, consistently ranking in the bottom 25th percentile globally. WJP data for 2025 indicates that civic participation has declined in 71% of countries, including Uzbekistan.⁸

Government approaches to "public oversight" are frequently perceived as symbolic; non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are formally consulted but lack legal leverage to compel state bodies to address their findings. To rectify this, amendments to the Law "On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations" (August 21, 2025) introducing administrative fines for officials who ignore the "final documents" of public oversight bodies must be strictly enforced. Specifically, failure to review such documents without valid cause now incurs a fine of 3 to 5 Base Calculation Amounts (BCA).

Furthermore, the "Right to Information" (Sub-factor 3.2) requires institutional reinforcement. Citizens must be granted a direct right to judicially appeal information denials based on vague "state secrecy" grounds.⁹ While the integration of the "Digital Government" platform with the "Legal Aid" (*Yuridik Yordam*) system creates a technological basis for challenging opaque administrative decisions, the realization of this potential depends on an independent judiciary capable of adjudicating such complaints effectively.¹⁰

Investment Climate and Regulatory Enforcement

Sub-factors 6.1 (Effective Regulatory Enforcement) and **6.5 (No Expropriation Without Compensation)** are pivotal for investor confidence. While the Law "On Investments and Investment Activity" guarantees the free repatriation of funds and protection of private property,¹¹ an "implementation gap" persists. Investors continue to demand greater transparency in public procurement and effective intellectual property protection.

To improve **Factor 6**, the state must eliminate "unreasonable delays" (Sub-factor 6.3) in administrative permitting. Additionally, the special legal regime of the International Digital Technology Center must not remain an isolated "island" of reform but should serve as a scalable model for the broader economy.¹²

⁷ <https://kun.uz/en/21912342>

⁸ <https://www.vision-gt.eu/news/uzbekistans-new-ngo-law-from-control-to-partnership/>

⁹ https://www.norma.uz/novoe_v_zakonodatelstve/uzakoneny_garantii_svobody_deyatelnosti_nno?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁰ <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/uzbekistan>

¹¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-investment-climate-statements/uzbekistan>

¹² <https://kostalegal.com/newsletters/uzbekistan-legal-newsletter-for-february-2025>

Digitalization of Justice

Significant advancements have been made in Civil and Criminal Justice through the "E-SUD" system and a fully integrated Case Management System (CMS), which have optimized case processing and reduced court visits. Uzbekistan ranks above average in "E-Justice Policy and Infrastructure," outperforming several transition economies. Since 2023, the "Legal Aid" information system has digitized the provision of legal counsel, allowing attorneys to file documents and attend hearings remotely[2]. However, "low stakeholder engagement" remains a barrier. Electronic filing is infrequently utilized by lawyers and entrepreneurs due to deficits in digital literacy or mistrust in system security[3]. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) identifies enhancing the "digital literacy and qualifications of advocates" as a key recommendation for unlocking the potential of these tools.

Conclusion: Toward "Second Generation" Reforms

To break out of the "80s range" and enter the WJP Top 50, Uzbekistan should adopt "targeted institutional change" ¹³models utilized by other transition economies, such as Georgia and the Baltic states.

- **Georgia (Rank 52):** A regional leader whose success was driven by radical judicial reform focused on court administration and ethics. Crucially, Georgia transformed its judiciary from a "Soviet instrument of repression" into an independent branch of power through international integrity checks on leadership appointments.¹⁴

- **The Baltic States:** Their success was anchored by the "external anchor" of the European Union, which provided the *acquis communautaire* framework for civil service reform. Uzbekistan's Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with the EU offers a similar milestone for monitoring human rights commitments[4].

The 2025 WJP score of **0.50** should be regarded as a baseline for the next phase of development. The "Uzbekistan—2030" strategy, aiming for a GDP of \$200 billion and \$42 billion in foreign investment, is unattainable without a parallel elevation in rule of law ratings. Investors are shifting their focus from "visible reforms" to expectations of "deep internal transformations," such as judicial independence.

The path to the upper echelon of the WJP ratings lies in "Implementation Reality". The government has demonstrated the capacity to enact complex legislation and launch digital portals. The mandate of "**Generation II Reforms**" is to ensure these laws apply equally to those in power, that digital systems protect vulnerable citizens, and that the rule of law becomes a daily reality rather than merely a state priority.

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¹⁴ <https://info.imedi.ge/en/politics/7398/georgia-tops-eastern-europe-and-central-asia-in-world-justice-project-rule-of-law-index-2025>

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