

The State of the Internet and Digital Rights in Tajikistan (2019–2025)

The report “The State of the Internet and Digital Rights in Tajikistan (2019–2025)” presents a detailed analysis of the paradoxical situation that has developed in the country’s digital sphere. On the one hand, Tajikistan demonstrates steady growth in the number of internet users and the expansion of mobile network coverage. On the other hand, this quantitative growth is taking place against the backdrop of critically low service quality, high prices, and one of the slowest internet connections in the world. This gap between the growing demand for network access and the actual state of infrastructure creates tension that is exacerbated by a strict state policy of regulation.

A key feature defining the development of the internet in the country is its high degree of centralisation and monopolisation by the state. The creation of the Unified Switching Centre (USC), through which all international traffic passes, has not only limited competition and led to higher prices for end users, but has also become an effective tool for control and censorship. The report examines in detail how this architecture allows the authorities to promptly intervene in information flows, creating “bottlenecks” that are vulnerable to failures and simplify the imposition of any restrictions.

Finally, the study sheds light on the legal and humanitarian consequences of this approach. An analysis of legislation and law-enforcement practice shows how laws on countering extremism and “fake information” are used to persecute journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens for their online statements. The report documents numerous cases of blocking news websites, social networks, and messengers, as well as prolonged internet shutdowns in regions, particularly in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. These measures not only violate citizens’ digital rights but also create an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship, forcing active users to resort to VPNs to bypass restrictions. The full report offers an in-depth examination of the details of this complex process in order to understand how technological development comes into conflict with the tightening of state control.

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using artificial intelligence technologies. It is recommended to use this text as a starting point for further research and to verify critically important data from primary sources.

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1. General Information

1.1. Geographical Location

The Republic of Tajikistan is a mountainous landlocked country located in Central Asia. It borders Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to the north and west, the People's Republic of China to the east, and Afghanistan to the south.¹ Ninety-three per cent of Tajikistan's territory is occupied by mountains, including the Pamir and Alay ranges, with altitudes ranging from 300 to almost 8,000 metres above sea level; almost 50% of the country's territory is located at an altitude of more than 3,000 metres.¹ The capital is the city of Dushanbe. Geographical isolation and complex mountainous terrain create significant difficulties for the development and maintenance of internet infrastructure, which can lead to uneven coverage and higher costs for network deployment. In addition, high seismic activity in the region poses a constant risk to physical internet infrastructure, requiring additional measures to ensure its resilience and the development of rapid recovery plans in the event of natural disasters.

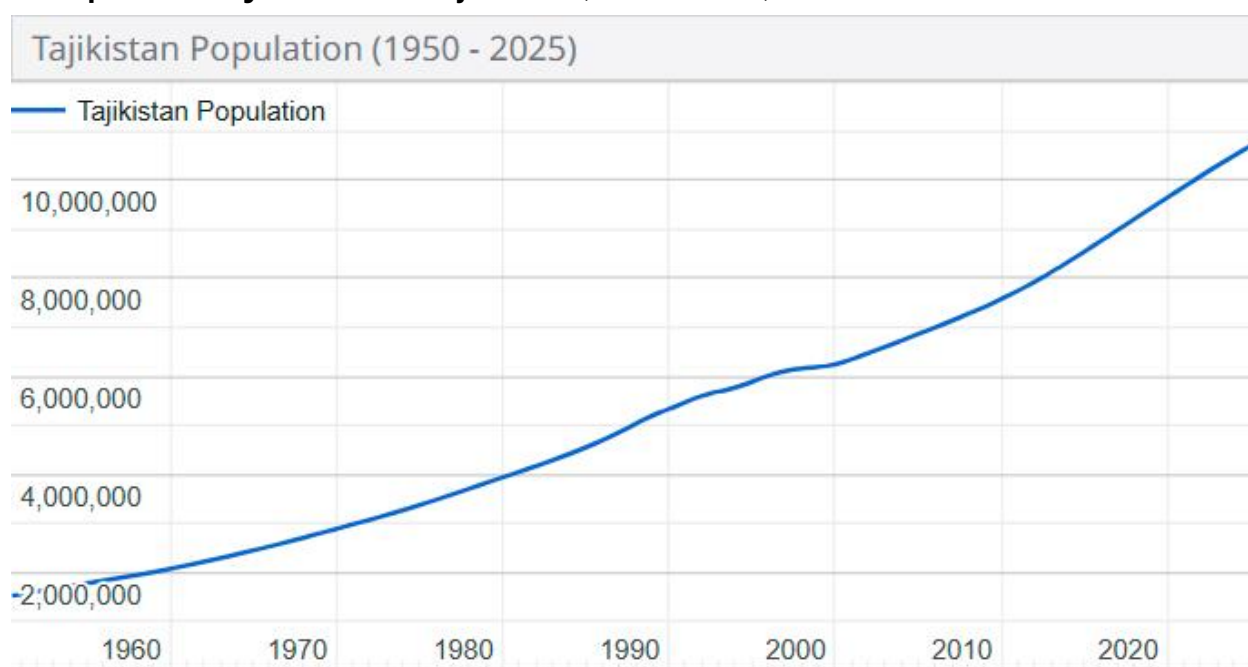
1.2. Population

The population of Tajikistan is characterised by some of the highest growth rates among the former USSR countries over the past three decades. From approximately 5.3 million people at the beginning of 1991, it increased by almost 83% by the beginning of 2022. The main factor in this growth is high natural population increase. A significant proportion of citizens live in rural areas; in 2022 their share was 71%. The ethnic composition of the country is predominantly Tajik (about

82.3% according to the 2010 census), with a significant proportion of Uzbeks (about 12.2%). The state language is Tajik, while the Russian language is widely used in government circles and business and has the status of a language of interethnic communication according to the Constitution.²

Rapid growth of a young population⁵ creates both opportunities (for example, a large potential market for digital services) and challenges, including the need to provide quality education with an emphasis on digital literacy and the creation of sufficient jobs. The predominance of rural population against the background of complex mountainous terrain also indicates a probable significant digital divide between urban and rural areas, both in terms of access and quality of internet services.

Graph 1: Population dynamics of Tajikistan (1950–2025)



Source: *worldometers.info*

1.3. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

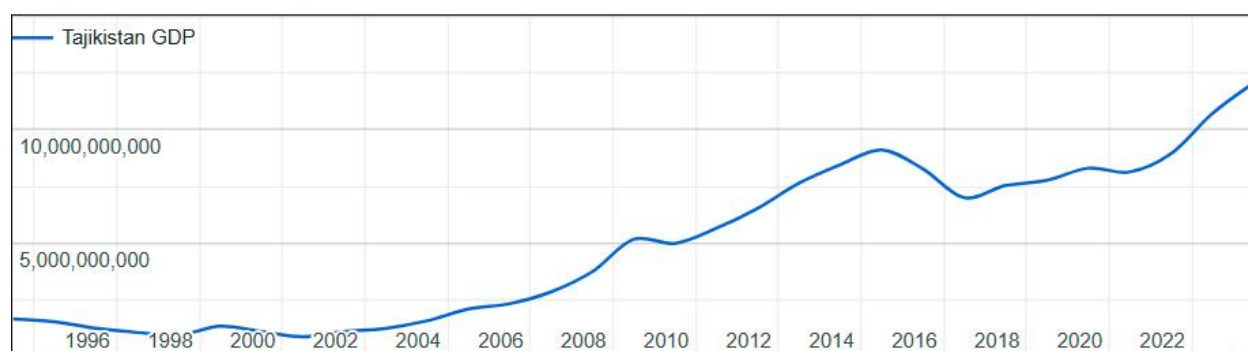
Tajikistan's economy over the past decade has shown steady growth rates, averaging more than 7.1% per year. In 2023, GDP growth was 8.3%,⁹ and for 2024 growth was forecast at 6.5%.⁹ The main drivers of economic growth remain large volumes of remittances from labour migrants, which stimulate private consumption, as well as government investments directed primarily at

infrastructure projects.⁹ Despite positive growth dynamics, GDP per capita in Tajikistan remains one of the lowest in the Central Asian region.⁹

High dependence of the economy on remittances, mainly from Russia, makes it vulnerable to external economic shocks in migrant-host countries. This can indirectly affect investments in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector and the affordability of internet services for the population. Even with overall GDP growth, the low GDP per capita means that for a significant part of citizens the cost of even basic internet services may remain high, limiting their full participation in the digital space.

Graph 2: Dynamics of nominal GDP of Tajikistan (1993–2023)

Tajikistan GDP (Nominal, \$USD) 1993-2023



Source: *worldometers.info*

1.4. Main Economic Characteristics

The economy of Tajikistan, while in a growth phase, faces a number of deep structural problems. These include the predominance of the agricultural sector, high dependence on remittances from labour migrants, and insufficient diversification of the economic base.¹⁰ The most important industries for the country remain agriculture, where cotton is the key crop, industry represented by aluminium and cement production, and hydropower.¹⁰ The government declares a course towards developing the private sector and increasing export volumes. However, structural challenges such as an unfavourable business environment, low levels of foreign direct investment, high risk of debt crisis, and inefficient management of state enterprises continue to hinder economic development.¹¹

The state strategy aimed at developing the private sector and stimulating exports could potentially create increased demand for digital services and appropriate infrastructure, including e-commerce, digital marketing, and modern logistics IT solutions. However, the success of these initiatives will

directly depend on the implementation of real reforms aimed at improving the business climate and attracting investment, including in the ICT sector. Low economic diversification and dependence on a few key industries make the country vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices for commodities such as aluminium and cotton.¹⁰ This, in turn, can negatively affect overall economic stability and, consequently, the pace of development of the digital sector.

1.5. General Political Situation

Tajikistan is a presidential republic where power is heavily concentrated in the hands of the executive branch.¹⁹ President Emomali Rahmon has been in power continuously since 1992.²⁰ In 2016, as a result of a constitutional referendum, he was released from term limits, and he and his family members were granted immunity from prosecution.²⁰ The president's son, Rustam Emomali, holds the post of speaker of the upper chamber of parliament (Majlisi Milli) and is first in line to succeed to the presidency.²⁰

The dominant political force in the country is the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), which controls the majority of seats in parliament.²⁰ Other parties represented in the legislature also express support for the incumbent president.²⁰ The activities of the main opposition force, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), were banned, and the party itself was recognised as a terrorist organisation.²⁰ International observers, including the OSCE, have repeatedly noted that elections in Tajikistan do not meet democratic standards and cannot be considered free and fair.²⁰

In administrative-territorial terms, Tajikistan is divided into the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), Sogd and Khatlon regions, regions of republican subordination (RRS), and the capital – the city of Dushanbe, which has the status of a city of republican significance.²² The country has 17 cities, 62 districts (including 13 districts of republican subordination), 55 towns, and 368 rural communities (jamoats).²²

High concentration of power and suppression of political opposition create conditions under which decisions concerning the regulation of the internet and digital rights can be made without broad public discussion and consideration of the opinions of independent experts. This increases the risk of adopting measures that restrict freedom in the digital sphere. The long-term tenure of one political group and members of the president's family can also contribute to the merging of state and private economic interests, including in the telecommunications sector, which potentially leads to monopolisation and restriction of competition. The special status of the Gorno-Badakhshan

Autonomous Region and reports about the situation in this region²⁵ may indicate the application of specific control and regulation measures over the internet by the central authorities.

2. Internet

2.1. National Domain

The national top-level domain (ccTLD) for Tajikistan is **.TJ**.²⁸ It was put into operation in 1995,²⁹ although some sources indicate 1997³¹ or 2004²⁸ as the date of implementation or activation. Administration and registration of domains in the .TJ zone is carried out by the Information and Technical Centre (ITC) under the Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan,²⁹ also known as the .TJ Domain Registry.²⁸

Registration of domain names in the .TJ zone is available both to residents and non-residents of Tajikistan, including individuals and legal entities.³² However, in disputed situations, priority is given to residents of the country.³¹ A domain name must contain from 2 to 63 characters consisting of Latin alphabet letters (case-insensitive), numbers, and hyphens, which cannot be in the third or fourth position.³² The first and last characters must be a letter or number, and the name cannot consist only of numbers.³⁴ Support for internationalised domain names (IDN), particularly in the Tajik language using Cyrillic or Arabic script, is explicitly not indicated or noted as absent.²⁸ There are reserved domain names, including two-letter country codes and geographical names, the registration of which requires special permission.³² Public second-level domains are also provided for registration of third-level domains by industry (e.g., .com.tj, .edu.tj, .gov.tj, .org.tj).³¹ The registration and renewal period is usually from 1 to 5 years.²⁸

Centralisation of national domain management under a structure attached to the Executive Office of the President²⁹ may indicate the state's desire to maintain control over key elements of the national internet infrastructure. This can have both positive aspects related to coordination of development and negative ones expressed in the risk of censorship or administrative interference. The lack of full IDN support in the Tajik language²⁸ may limit accessibility and ease of use of the internet for part of the population that prefers their native language and potentially hinder the development of local content.

2.2. Number of Users

According to DataReportal, as of the beginning of 2025, Tajikistan had 6.07 million internet users, corresponding to an internet penetration level of 56.8% of the total population.⁵ This demonstrates significant growth compared to previous years: in January 2024 there were 4.25 million users (41.6% penetration),³⁷ in January 2023 – 4.10 million (40.8%),³⁸ in January 2022 – 3.95 million (40.1%), in January 2021 – 3.36 million (34.9%),³⁹ and in January 2020 – 2.42 million (26%).⁴⁰ In January 2019, the number of users was estimated at 2.70 million (30%).⁴¹

The national news agency of Tajikistan “Khovar”, citing data from the Communications Service, reported 4.18 million users (including mobile and fixed internet) in July 2024.⁴² A year earlier, in July 2023, the total number of internet users was estimated at 4.5 million.⁴³ World Bank data, based on information from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), indicate an internet penetration level of 56.8% in 2023, 53.1% in 2022, 49.8% in 2021, and 27.5% in 2020.⁴⁴

Steady and significant growth in the number of internet users and internet penetration in Tajikistan over the period 2019–2025 indicates progressive digitalisation of society, despite existing economic and infrastructure challenges. This growth may be driven by the expansion of mobile network coverage, lower smartphone prices, and growing demand for online services. Nevertheless, discrepancies in data from various sources³⁶ may be related to differences in counting methodology and require a cautious approach to interpretation. Despite the positive dynamics, a significant part of the population (43.2% at the beginning of 2025 according to DataReportal) still remains offline, indicating a persisting digital divide.⁵

2.2.1. Fixed-line Internet

The fixed broadband (FBB) market in Tajikistan remains underdeveloped.⁴⁵ The number of fixed broadband subscribers is extremely low: according to the World Bank, in 2022 there were only 6.2 thousand users.⁴⁵ According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for the same year, this amounted to about 61.3 subscribers per 100 people,⁴⁷ which is one of the lowest indicators in Central Asia.⁴⁸ The main constraining factor for development is the limited fixed-line infrastructure.⁴⁶ Extremely low fixed broadband penetration makes the majority of the population dependent on mobile internet, which can be more expensive and less stable for certain types of online activity.

Despite statements by the Communications Service about lowering costs and abolishing tariffs for fixed internet with speeds below 5 Mbit/s in 2025,⁵¹ historically high prices and low speeds⁴⁹ have been a serious barrier. Real improvement of the situation will require significant investment in infrastructure and increased competition in the market. The existence of own international channels

by some providers⁵² may contribute to improving connectivity; however, the overall dependence on the Unified Switching Centre (USC) of Tojiktelecom for international traffic⁵³ limits their competitive advantages.

Major fixed-line internet providers:

- **Tojiktelecom (TojNet):** National operator, offers services based on GPON, FTTB, Wi-Fi technologies. Websites: <http://www.tojiktelecom.tj/>, <http://www.tojnet.tj/>. Market share not specified, but as the national operator probably holds a significant share.⁵⁵
- **Babilon-T:** Offers CyberOptic (fibre-optic), CyberNet, WiMAX services. Website: <http://www.babilon-t.tj/>. Has its own international lines, one of the largest by IPv4 addresses.⁵²
- **Eastera:** Internet provider. Website: <http://www.eastera.tj/>.⁵⁵
- **Saturn-Online:** Has its own international lines. Website: www.saturn.tj (may be unavailable).⁵²
- **Telecom Technology (TTL):** Internet provider. Website: <http://www.ttl.tj/>.⁵²
- **TezNet (from Tcell):** Offers access via GPON technology. Website: <https://teznet.tj/> or via <https://www.tcell.tj/>.⁶⁶
- **Spitamen Alexander Internet LLC (SA-NET):** Internet via Ethernet and Wi-Fi. Websites: <https://spitamen-it.com/>, <http://www.sa-net.tj/>.⁵⁶
- **Intercom:** IP-telephony operator and internet provider. Website: <https://intercom.tj/>.⁵⁶

2.2.2. Mobile Internet

Mobile internet is the dominant means of network access for the majority of Tajikistan's population. At the beginning of 2025, the total number of active mobile connections was estimated at 10.8 million, equivalent to 101% of the total population. Of these, 89.1% of connections were classified as broadband (3G, 4G or 5G). The number of mobile connections exceeding 100% of the population indicates the widespread practice of using several SIM cards by one person or the presence of inactive SIM cards in statistics, which means that the real penetration of mobile communications among unique users may be lower.

Active development of 4G networks and the start of 5G deployment⁵¹ testifies to the desire of operators to improve the quality of mobile internet. However, actual coverage and availability of these technologies, especially outside major cities, remain key issues given the country's mountainous terrain and high proportion of rural population. Competition between several major mobile operators should theoretically contribute to improving service quality and reducing prices,

but the overall dependence on state infrastructure (USC) and regulatory pressure may limit this effect.

Major mobile internet providers:

- **MegaFon Tajikistan (CJSC “TT mobile”)**: Provides GSM, 3G-UMTS, HSDPA, 4G/LTE and 5G services. Website: megafon.tj.⁶⁵
- **Tcell (CJSC “Indigo Tajikistan”)**: Provides GSM, UMTS, HSPA, LTE services; launched 5G in 2020. Owned by AKFED. Website: www.tcell.tj.⁵⁵
- **Babilon-Mobile**: Provides GSM, 3G-UMTS/HSDPA, 4G-LTE services. Website: www.babilon-m.tj.⁵⁵
- **ZET-MOBILE (LLC “Takom”, formerly Beeline)**: Part of VimpelCom group. Website: zet-mobile.com.⁵⁵
- **O Mobile (CJSC “O-Mobile”)**: Relatively new operator. Website: <https://www.omobile.tj/>.⁶⁵

Exact market share data in open sources are limited, but it is known that private operators hold a dominant position in the communications market (about 94.5% in 2022).⁸⁵

2.3. Internet Access Speed and Quality of Services

Tajikistan consistently ranks low in global internet speed rankings. According to the Speedtest Global Index by Ookla for March 2025, the median fixed broadband download speed was 34.23 Mbit/s and upload speed was 33.51 Mbit/s (122nd place).⁸⁷ Data for mobile internet in the same 2025 reports were missing.⁸⁷

In August 2023, according to the same Speedtest Global Index, Tajikistan ranked 139th out of 145 countries in mobile internet speed, with an average download speed of 9.61 Mbit/s and upload speed of 5.71 Mbit/s.⁸⁸ According to Cable.co.uk for 2024, the average broadband speed in Tajikistan was only 3.10 Mbit/s (225th place in the world),⁸⁹ and in 2023 – 2.98 Mbit/s (214th place).⁹⁰ In 2021, the average download speed was even lower – 1.82 Mbit/s.⁹¹ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its 2025 review indicated that slow mobile internet speed (139th place in the world) and high cost of services are significant obstacles to the country’s digitalisation.⁴⁹ At the same time, the Communications Service of Tajikistan announced plans to increase access speed to 30–32 Mbit/s for each user in 2024.⁹²

There is a noticeable discrepancy between official statements about plans to improve internet speed⁵¹ and actual data from international rankings,⁴⁹ which consistently show low indicators for Tajikistan. This may indicate either slow implementation of the announced plans or that

improvements are not nationwide and do not cover the majority of users. Low quality and high cost of internet services⁴⁹ are serious obstacles to the development of the digital economy, online education, access to information, and the realisation of citizens' digital rights, exacerbating digital inequality. Monopolisation of the market and control over international gateways by state or state-affiliated companies such as the USC and Tojiktelecom⁵³ are probably among the key reasons for the low quality and high cost of internet, as this limits competition and incentives for investment in infrastructure improvement by independent providers.⁵

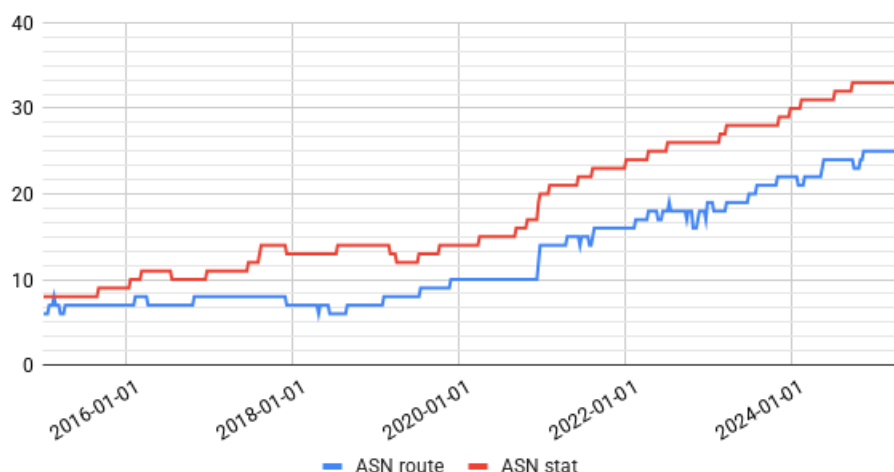
2.4. Development of Providers and Autonomous Systems

According to RIPE NCC, as of April 2025, 36 Autonomous Systems (AS) were registered in Tajikistan.¹⁰⁰ Historical data show that the growth in the number of networks (AS) in Tajikistan was slow compared to other Central Asian countries.¹⁰² The RIPE NCC report for 2020 noted that in Tajikistan (and Turkmenistan) over the previous 15 years there had been insignificant growth or complete absence of growth in the number of active networks.¹⁰² Such slow growth in the number of AS may indicate high barriers to entry for new internet providers. These barriers may be related to a complex regulatory environment, the need to connect through the Unified Switching Centre (USC), or the high cost of creating and maintaining infrastructure.

A limited number of AS and potential dependence on a small number of transit providers increase the vulnerability of the national internet infrastructure to possible failures and technical problems. In addition, such centralisation facilitates state control over information flows and potentially simplifies the application of censorship measures.

Graph 3: Dynamics of Autonomous Systems in Tajikistan (2015–2025)

ASN Stat



The dynamics of growth of autonomous systems (AS) in Tajikistan over the past decade demonstrate steady, though not explosive, development of the national internet infrastructure. However, despite positive dynamics, the country significantly lags behind its neighbours in Central Asia in the ratio of the number of internet networks per capita, which indicates the presence of serious challenges for further digitalisation. As of 2025, Tajikistan has 36 registered autonomous systems, of which 25 are actively announced in the global routing table.

Key observations:

1. **Steady growth:** Both curves on the graph indicate steady growth, which testifies to the emergence of new internet providers, large companies, and state structures seeking independent routing policy.
2. **Growing gap:** Over time, the gap between the number of registered and active AS increases. This may indicate that some organisations register AS “for future use”, to protect the brand, or face technical and bureaucratic difficulties when launching their own network. The presence of 11 “dormant” systems (almost a third of the total) is a notable feature.
3. **Periods of acceleration:** Periods of more intensive growth are noticeable, particularly after 2021, which may be related to the implementation of state programmes for the development of the digital economy or the entry of new players into the market.

Despite positive internal dynamics, comparison with other Central Asian countries reveals Tajikistan’s significant lag. An important indicator of the level of development and decentralisation of internet infrastructure is the number of inhabitants per autonomous system. In Tajikistan, with a

population of about 10.5 million people and 36 AS, approximately 292 thousand people fall on each autonomous system.

This indicator is significantly higher than that of the region's leaders in network decentralisation — Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, one of the 192 autonomous systems accounts for about 105 thousand inhabitants, and in Kyrgyzstan, with 58 systems, approximately 124 thousand. Tajikistan's indicators are closer to those of Uzbekistan, where one of 95 AS accounts for about 383 thousand people. Turkmenistan stands apart, with only 7 autonomous systems for 7.6 million inhabitants, reflecting the extremely centralised and closed nature of its internet space.

Conclusions

Growth exists, but the pace is insufficient: Tajikistan's internet infrastructure is developing, as evidenced by the steady growth in the number of autonomous systems. This is a positive sign indicating gradual diversification of the internet market.

High centralisation and potential for growth: A large number of inhabitants per autonomous system indicates a high level of centralisation of internet access. This may mean limited competition between providers, which often leads to higher prices and lower quality of services for end consumers. On the other hand, this indicates significant untapped growth potential and the possibility of new networks emerging.

Need for stimulation: To accelerate digital development, Tajikistan probably needs additional measures to stimulate the creation of new autonomous systems. This may include simplification of regulatory procedures, support for small and medium-sized internet providers, and creation of a more competitive environment in the telecommunications market.

“Dormant” systems as an indicator of barriers: The presence of 11 inactive but registered AS may signal the existence of certain (technical, financial or administrative) barriers preventing the full launch of network infrastructure. Analysis of the causes of this phenomenon could help develop effective industry development policy.

Overall, the dynamics in Tajikistan are positive, but to reach the level of its more digitally developed neighbours in the region, the country needs to accelerate the decentralisation of its internet infrastructure.

Table 1: Top 10 largest Autonomous Systems of Tajikistan

#	Number of AS	Name	Web Site	Foreign neighbour count	Local neighbour count	Total neighbour count	Foreign neighbours share
1	51346	Tojiktelecom	https://tojnet.tj	9	15	24	38%

2	43197	MegaFon Tajikistan	https://www.mega-fon.tj	13	8	21	62%
3	208592	AS-AVESTONET KAZTRANSCOM		1	7	8	13%
4	24722	Babilon-AS	https://www.babilon-t.com	1	7	8	13%
5	57443	OSHNOGROUP-AS		0	7	7	0%
6	8847	CJSC "Telecomm Technology"	https://www.ttl.tj	1	3	4	25%
7	47139	INDIGO-TAJIKISTAN-AS		1	3	4	25%
8	49945	Alif-as		0	4	4	0%
9	196854	AS-ISATELTJ Alif-Bank	https://isatel.tj	0	3	3	0%
10	199303	spb-tj		0	3	3	0%

From the table, the following conclusions can be drawn about the structure of internet connectivity in Tajikistan:

Clear centralisation and dominance of two players

Analysis of the top-10 autonomous systems shows that the internet transit market in Tajikistan is strongly concentrated around two key operators: Tojiktelecom (AS51346) and MegaFon Tajikistan (AS43197). Together they have 45 peering connections, which is the overwhelming majority of all connections of the top-10 operators. This confirms the earlier conclusion about the high centralisation of the country's internet infrastructure.

The two market leaders have different strategies for building connectivity:

- **MegaFon Tajikistan** acts as the main international gateway. 62% of its connections (13 out of 21) are with foreign partners. This indicates the company's focus on providing access to global resources.
- **Tojiktelecom**, on the contrary, plays the role of the central domestic hub. The company has the largest number of local connections (15), which is almost twice as many as MegaFon. This indicates its key role in domestic traffic exchange in Tajikistan.

Dependence of other operators

The high degree of centralisation is evidenced by the fact that four of the ten largest autonomous systems have no direct foreign connections (Foreign neighbours share = 0%). These include OSHNOGROUP-AS, Alif-as, AS-ISATELTJ Alif-Bank and spb-tj.

This means that to access the global network they are completely dependent on purchasing transit from larger players, primarily Tojiktelecom and MegaFon. Such a structure creates “bottlenecks” and puts most of the national internet in dependence on the stability and pricing policy of two dominant providers.

Immaturity of the peering ecosystem

The total number of peering connections even for market leaders (24 for Tojiktelecom and 21 for MegaFon) is quite low by global standards. This indicates an insufficiently developed peering ecosystem. A small number of direct connections between networks can lead to suboptimal traffic routes, increased latency, and reduced overall network fault tolerance in the country.

2.5. IPv6 Penetration

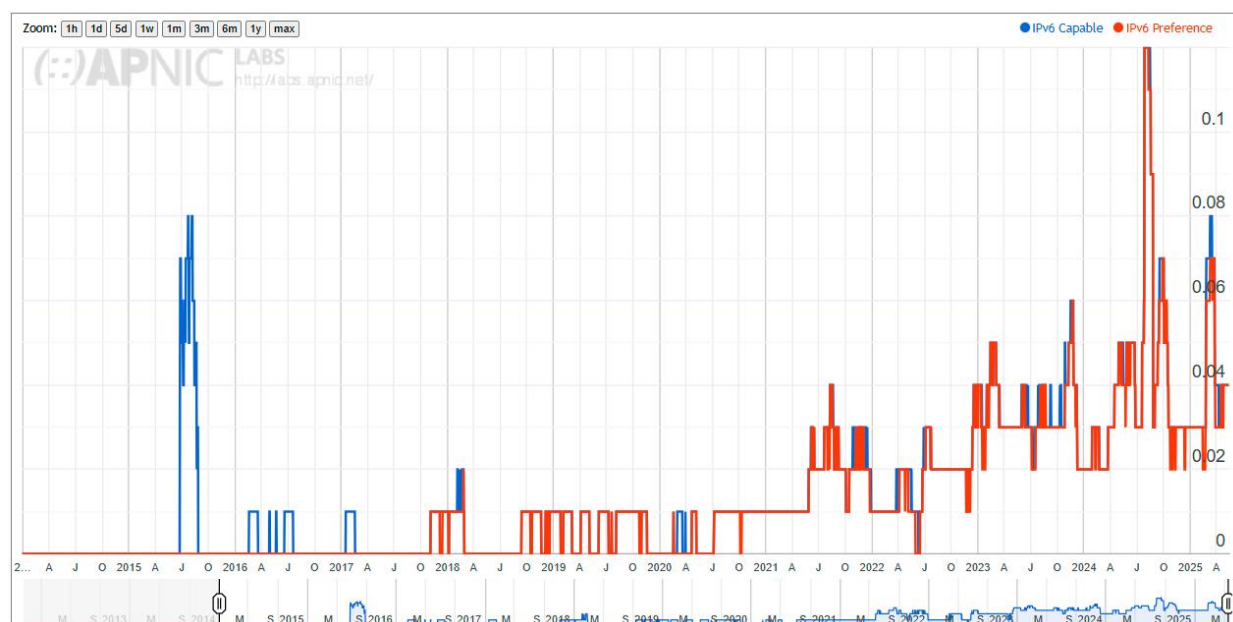
Data on IPv6 penetration in Tajikistan indicate an extremely low level of implementation of this protocol. APNIC Labs statistics show very low IPv6 Capable (share of users able to use IPv6) and IPv6 Preferred (share of users preferring IPv6 when available) values for the country.¹⁰³ For example, for individual autonomous systems such as AS206351 and AS44961, these values were close to zero for many years.¹⁰³ In the general APNIC report for Central Asia (XR region), the average IPv6 Capable indicator was about 11.45%, and IPv6 Preferred – 10.69%,¹⁰⁵ however, for Tajikistan individual indicators are significantly lower than this regional average. According to APNIC as of May 2025, the overall IPv6 capability level for Tajikistan is only 0.04%.¹⁰⁵

Google IPv6 statistics, showing global penetration of about 47.55% as of April 2025,¹⁰⁷ do not provide detailed data for Tajikistan in available sources.¹⁰⁸ Graphs from ipv6-test.com¹¹⁰ also indicate slow growth of IPv6 support in the country, but do not contain specific percentage values by year. The lack of active IPv6 deployment may in the long term lead to problems with the shortage of IPv4 addresses, increased access costs, and restrictions on the development of new internet services requiring large address space (for example, the Internet of Things – IoT). This may also affect global connectivity and performance of access to resources transitioning to IPv6. The extremely low level of IPv6 implementation testifies to the absence of strategic focus and investment in network infrastructure modernisation on the part of both the state and providers. This

is probably related to current priorities aimed at solving more pressing problems with basic access and IPv4 internet speed.

Graph 4: Dynamics of IPv6 penetration in Tajikistan (2015–2025)

Use of IPv6 for Tajikistan (TJ)



Source: stats.labs.apnic.net

2.6. Connectivity Index

To assess the level of integration of the internet segment, two key indicators are used, based on the analysis of pairwise connections (peerings) between Autonomous Systems (ASN).

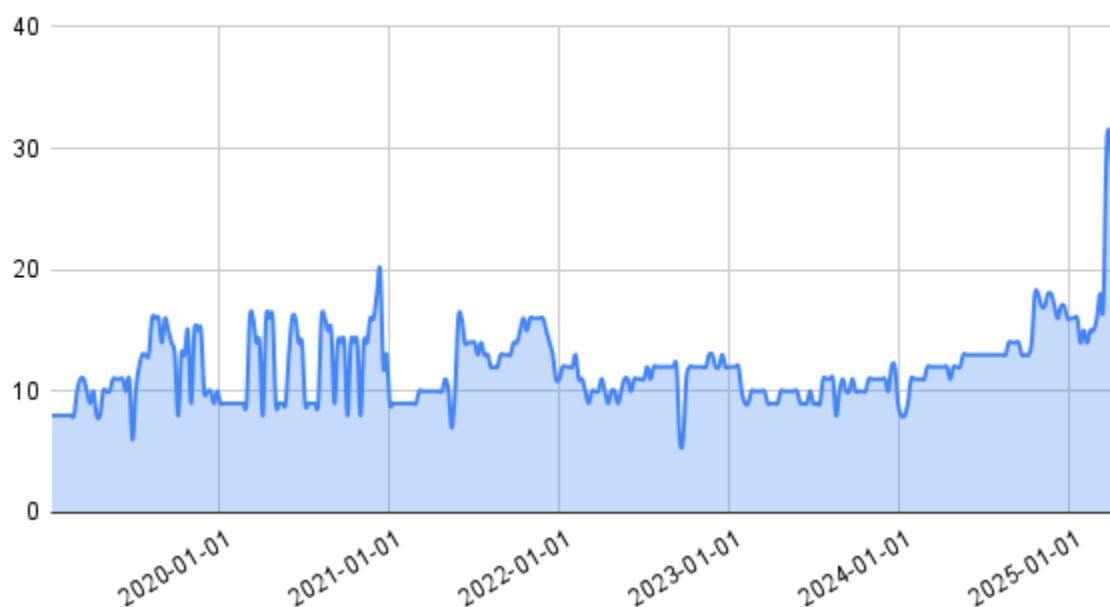
Global Connectivity Index: This index represents the total number of unique connections between each local ASN and each external (foreign) ASN. Essentially, it measures how widely and diversely the internet segment is connected to the rest of the world. The higher this indicator, the more “windows” the country has to the global network.

Local Connectivity Index: This index is calculated as the total number of unique connections between different local Tajik ASN. It reflects the intensity and complexity of the domestic internet market, in particular the activity at internet exchange points (IXP). A high indicator indicates a developed domestic ecosystem that allows efficient local traffic exchange within the country, minimising delays and dependence on expensive international channels for local data.

Analysis of the ratio of these two indices makes it possible to understand the strategic orientation of the national network: whether it is predominantly self-sufficient or deeply integrated into the global infrastructure.

Graph 5: Dynamics of global connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Tajikistan (2019–2025)

Global connectivity statistics

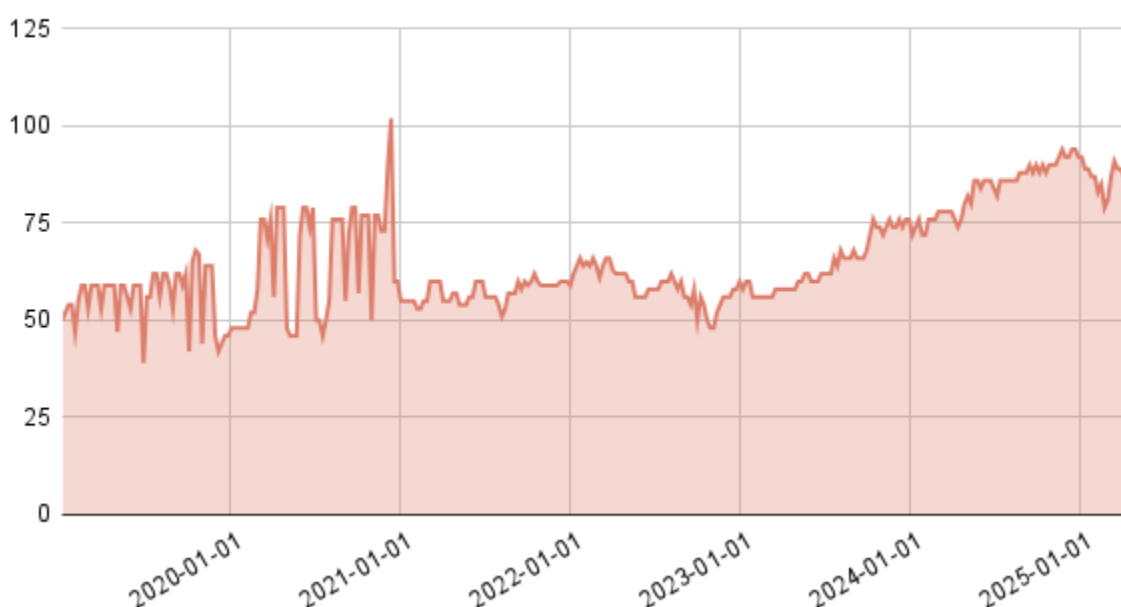


The dynamics of global connectivity of Tajikistan's internet segment are characterised by high volatility and a recent sharp increase. Throughout most of the period from 2019 to 2024, the index fluctuated in a narrow corridor, averaging from 10 to 15 unique external connections. Frequent and sharp peaks and drops, especially in 2020–2021, may indicate instability of peering agreements, frequent changes of transit operators, or test connections, which is typical for a developing market.

The key point is the significant growth that began in 2024 and reached an unprecedented peak by mid-2025. This leap testifies to a qualitative change: either a new major player with a diversified connection network entered the market, or existing operators aggressively increased the number of external peerings. This is a positive shift indicating stronger integration of Tajikistan into the global network and increased fault tolerance due to diversification of external channels.

Graph 6: Dynamics of local connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Tajikistan (2019–2025)

Local connectivity statistics



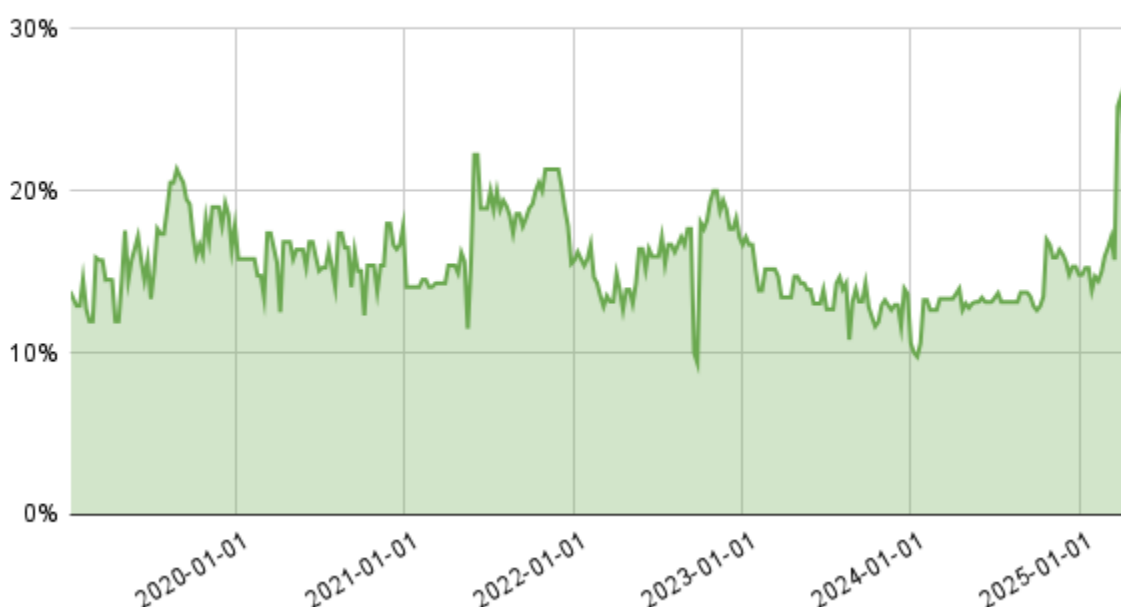
The local connectivity graph demonstrates a significantly higher level of interaction between operators within the country compared to external connections. Despite periods of high volatility, especially a noticeable jump at the end of 2020, the overall trend since 2022 has been slow but

steady growth. The sharp peak in the past may be associated with the launch or reconfiguration of the national internet exchange point (IXP), to which a large number of participants temporarily connected.

The steady increase in the index in recent years (2023–2025) indicates the gradual maturation of the domestic internet market. Operators are more actively establishing direct connections with each other, which allows keeping local traffic inside the country. This reduces delays for users, reduces the load on expensive international channels, and strengthens the overall stability of the national segment, making it less dependent on external factors for internal communication.

Graph 7: Dynamics of the ratio of global and local connectivity of Autonomous Systems of Tajikistan (2019–2025)

Total connectivity share



This graph shows that throughout almost the entire analysed period, the share of global connections in the overall connectivity structure remained stably low, fluctuating in the range of 10–20%. This indicates that the Tajik internet segment has historically been more oriented towards

internal interactions than external integration. The number of local peerings steadily and significantly exceeded the number of global ones, which indicates a certain degree of self-sufficiency of the network.

3. Internet Legislation

3.1. Principles of Internet Governance

Internet governance in Tajikistan tends towards a state-oriented model, which corresponds to the position of the Regional Commonwealth in the field of communications (RCC), of which Tajikistan is a member.¹¹¹ This model implies increased state control over national internet infrastructure and regulation of digital platforms, which differs from the multistakeholder approach promoted by many international organisations.¹¹¹ Despite the participation of Tajik representatives in regional internet governance forums such as the Central Asian Internet Governance Forum (CAIGF), where the advantages of the multistakeholder approach were discussed,¹¹² in practice there is a consistent strengthening of state regulation.

The legislative framework consists of acts such as the Law “On Information”¹¹³ and the Law “On Informatisation”,¹¹⁵ which establish general frameworks for activities in the information sphere, including the creation, accumulation, storage, transmission, and dissemination of information using modern information technologies. The declared principles include ensuring the rights of subjects in information processes, as well as preserving state secrets and confidentiality of information.¹¹⁵ However, these principles may conflict with the practice of state control and restriction of access to information, especially if legislative wording allows broad interpretation in the interests of “national security” or “public order”. Tajikistan’s support for the state-oriented internet governance model within the RCC¹¹¹ indicates the possible further strengthening of state control over the national segment of the network.

3.1.1. Regulation

Internet regulation in Tajikistan is carried out comprehensively, through licensing of providers’ activities,⁵⁷ control over the use of the radio frequency spectrum and tariffs,⁵⁷ as well as through legislation affecting information security, countering extremism, and the procedure for disseminating information.¹¹⁷ A key role in this process is played by the Communications Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, which is authorised to issue licences, monitor the activities of operators, and take measures to restrict access to information.⁵⁷ An important

element of regulation and control is the Unified Switching Centre (USC), managed by the national operator OJSC “Tojiktelecom”, through which all international internet traffic passes.⁵³

The regulation system is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and concentration of powers in state bodies, especially the Communications Service and security-related structures. This creates conditions for prompt intervention in the activities of internet providers and content resources. The lack of transparency in some regulatory procedures, for example, website blocking based on informal “recommendations” or verbal instructions,¹¹⁷ undermines the principle of the rule of law and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for internet businesses and users.

3.1.2. Regulatory Bodies and Responsible Persons

- **Communications Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan:** The key regulator in the field of telecommunications and internet. It is responsible for licensing, development of regulatory acts, monitoring operator activities, managing the radio frequency spectrum, ensuring information security, and implementing state policy in the field of ICT.⁵⁷
 - **Head:** As of January 2025, Isfandiyor Sa’dullo was appointed head of the Communications Service.¹²⁵ He replaced Beg Sabur (previously Zuhurov Beg Saburovich), who had headed the agency from 2011 to January 2025.¹²⁶
 - **Official website:** <https://cs.gov.tj/>.¹²⁸ Information about the leadership on the site may be limited.¹³⁰
- **Council for Information and Communication Technologies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan:** Acts as the highest guiding and coordinating body in the field of ICT development, implementation of state information policy, and formation of e-government.¹¹⁷
 - **Chairman:** President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon.¹³² A key role in implementing digital policy is played by the Agency for Innovation and Digital Technologies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.¹³⁴ Director of the Agency – Khurshed Mirzo.¹³⁴
- **Security Council of the Republic of Tajikistan:** Exercises control over the implementation of the state strategy in the field of ICT and monitoring of telecommunications, including the internet, for the purpose of ensuring national security.¹¹⁷
 - **Secretary of the Security Council:** Yusuf Rahmon (appointed in February 2025).¹³⁷ Previously this position was held by Nasrullo Mahmudzoda.¹³⁸ The Chairman of the Security Council ex officio is the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.¹³³

- **Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Committee for National Security:** These agencies are also involved in monitoring information on the internet, especially in the context of countering extremism and terrorism.

3.2. Monopolisation of the Market

Tajikistan's legislation in the field of communications and competition contains provisions aimed at preventing monopolisation and protecting fair competition. The Antimonopoly Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan is authorised to regulate prices for products of monopoly enterprises and suppress monopolistic activity and unfair competition.¹⁴⁰ The Law "On Protection of Competition" provides for state control over economic concentration.¹⁴¹

Despite the existence of antimonopoly legislation, in practice there is a significant degree of monopolisation in the telecommunications market, especially in the segment of the international internet gateway. A key role here is played by the Unified Switching Centre (USC), created by Government Resolution No. 765 of 30 December 2015 and managed by the state operator OJSC "Tojiktelecom".⁵³ All international internet and voice channels must pass through the USC.⁵³ This decision was justified by the need to ensure national and information security, as well as to combat "grey traffic".⁹¹

In fact, the USC and Tojiktelecom have become monopolists in the market for providing access to the international internet channel for other providers and communication operators.⁵³ This has led to private internet providers being deprived of the right to directly purchase internet traffic from foreign operators and being forced to buy it from Tojiktelecom at significantly higher prices.⁵³ Such a situation has led to an increase in internet prices for end users and a decrease in service quality, since providers' incentives for investment and competition have decreased.⁵³ In November 2023, the Communications Service reported the issuance of licences to two private companies for the supply of high-speed internet through international channels, which could potentially somewhat demonopolise this segment; however, the details and impact of this step on the overall market structure remain not fully clear.⁵³

3.3. Internet Shutdowns on Government Orders

Tajikistan's legislation provides for the possibility of shutting down or restricting access to the internet and communication services by decision of the authorities in certain situations. In particular, the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Combating Terrorism" (Article 20 as amended by Law No. 1266 of 25.12.2015) allows temporary suspension of the provision of electric

communication services and the use of relevant means in the zone of a counter-terrorism operation, as well as throughout the country or in its individual regions at the request of the main entity directly combating terrorism.¹⁴⁴ Article 12 of the same law is aimed at preventing the use of communication networks for terrorist purposes, although its full text was not available.¹⁴⁶

The Constitutional Law “On the Legal Regime of a State of Emergency” also grants the authorities the power to restrict or prohibit the use of various types of communication equipment, including mobile and internet equipment, as well as to exercise control over the activities of the media under a state of emergency (paragraph 14 of Article 4 as amended).¹⁴⁷ In addition, general rules for the provision of data transmission services may provide for the possibility of disconnecting a subscriber from the network in the event of violation of the contract terms or for reasons related to emergency circumstances.¹⁴⁸

In practice, the Tajik authorities have repeatedly resorted to internet shutdowns and blocks, especially during periods of political tension or protests, as occurred in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in 2021–2022.²⁵ Human rights organisations noted that such shutdowns often occurred without formally declaring a state of emergency and proper legal justification, violating both international norms and national legislation.²⁵ Decisions on shutdowns can be made by the Communications Service or other authorised bodies, sometimes in a non-transparent manner.¹²³

3.4. Legislation on “Words on the Internet”

In Tajikistan, there is legislation that can be applied to prosecute citizens or organisations for statements on the internet, including for disseminating information that the authorities may consider “fake” or “extremist”.

In June 2020, amendments were adopted to the Code of Administrative Offences of the Republic of Tajikistan (CAO), supplementing it with Article 374.¹⁵¹ This article establishes liability for “Dissemination of knowingly false information using mass media, the internet or other electric communication networks”. Punishment is provided for disseminating such information in the context of the emergence and spread of diseases dangerous to humans or during the implementation of restrictive quarantine measures, as well as for disseminating information that does not correspond to reality about methods and means of protection and other measures taken to ensure public safety in these circumstances.¹⁵³ For individuals, the punishment is a fine of ten to twenty calculation indices or administrative arrest for a term of ten to fifteen days; for legal entities – a fine of one hundred fifty to two hundred calculation indices.¹⁵³ According to reports, these

amendments were adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in response to publications by journalists and activists about cases of the disease and the distribution of humanitarian aid.¹⁵¹

The definition of “knowingly false information” in the article itself is not detailed, which, according to the human rights organisation ARTICLE 19, creates risks for freedom of expression, since it leaves a wide field for interpretation by law-enforcement bodies.¹⁵¹ The organisation also noted that the adoption of the amendments took place without open public consultations and may have a “chilling effect” on the media and critical voices in society.¹⁵¹

In addition, the Criminal Code of Tajikistan contains articles that can be applied to online statements. For example, amendments made to Article 307 of the Criminal Code in June 2018 provide for punishment for “public justification of terrorism” and “public calls for the violent change of the constitutional system of the Republic of Tajikistan” via the internet.¹⁵⁴ Article 330 of the Criminal Code provides for liability for insulting a representative of the authorities.¹⁵⁵ The Law “On Countering Extremism” also contains broad definitions of extremist activity that may include the dissemination of certain materials on the internet.¹¹⁹ The Law “On Information” prohibits the collection, storage, use, and dissemination of information about private life, as well as information disclosing personal and family secrets.¹¹⁴

These legislative norms create a legal basis for prosecuting online content that the authorities may consider illegal; however, broad and sometimes vague wording raises concerns among human rights defenders regarding their possible use to suppress freedom of speech and criticism of the authorities.¹⁵¹

3.5. Legislation on Internet Blocking

Tajikistan’s legislation contains provisions allowing the authorities to block internet resources. The main regulatory act often cited to justify blocking is the Law “On Countering Extremism”.¹⁵⁶ This law defines “publishing and/or disseminating printed, audio, audiovisual and other materials of an extremist nature in the mass media, the internet, electric communication networks” as one of the forms of extremist activity.¹⁵⁶

In addition, amendments to the Law “On the State of Emergency” also grant the government the right to block mobile services and internet access without a court decision.¹⁴⁷ The Law “On Combating Terrorism” permits blocking of internet and telephone systems during “counter-terrorism operations”, especially if “prohibited information” is disseminated through

them.¹⁴⁴ These legislative norms create broad opportunities for the authorities to restrict access to online content, often citing national security or countering extremism considerations.

3.5.1. Legislation

As noted above, the key laws regulating internet resource blocking in Tajikistan are:

1. **Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Countering Extremism”**: Article 3 defines the dissemination of extremist materials via the internet as extremist activity. Article 11 grants the Communications Service the authority to monitor websites and social networks, inform law-enforcement agencies about extremist materials, and restrict or suspend the operation of internet resources to prevent extremist activity.¹⁵⁶
2. **Constitutional Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On the Legal Regime of a State of Emergency”**: Amendments (in particular paragraph 14 of Article 4) allow restricting or prohibiting the use of mobile and internet equipment, as well as exercising control over the media under a state of emergency.¹⁴⁷
3. **Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Combating Terrorism”**: Article 20 (as amended on 25.12.2015) allows temporary suspension of electric communication services (including internet) in the zone of a counter-terrorism operation or throughout the country at the request of the authorised body.¹⁴⁴

These laws grant state bodies, primarily the Communications Service and security structures, significant powers to restrict access to information on the internet. Human rights defenders note that the definitions of “extremism” and grounds for blocking can be broad and applied to restrict freedom of speech.¹⁵⁶

3.5.2. Blocking Procedures

Internet resource blocking procedures in Tajikistan are not always transparent and formalised. In practice, blocking can be carried out on the basis of a verbal order, SMS message, or written decision from the regulatory body, which is most often the Communications Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan.¹²³ The Communications Service, in accordance with the Law “On Countering Extremism”, is authorised to monitor internet resources and take measures to restrict access to content recognised as extremist.¹⁵⁶

In some cases, blocking is carried out on the basis of court decisions, especially when it comes to recognising materials or organisations as extremist.¹⁵⁶ However, as experts note, the judicial system

may side with the regulator to avoid creating precedents for challenging blocking.¹⁵⁶ The authorities may also refer to the need to ensure information security or prevent the dissemination of “unreliable” information, especially during politically sensitive periods.¹¹⁷

The lack of clearly defined and publicly available blocking procedures, as well as frequent references to verbal instructions, create an atmosphere of legal uncertainty and make it difficult to challenge such decisions for resource owners and users.

3.5.3. Registries of Blocked Internet Resources

There appears to be no official, publicly available single registry of blocked internet resources in Tajikistan, or information about it is extremely limited. The authorities usually do not publish lists of blocked sites, and the reasons for blocking are often unclear or explained as “technical problems”.¹²³

Nevertheless, there are lists of organisations recognised by a court as extremist or terrorist whose activities (including their internet resources) are prohibited on the territory of Tajikistan. For example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs previously published lists of sites associated with such organisations.¹⁵⁹ It is also known about court decisions to block specific information resources such as Akhbor.com or Pamir Daily News on charges of extremism.¹⁵⁶

The lack of an official and transparent registry of blocked resources makes it difficult to understand the scale and reasons for internet censorship in the country, as well as the possibility of legally challenging blocking. Users and resource owners often learn about blocking only when the site becomes inaccessible.

As mentioned above, there appears to be no official public single registry of blocked internet resources in Tajikistan. However, there are unofficial lists and mentions of blocked resources in reports by human rights organisations and the media.

- **List of banned organisations and their sites:** The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan previously published lists of sites associated with organisations recognised as terrorist or extremist. An example of such a list is the 2015 publication that included sites associated with Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, the Caucasus Emirate, and others.¹⁵⁹ In 2024, Fergana published an updated list of 29 organisations recognised as terrorist and/or extremist and banned in Tajikistan, including Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, Group 24, as well as media resources Pamir Daily News and New Tajikistan 2.¹⁶¹

- **Reports from media and human rights defenders:** Reports regularly appear about the blocking of individual news sites, social networks, and messengers. For example, the Asia-Plus website (news.tj) and Radio Ozodi (rus.ozodi.org, ozodi.org) have been repeatedly blocked over the years.²⁷ There have also been reports of blocking Facebook, YouTube, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and other platforms.¹⁵⁷ In 2016, about 30 sites were reported blocked, including ria.ru, lenta.ru, Tjknews.com, Maxala.org, centrasia.ru, Fergana.ru.¹⁶⁵
- **OONI data (Open Observatory of Network Interference):** OONI collects data on internet censorship worldwide, including Tajikistan. However, according to their website, there are still insufficient measurements for Tajikistan to form a complete picture and publish a separate research report.¹⁶⁶ The collected data can be used to analyse the blocking of specific URLs.

The lack of an official, transparent, and regularly updated registry of blocked resources with an indication of the legal grounds for blocking is a serious problem for freedom of information and the rule of law in the country. This creates space for arbitrary blocking and makes it difficult to challenge them.

3.5.4. Development of Blocking

The practice of blocking internet resources in Tajikistan has a long history and is characterised by a wave-like nature, often coinciding with important political events or periods of social tension. International organisations and local observers have repeatedly reported blocking of news sites, social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki), and messengers.²⁵

The authorities often deny their involvement in blocking, citing “technical problems” or actions of the providers themselves.¹²³ However, providers in turn point to orders from the Communications Service.¹⁵⁷

OONI Data (Open Observatory of Network Interference):

OONI is a global project that collects data on internet censorship using open-source software (OONI Probe) to test for blocking of websites, instant messaging applications, and censorship circumvention tools.

- **General information on Tajikistan:** As of April 2025, OONI Probe users in Tajikistan had collected more than 285 thousand measurements from 14 local networks.¹⁶⁶ However, according to OONI, this number of measurements is still insufficient to form a comprehensive

picture of internet censorship in the country and publish a separate research report on Tajikistan.¹⁶⁶

- **Methodology:** OONI uses the Web Connectivity test to measure DNS, HTTP, and TCP/IP blocking of websites. The websites tested are based on Citizen Lab lists and can also be added by users via the OONI Probe mobile app.¹⁶⁶ Tests are also conducted for blocking WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, Signal, Tor, and Psiphon.¹⁶⁶
- **Available data:** On the OONI Explorer website, data for individual measurements can be found, but there are no generalised conclusions for Tajikistan for the period 2019–2025 in the provided materials. In the “Findings” section for Tajikistan, it says “No findings available”.¹⁶⁷
- **Examples of blocking in the region (not Tajikistan):** OONI publishes reports on blocking in other countries, for example, the blocking of TikTok in Kyrgyzstan (April 2024), Viber in Russia (December 2024), Proton VPN in Tanzania (August 2022), and various social networks and news sites in other countries at different periods.¹⁷² These examples show the types of blocking that OONI can detect.

Conclusion on the development of blocking:

The practice of blocking internet resources in Tajikistan remains widespread and non-transparent. The authorities have legislative tools to restrict access to information and actively use them, especially with regard to critical content, opposition resources, and during periods of exacerbation of the socio-political situation. The lack of an official registry of blocked sites and clear procedures makes monitoring and challenging blocking difficult. OONI data, although collected, are still insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of the situation in Tajikistan over the entire period under review, but confirm the existence of tools for detecting censorship. Given the general trend towards strengthening state control over the information space, it can be assumed that the practice of blocking will persist and possibly expand.

4. Human Rights Violations on the Internet

In Tajikistan, there is a complex situation with respect for human rights on the internet. The authorities actively use legislative and technical means to control the online space, which leads to restrictions on freedom of expression, access to information, and persecution of users for their online activity. Reports from international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch,

Amnesty International, as well as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), indicate the systematic nature of violations.²⁷

Key problems include arbitrary blocking of websites and social networks, internet shutdowns, especially in regions with heightened tension such as the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), as well as criminal and administrative prosecution of citizens, journalists, and bloggers for their online publications. Legislation on countering extremism and the dissemination of false information is often used to suppress criticism and dissent.

4.1. Internet Shutdowns on Government Orders

Tajikistan has repeatedly recorded cases of internet shutdowns and restrictions on access to communication services by decision of the authorities, especially during periods of political instability or protest actions. The most noticeable and prolonged shutdowns were associated with events in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO).

- **Events in GBAO (2021–2022):**
 - In November 2021, after the start of protests in Khorog, the capital of GBAO, the authorities completely shut down the internet in the region.²⁵ This shutdown lasted for several months. Although internet connection was partially restored for some government agencies and banks, the main part of the population and international organisations remained without access.²⁵
 - Human rights organisations, including the Civic Solidarity Platform and IPHR, expressed concern that the internet shutdown deprives people of the right to access information and has serious humanitarian consequences.²⁵ They noted that the authorities provided no explanations or legal grounds for the blocking and its duration.²⁵
 - Although Tajikistan's national legislation (Laws "On Combating Terrorism" and "On the State of Emergency") allows restriction of communications in emergency situations,²⁵ a state of emergency was not officially declared in GBAO, which called into question the legality of the shutdown.²⁵
 - In May 2022, against the background of a new wave of protests and the subsequent "counter-terrorism operation" in GBAO, internet and mobile communications in the region were again completely shut down.¹⁴⁹ This shutdown was also prolonged and seriously limited opportunities for monitoring the human rights situation and disseminating independent information.

- Amnesty International in its report indicated that for a month after the start of protests in GBAO in May 2022, internet and mobile communications in the region were shut down.¹⁴⁹
- Access Now, as part of the #KeepItOn campaign, also documented these shutdowns, emphasising that they are a violation of human rights and are often used to conceal violations during the suppression of protests.¹⁷⁷
- **Other cases and general practice:**
 - Human Rights Watch in its annual reports for 2019 and 2021 noted that the Tajik authorities regularly blocked access to internet news and social networks, as well as disrupted access to mobile and messenger services when critical statements about the president, his family, or the government appeared on the network.²⁷
 - The authorities often use vague wording such as “ensuring national security” or “combating extremism and terrorism” to justify blocking and shutdowns.²⁵

These cases demonstrate the readiness of the Tajik authorities to resort to complete or partial internet shutdowns as a tool for controlling the information space and suppressing dissent, especially in crisis situations. Such actions seriously violate citizens’ right to access information, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly.

4.2. Criminalization of Statements on the Internet

In Tajikistan, during the period from 2019 to 2025, numerous cases of criminal and administrative prosecution of citizens, journalists, and bloggers for their statements on the internet have been recorded, including posts on social networks, comments, and “likes”. The authorities actively use legislation on countering extremism, terrorism, as well as articles on libel, insult, and dissemination of false information to suppress criticism and dissent.

The most mentioned cases and general trends:

- **Cases related to “likes” and reposts:** In Tajikistan, there have been cases where citizens were held accountable for “likes” or reposts of materials on social networks that the authorities considered extremist or illegal. This practice has drawn criticism from the public and human rights defenders.¹⁵⁴ In October 2024, President Emomali Rahmon criticized unfounded cases for “likes” and the “weak work” of Tajik officials in the Russian Federation, which could potentially lead to a review of such practice.¹⁵⁴
- **Accusations of extremism and terrorism for online activity:**

- In June 2018, amendments were made to Article 307 of the Criminal Code (CC) of the Republic of Tajikistan, providing for punishment for "public justification of terrorism" and "public calls for violent change of the constitutional order" via the internet.¹⁵⁴
- **Case of Daler Sharipov (2020):** Journalist Daler Sharipov was sentenced to one year of imprisonment on charges of "inciting religious discord" for publishing a treatise.¹⁶³
- **Case of Abdulmajid Rizoev (2021):** Lawyer Abdulmajid Rizoev was sentenced to five and a half years of imprisonment for "public calls for extremist activity using mass media or the internet" (Article 307 of the CC of the Republic of Tajikistan). His posts and reposts on Facebook, questioning the turnout in the 2020 parliamentary elections and quoting classics of Tajik literature about wise and unwise rule, were recognized as "extremist".²⁷
- **Cases of bloggers Daleri Imomali and Abdullo Gurbati (2022):** Bloggers known for their critical reports on state institutions were detained and accused of "participation in the activities of banned political parties and organizations".¹⁷⁰ Daler Imomali was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for alleged connections with the banned movement "Group 24".¹⁸⁴
- **Case of Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoda (2022):** Blogger was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment. He claimed torture and coercion to confess connections with the banned Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) after covering social problems.¹⁷⁴
- **Case of Khurshed Fozilov (2023):** Journalist was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment on charges of "cooperation with banned organizations" for materials covering social problems and criticizing local authorities.¹⁶⁰
- **Case of Ahmad Ibrohim (2024–2025):** Editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Paik" was arrested in August 2024 on charges of bribery, extortion, and extremism. In January 2025, he was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in a closed trial.¹⁷¹
- **Case of Rukhshona Khakimova (2024–2025):** Journalist faced accusations, possibly of "treason", in connection with conducting a public survey on China's influence in Tajikistan. In February 2025, she was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment in a closed process on classified charges.¹⁸⁴
- **Administrative offenses:**
 - Article 374(1) of the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO) of the Republic of Tajikistan, introduced in 2020, provides for fines or administrative arrest for dissemination of "knowingly false information" via mass media or the internet, especially in the context of emergencies such as a pandemic.¹⁵¹
 - Article 330 of the CAO of the Republic of Tajikistan ("Insult to a representative of authority") can also be applied to online statements.¹⁵⁵

- In July 2024, two young women were detained for posts on Instagram where they posed in short dresses, which was regarded as "insulting the honor" of Tajik women.¹⁷¹
- In January 2023, blogger Habibullo Khimmatzoda was arrested for 5 days for "dissemination of insulting videos with obscene language".¹⁷⁵
- **Pressure and intimidation:** In addition to formal prosecutions, journalists and activists report threats, surveillance, and pressure on their families in connection with their online activity.²⁷

These cases testify to the systematic approach of the Tajik authorities to control the online space and suppress any dissent, which seriously limits freedom of speech and creates an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship.

4.3. Persecution of Media and NGOs

In Tajikistan, mass media (media) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face significant pressure and persecution for their activities, including online publications. The authorities use various methods to restrict their work, including blocking websites, denying accreditation, criminal prosecution of employees, and pressure on their relatives.

The most notable cases and trends:

- **Blocking of news websites and social networks:**
 - Independent news agencies such as "Asia-Plus" (news.tj) and Radio "Ozodi" (Tajik service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) have been repeatedly blocked over the years.²⁷ The authorities often deny their involvement, citing technical problems, while access to resources is only possible via VPN.¹⁵⁸
 - In 2020, the Supreme Court found the independent news publication Akhbor.com guilty of "serving terrorist and extremist organizations" and ordered the website to be blocked.¹⁶³
 - In June 2023, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan banned the website "Novyi Tadjikistan 2" ("New Tajikistan 2"), associated with the opposition "Group 24", recognizing it as an "extremist organization". The authors' pages on Telegram, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were also banned.¹⁶⁰

- A week earlier, in June 2023, the Supreme Court also banned the online publication "Pamir Daily News", which covered events in GBAO, recognizing it as an "extremist organization".¹⁶⁰
- **Persecution of journalists and editors:**
 - Many journalists have been forced to leave the country due to persecution.¹⁶²
 - **Case of "Asia-Plus" (2019):** In July 2019, Russian authorities blocked the "Asia-Plus" website. Later, in August, the agency's addresses in Tajikistan were globally disconnected due to unauthorized changes in technical settings at the provider. The agency, which had previously faced persecution and blocking, moved its website to a foreign domain.¹⁶²
 - **Denial of accreditation and pressure on Radio "Ozodi":** For several years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan has denied extension or issuance of accreditation to Radio "Ozodi" journalists, or issued short-term accreditations, which contradicts the legislation. The service's employees reported intimidation by security services.²⁷
 - **Criminal cases against journalists:** As detailed in section 4.2, a number of journalists (Daler Sharipov, Abdulmajid Rizoev, Daleri Imomali, Abdullo Gurbati, Khurshed Fozilov, Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, Khushruz Djumaev, Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoda, Ahmad Ibrohim, Rukhshona Khakimova) were convicted on various charges, which human rights defenders link to their professional activities and online publications.²⁷
 - **Pressure on relatives of journalists in exile:** The Tajik authorities exert pressure on relatives of journalists working for foreign independent media such as Azda TV, in retaliation for their professional activities.¹⁷⁴
- **Pressure on NGOs:**
 - In 2023, the authorities announced the closure of 239 NGOs, in addition to more than 500 closed in 2022. Closures are often explained by government pressure or court decisions.¹⁶⁰
 - In January 2023, a court in Dushanbe liquidated the "Independent Center for Human Rights Protection" (ICHPR), which worked on sensitive issues such as housing rights and legal support for journalists.¹⁶⁰
 - In February 2024, a group of UN special rapporteurs expressed concern about the dissolution of 700 NGOs in the country in recent years.¹⁷³
 - Organizations working in the field of digital rights or freedom of speech face restrictions and self-censorship due to the overall repressive environment.¹⁶⁹

These cases testify to the targeted policy of the Tajik authorities to restrict the activities of independent media and NGOs, including through persecution for their online publications and creating an unfavorable environment for freedom of speech and access to information.

5. Civil Society in the Field of Internet Governance

Civil society in Tajikistan, engaged in issues of internet governance and protection of digital rights, operates in difficult conditions characterized by significant state control and restrictions on freedom of expression. Despite this, individual organizations and activists make efforts to monitor the situation, improve digital literacy, and advocate for users' rights in the online space. Their activities are often associated with risks and pressure from the authorities.²⁷

International organizations and donors also play a role in supporting initiatives aimed at developing digital potential and strengthening civil society in this area.¹⁸⁸ However, the overall environment for the activities of independent NGOs remains difficult, as evidenced by reports of the closure of many organizations.¹⁶⁰ The participation of civil society representatives in internet governance processes, such as the Central Asian Internet Governance Forum (CAIGF), provides a platform for dialogue with state bodies, but its real impact on policy remains limited.¹¹²

5.1. Organizations

In Tajikistan, there are several civil society organizations that to one degree or another deal with issues related to the internet, digital rights, and freedom of speech. However, their activities are often limited due to the overall political situation and pressure from the authorities.

- **Public Foundation "Civil Initiative on Internet Policy" (CIIP):** This organization previously actively participated in discussions on internet policy issues and the development of the internet segment in Tajikistan. For example, CIIP is mentioned as one of the developers of the website www.mometavonem.tj.¹⁹⁰ However, current information about activities and the website www.gipi.tj at the time of report preparation may have been unavailable.¹⁹¹
- **Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (BHR):** This organization deals with a wide range of human rights issues, including access to justice and freedom of expression. As part of its projects, BHR could address digital rights.¹⁹² Current website: <https://www.bhr.tj/>.¹⁹²

Contact information: Rudaki Ave. 137, 6th floor, room 607, tel. 224-41-53, 224-41-45, email: bhr.taj@gmail.com.¹⁹²

- **Public Foundation "Notabene" (NotaBene):** Engaged in human rights activities, including issues of non-discrimination and the rule of law. Although direct specialization in digital rights is not indicated in available fragments, their work on promoting international human rights standards may indirectly affect the online sphere.¹⁹⁴ Website: <https://notabene.tj/>.¹⁹⁵
- **National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT):** Unites independent media and journalists, deals with issues of press freedom and protection of journalists' rights, which is closely related to digital rights in the context of online journalism.¹⁹⁶
- **Public Organization "Marifati Shahrivandi":** Organization engaged in civic education. Contacts: Vahdat city, Tugral-19 V st.; tel: (+992) 918489444; email: marifatishahrivandi@bk.ru.¹⁹⁸
- **Acted:** International NGO implementing in Tajikistan the project "CSO-GO for GOVERNANCE", aimed at empowering media and civil society to protect fundamental freedoms and democracy, including through improving digital skills, combating disinformation, and improving access to information.¹⁸⁸ Website: <https://www.acted.org/>.¹⁸⁸
- **Other organizations:** There are other local and international NGOs that may periodically address digital rights issues as part of their broader human rights or media activities (for example, PF "Tashabbusi Hukuki", PO "Independent Center for Human Rights Protection"¹⁹⁷, HelpAge International¹⁹⁹).

It is important to note that many organizations operate under conditions of self-censorship and limited resources, and their ability to influence state policy in the field of the internet is small.

5.2. VPN and Means of Bypassing Blocks

The use of VPN (virtual private networks) and other means of bypassing blocks is a common practice among internet users in Tajikistan to access blocked resources such as independent news sites and social networks.¹⁵⁸ This is due to frequent blocks by the authorities, which restrict access to information and freedom of speech on the internet.

Although there appears to be no direct legislative ban on the use of VPN for ordinary users, the authorities periodically take steps to block the VPN services themselves and their websites.¹⁶⁴ This creates additional difficulties for citizens seeking access to alternative sources of information. Some VPN providers note that the Tajik government has blocked many VPN sites.²⁰²

5.2.1. Status of VPN Services

Officially, the use of VPN services in Tajikistan for individuals is not prohibited by law, if their use is not related to illegal activities.²⁰² However, the Tajik government takes measures to restrict access to the VPN services themselves and their websites.¹⁶⁴ This creates a situation where the use of VPN itself is not illegal, but access to tools providing such capability is difficult.

In Tajikistan's legislation, there are no special laws directly regulating the use, advertising, or sale of VPN services for private individuals. However, general laws on communications, information, and countering extremism may indirectly affect this issue. For example:

- **Law "On Electric Communications"** (new edition of 2023)¹¹⁸ and related by-laws of the Communications Service regulate the activities of operators and providers, who may receive instructions to block certain resources, including VPN services.
- **Law "On Countering Extremism"**¹⁵⁶ and **Law "On Combating Terrorism"**¹⁴⁴ can be used as grounds for blocking resources that, in the opinion of the authorities, contribute to the dissemination of prohibited information, and VPN services can be considered as means of access to such resources.
- **Government Resolution "On the Unified Switching Center for Electric Communications"**⁵³ centralizes internet traffic, which technically facilitates the possibility of filtering and blocking VPN protocols.

Although there are no direct laws prohibiting VPN, the authorities can use existing legislation to restrict access to them under the pretext of ensuring information security or combating illegal content.

5.2.2. Number of VPN Users

Exact official data on the number of VPN users in Tajikistan for the period from 2019 to 2025 could not be found in open sources. Estimating the number of VPN users is difficult due to the lack of systematic collection of such statistics and users' reluctance to publicize the use of means to bypass blocks.

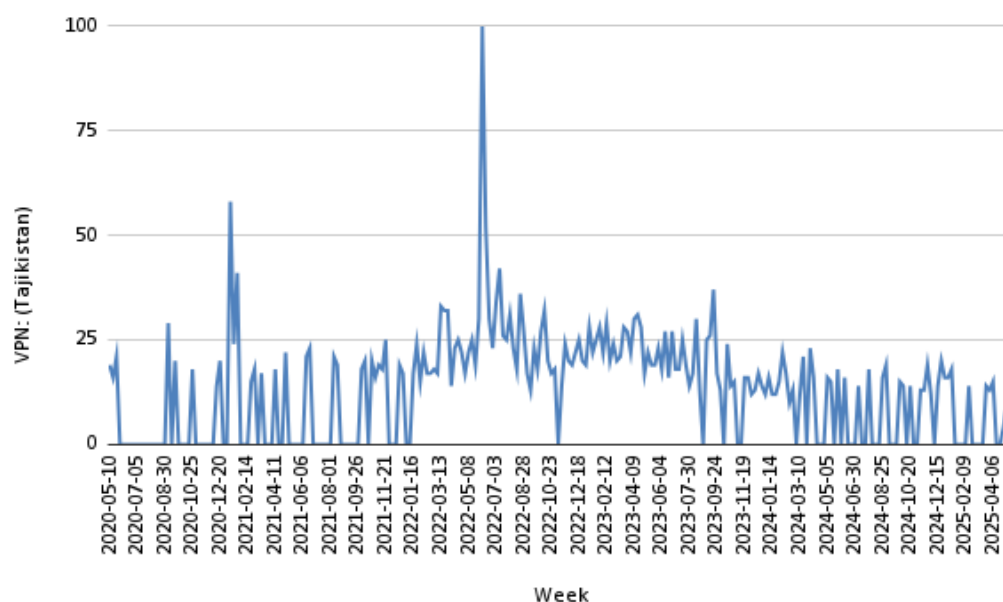
However, indirect data and reports indicate that the use of VPN is a common practice:

- Reports of blocks of popular sites and social networks¹⁵⁸ are often accompanied by information that access to them is possible via VPN. For example, after blocking the

"Asia-Plus" site, its audience adapted to the new reality and began using VPN, as a result of which the site's traffic began to return to previous levels.¹⁵⁸

- Reports from human rights organizations also indicate the need to use VPN to access blocked resources.²⁰⁰
- Global reports on the VPN market (for example, from Statista, AtlasVPN, Surfshark, Top10VPN) show overall growth in VPN use worldwide ²⁰⁸, but do not provide detailed statistics specifically for Tajikistan for the specified period.

Graph 8: Dynamics of search queries about VPN in Tajikistan (2020-2025)



Source: *trends.google.com*

Interest in VPN services in Tajikistan is not constant, but reactive. The graph does not show steady growth, but consists of sharp, short-term spikes against a relatively low baseline level of interest. This directly indicates that the mass user turns to VPN not for constant privacy protection, but as a tool to solve a suddenly arisen problem – loss of access to familiar resources.

Such dynamics allow using the graph as a kind of barometer of internet freedom in the country. Each significant peak on the graph is highly likely to correlate with periods of introduction of new restrictions or blocks by state regulators. The constant low background of queries meanwhile speaks of the presence of a core of users who use VPN on a permanent basis to access previously blocked sites or for other purposes.

Analysis of key peaks and their possible causes:

Search query peaks on the topic of VPN usually coincide with moments of restriction of access to popular social networks, messengers, or independent news publications.

- **Absolute peak (July-August 2022):** The highest spike in interest, reaching 100, occurred in mid-2022. This period followed the events in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in May 2022, after which the internet was completely shut down in the region, and throughout the country there were massive and prolonged blocks of social networks

(Facebook, Instagram), messengers, and many news resources. This peak reflects the population's reaction to the most large-scale internet restrictions over the entire observed period.

- Other significant spikes (for example, end of 2020, September 2023): Less high, but still distinct peaks are most likely also related to local or temporary restrictions. Causes could be:
 - Blocking of individual independent media during periods of publication of resonant materials.
 - "Slowdown" of social networks and messengers during socio-political tension.
 - Technical failures in the operation of backbone providers, which users could mistakenly take for blocks.
 - Spread of rumors about upcoming blocks, which prompted people to preemptively search for bypass solutions.

Blocking of VPN services:

The Tajik authorities periodically block access to known VPN services and protocols. This is usually done by blocking IP addresses or domain names of VPN providers through the Unified Switching Center (USC) or by order of the Communications Service to internet providers. Expert Nuriddin Karshiboev noted that most of the country's internet providers blocked a number of VPN proxies and other programs to bypass filtering.¹⁶⁴ Some VPN providers, such as ProtonVPN, note that the Tajik government has blocked many VPN sites, and use obfuscation methods to bypass such blocks.²⁰¹

5.2.3. Cases of Persecution for Using VPN

In the provided materials, there are no direct reports of judicial prosecutions or administrative penalties for ordinary users in Tajikistan solely for the fact of using VPN to access information during the period from 2019 to 2025. However, it is important to note several aspects:

- **Legislative context:** Although there is no direct law prohibiting the use of VPN for private individuals, ²⁰² legislation on countering extremism and terrorism, as well as on dissemination of false information, can be interpreted in such a way that using VPN to access prohibited content or to commit illegal actions is an aggravating circumstance or an independent offense.
- **Pressure and risks:** The authorities actively combat the dissemination of information they consider undesirable, and using VPN to bypass blocks can attract the attention of law enforcement agencies. In Turkmenistan, a neighboring country with a similar level of

restrictions, there are known cases of persecution of citizens for using VPN, including disconnection from the internet.²¹¹ Although there are no direct analogies with Tajikistan in the provided materials, such experience of neighboring countries may indicate potential risks.

- **Absence of information does not mean absence of cases:** The absence of widely publicized cases of persecution specifically for using VPN does not necessarily mean that there were no such cases. Information on law enforcement practice in Tajikistan is often limited.

Thus, although formal persecution for the fact of using VPN to access blocked sites in Tajikistan during the specified period was not massively recorded in the provided sources, VPN users may potentially face risks if their online activity is deemed illegal by the authorities on other grounds.

5.2.4. Monitoring of Blocks

Monitoring of internet resource blocks in Tajikistan is carried out by several organizations and projects, although systematic and comprehensive public monitoring is difficult due to the opacity of the authorities' actions.

- **OONI (Open Observatory of Network Interference):** This is a global initiative that collects data on internet censorship worldwide, including Tajikistan. The OONI Probe project software allows users to conduct tests and identify blocks of websites and applications.¹⁶⁶ OONI data are open and available on OONI Explorer. However, as of April 2025, insufficient measurements had been collected for Tajikistan to form a complete picture and publish a separate research report.¹⁶⁶
 - **Digest of reports (based on general information about OONI activities, as there are no specific reports on Tajikistan):** OONI regularly publishes reports on blocks in various countries, identifying cases of censorship during elections, protests, blocking of news sites, social networks, LGBTQI resources, and censorship circumvention tools.¹⁶⁶ Methods of blocks identified by OONI include DNS manipulation, HTTP blocking, and TCP/IP blocking.¹⁶⁶ Although no direct reports on Tajikistan for the last 5 years were found in the snippets, OONI's methodology allows recording such incidents if there are sufficient measurements from local users.
- **Local and international human rights organizations and media:** Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Reporters Without Borders" (RSF), as well as local media (for example, "Asia-Plus", Radio "Ozodi") and regional projects (for example, CABAR.asia) regularly report on cases of

internet resource blocks in Tajikistan, based on their own observations, user reports, and expert assessments.²⁵

○ **Digest of reports (2019–2024):**

- **2019:** Regular blocks of news sites (including "Asia-Plus", Radio "Ozodi"), social networks (Facebook, YouTube), and messengers, especially in response to critical publications.¹⁶² It was reported that 131 sites were blocked in January.¹⁵⁷
- **2020:** Continuation of blocks of news sites and social networks. The Supreme Court blocked the Akhbor.com site on charges of links to extremists.¹⁶³ The "Asia-Plus" site remained accessible mainly via VPN.¹⁵⁸
- **2021:** The state telecommunications agency regularly blocked sites with critical information, including Facebook, Radio "Ozodi", and opposition resources.²⁷ Large-scale internet shutdown in GBAO from November 2021.²⁵
- **2022:** Continuation of internet shutdown in GBAO and its repeated shutdown in May amid protests and "counter-terrorism operation".¹⁴⁹ Blocks of independent media covering events in GBAO.¹⁷⁰
- **2023:** The Supreme Court banned the "Novyi Tadjikistan 2" and "Pamir Daily News" sites, recognizing them as extremist.¹⁶⁰ Continued pressure on independent online media.¹⁷⁵
- **2024:** Preservation of the overall trend of restrictions. In July 2024, Tajikistan ranked one of the last places in the world in mobile internet speed, which also affects resource accessibility.⁹⁹ Reports of access problems to YouTube in Russia, through which Tajikistan receives part of the traffic, could indirectly affect accessibility in Tajikistan as well.²¹⁶

Monitoring of blocks in Tajikistan is complicated by the opacity of the authorities' actions and the absence of official lists of blocked resources. However, aggregate data from OONI and human rights/media organizations indicate the systematic nature of restrictions on access to information in the country.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the state of the internet and digital rights in Tajikistan for the period from 2019 to 2025 reveals a complex and contradictory picture. On the one hand, there is quantitative growth in

internet users and expansion of mobile infrastructure, including the introduction of 4G technologies and initial steps towards deploying 5G. On the other hand, the quality and speed of internet access remain low by international standards, and the cost of services is high for a significant part of the population. This is exacerbated by extremely low penetration of fixed broadband access and slow implementation of the IPv6 protocol, which creates risks for the future development of the country's digital ecosystem.

In the field of internet governance and its regulation, a state-oriented model dominates with a high degree of centralization and control by the Communications Service and security structures. The creation of the Unified Switching Center (USC) under the management of the state operator "Tojiktelecom" has led to actual monopolization of the international internet gateway, which limits competition and negatively affects prices and service quality. Legislation in the field of information, communications, countering extremism, and terrorism provides the authorities with broad powers to control the online space, including the possibility of shutting down the internet and blocking resources, often without transparent procedures and judicial oversight.

The practice of applying these powers raises serious concerns in terms of respect for human rights. Numerous cases of blocking independent news sites, social networks, and messengers have been recorded, especially during periods of political tension. Internet shutdowns, particularly in GBAO, were prolonged and significantly limited citizens' right to access information and freedom of expression. Criminal and administrative prosecution of journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens for their online statements, including "likes" and reposts, as well as for disseminating information that the authorities consider "false" or "extremist", create an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship. The activities of independent media and NGOs working in the field of digital rights and freedom of speech are associated with significant difficulties and risks. The use of VPN to bypass blocks is a common practice, however, the authorities periodically attempt to restrict access to these tools as well.

Forecast of developments:

- **Neutral scenario:** Preservation of current trends. Slow growth in internet penetration and improvement of its quality will continue, but Tajikistan will lag behind global and regional leaders. State control over the internet will remain high, with periodic blocks and prosecutions for online activity. Legislation will be used to restrict undesirable content. The level of self-censorship among users and media will remain high. The role of civil society in internet governance will be minimal.

- **Positive scenario (relaxation of regulation, liberalization):** The government, realizing the importance of the digital economy and free access to information for the country's development, will take steps to demonopolize the internet access market, ensure transparency of resource blocking procedures, and revise legislation towards greater compliance with international human rights standards. Competition among providers will be encouraged, which will lead to lower prices and improved service quality. The practice of prosecution for online statements will decrease, and the role of civil society in discussing internet policy issues will increase. Investment in infrastructure, including IPv6, will increase.
- **Negative scenario (strengthening of censorship):** The authorities will strengthen control over the internet space under the pretext of combating extremism, terrorism, and dissemination of "fake" information. New, stricter laws restricting freedom of speech and access to information will be adopted. The practice of total blocks and shutdowns will become more frequent. Prosecution for any criticism of the authorities on the internet will intensify, including using surveillance technologies. More active measures will be taken to block VPN and other means of bypassing censorship. The digital divide and the country's isolation from the global information space may worsen.

The likelihood of implementing one or another scenario will depend on many factors, including the domestic political situation in the country, economic development, the geopolitical situation in the region and the world, as well as the activity of the international community and local human rights initiatives. However, given the current trends and the overall political situation, the neutral scenario with elements of the negative one appears to be the most likely in the short and medium term.

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