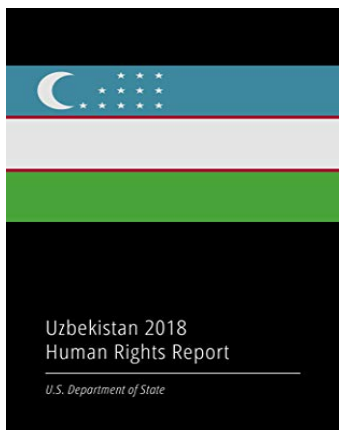


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Uzbekistan is a constitutional republic with a political system dominated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his supporters. In 2016 former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev won the presidential elections with 88 percent of the vote. The Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), in its final election observation report, noted, "the campaign lacked competitiveness and voters were not presented with a genuine choice of political alternatives," with OSCE/ODIHR observers citing "serious irregularities inconsistent with national legislation and OSCE commitments, including proxy voting and indications of ballot box stuffing." Parliamentary elections took place in 2014.

According to the OSCE's observer mission, those elections did not meet international commitments or standards. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces, but security services permeated civilian structures, and their interaction was opaque, making it difficult to define the scope and limits of civilian authority. Human rights issues included torture and abuse of detainees by security forces, arbitrary arrest, and

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incommunicado and prolonged detention; harsh and sometimes life-threatening prison conditions; political prisoners; restrictions on freedom of speech, the press, and the internet, including censorship, criminal libel, and site blocking; restrictions on assembly and association, including restrictions on civil society, with human rights activists, journalists, and others who criticized the government subject to harassment, prosecution and detention; severe restrictions on religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; restrictions on political participation in which citizens were unable to choose their government in free, fair, and periodic elections; criminalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) conduct; and human trafficking, including forced labor. Impunity remained pervasive, but government prosecutions of officials on corruption charges significantly increased during the year.