

## **Uzbekistan: A Year of Disturbances**

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Over the past year, growing anger towards the government coupled with the harsh realities of life have sparked a series of incidents.

March-April/04

Armed clashes and explosions, some deliberate and some apparently accidental, rocked Tashkent. The government blamed Islamic radicals. Around 50 people died, at least ten of them police officers. Banned group Hizb-u-Tahrir was an early suspect but sources in the security services told IWPR the Islamic organisation was not involved. With no clear culprit, many in the capital turned on the government, saying its policies caused the poverty and hopelessness that fuel extremism

June/04

A businessman from the southern region of Kashkadarya tried unsuccessfully to organise a protest calling for the resignation of President Islam Karimov. It would have been the first-ever rally by ordinary Uzbeks against the policies of the president. Human rights activists and opposition politicians have almost always staged previous protests. However, it wasn't to be and in the end the authorities intervened to prevent it going ahead. Uzbek special operations forces, police and rescue service workers, blockaded the apartment where organiser Bahodir Choriev was staying in Tashkent. When he and his family eventually came out, they were beaten up and bussed out of the capital.

July/04

Suicide attacks on the United States and Israeli embassies and the Uzbek prosecutor's office left seven people dead, including three suspected bombers. The attacks were coordinated with a single bomber approaching each of the three buildings at almost exactly the same time. As with the explosions earlier in the year, there was little information about those responsible but theories ranged from al-Qaeda and Hizb-u-Tahir to the authorities themselves. However, it appeared the bombings were timed to coincide with the trials of 15 people accused of participating in the Tashkent violence.

November/04

Government attempts to enforce controversial new trade regulations resulted in mass unrest in the Fergana Valley, the country's most densely populated region. Around 6,000 furious market workers took to the streets in the city of Kokand. Several smaller disturbances in nearby towns followed. The violence broke out after tax inspectors in charge of implementing a new regulation requiring every small trader to have a license and sell the goods themselves carried out raids and confiscated goods belonging to traders who had not complied. A group of 300 demanded the return of the items then attacked inspectors and policemen, pelting them with stones. Calm was restored when the Kokand mayor temporarily put the decree on hold.

February/05

Uzbeks whose homes were bulldozed to make way for changes to the border with neighbouring Kazakhstan scored an unlikely victory over Tashkent, forcing the government to pay compensation. Their homes were knocked down to widen the no-man's-land between the two countries. Holding bright orange posters and

flags, the group of 50 from the Kibrai district on the Uzbek-Kazak border gathered in central Tashkent to demand payment for their demolished properties. The appearance of demonstrators on the streets of the capital in a scene reminiscent of the Ukrainian revolution shocked the government into action, and 16 were promised compensation.

May/05

Security forces wielding truncheons broke up a small demonstration outside the United States embassy in Tashkent. The 70 protesters, mainly women, had come from the south-western province of Kashkadarya to demand a farm they said had been wrongly seized by the local government be returned. They set up tents on the pavement outside the embassy and said they would stay until their demands were met. They chose the venue, because they hoped to seek asylum in the US if their government failed to respond. Police waded in late at night, attacking the demonstrators who were then sent back to Kashkadarya.

**Location:** [Uzbekistan](#)

**Focus:** [Central Asia](#)

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