

ANALYSIS OF THE WJP RULE OF LAW INDEX DATA, EXAMINATION OF ITS ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY, AND EVALUATION OF PROBLEMS AND SHORTCOMINGS IDENTIFIED IN THE KEY AREAS REFLECTED IN THE INDEX

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Abstract:

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the data of the Rule of Law Index developed by the World Justice Project (WJP) and offers an in-depth examination of the criteria and methodological principles applied in its formation. Within the framework of the study, the main structural dimensions of the Index are analyzed in detail, including constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, protection of fundamental rights, order and security, effectiveness of regulatory enforcement, as well as the independence of civil and criminal justice systems.

In addition, the problems and shortcomings identified in various countries through the WJP Index are examined from a comparative legal perspective, and the factors negatively affecting the enforcement of the rule of law are identified. The study substantiates the interconnection between the Index results and the quality of public administration, the effectiveness of the judicial system, the actual level of protection of human rights, and the mechanisms for combating corruption. The findings of this research are expected to serve as an important scientific and practical basis for assessing and improving national reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law.

Keywords: Rule of Law Index, World Justice Project (WJP), rule of law, indexing criteria, corruption, open government, judicial system, human rights, legal state, regulatory enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary globalization, ensuring the rule of law has emerged as a fundamental condition for the sustainable development of a democratic state, the effective protection of human rights and freedoms, and the enhancement of the efficiency of public administration. The rule of law is not limited solely to the existence of normative legal acts;

rather, it represents a complex socio-legal concept closely connected with their consistent and fair implementation in practice, the independence of the judiciary, the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, as well as the transparency and accountability of public authorities. The necessity to assess the practical state of these factors and to conduct a comparative analysis across countries has served as the basis for the establishment of international rankings and indices, including evaluation mechanisms such as the WJP Rule of Law Index.

The Rule of Law Index published annually by the World Justice Project is currently regarded as one of the most authoritative and widely used international indicators for assessing the legal systems of states worldwide. This Index is formed on the basis of eight core dimensions, namely: constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, protection of fundamental rights, order and security, effectiveness of regulatory enforcement, and the fairness of civil and criminal justice systems. Through these indicators, the rule of law is evaluated not only from a normative-legal perspective, but also from the standpoint of practical enforcement mechanisms.

In recent years, the results of the WJP Index have been widely utilized both in scientific research and as one of the primary analytical sources for shaping public policy, planning judicial and legal reforms, and developing anti-corruption strategies. In particular, according to the 2025 WJP Report, Uzbekistan ranked 81st among 143 countries, reflecting an improvement of two positions compared to its 83rd place in 2024 [1]. This indicates that the effectiveness of the reforms implemented in the legal sphere and the performance of institutions in the country are being recognized at the international level to a certain extent. At the same time, Uzbekistan scored 0.50 points in the overall Index.

However, a number of systemic problems still persist in certain dimensions of the Index. Specifically, the country ranked 114th in the area of constraints on government powers, while it was placed 120th with regard to the open government criterion. The indicator of protection of fundamental rights ranked 110th, with a corresponding score of 0.43 [2]. At the same time, Uzbekistan's relatively higher performance in the areas of order and security, as well as criminal law enforcement, indicates that the level of social stability and public safety in the country remains comparatively strong at the international level.

These circumstances demonstrate that conducting an in-depth and systematic analysis of the data of the WJP Rule of Law Index, examining its assessment criteria and methodological approaches from a scientific perspective, as well as identifying the existing strengths and weaknesses across the dimensions reflected in the Index, constitutes a pressing scientific and practical task. The results of this study will serve as a solid theoretical and practical basis for an objective assessment of the current state of the mechanisms ensuring the rule of law, as well as for the development of effective legal and institutional measures aimed at eliminating the identified shortcomings. From this perspective, assessing the present legal condition of Uzbekistan on the basis of the WJP Index and determining directions for its further improvement are of particular scientific and practical significance.

Literature Review and Methodology

The Rule of Law Index is one of the most important global indicators that independently assesses the level of the rule of law worldwide. This Index has been published annually since 2008 by the non-governmental organization World Justice Project (WJP) and currently covers more than 140 countries.

The WJP Index is constructed on the basis of nationwide public surveys (approximately 150,000 respondents) and surveys of legal experts (more than 4,000 specialists). For this reason, it reflects not only the formal legal framework but also the actual state of the rule of law in society and the extent to which citizens perceive and experience it in practice. The Index was developed with the aim of enabling countries to compare the strengths and weaknesses of their legal systems and to facilitate the identification of priority directions for relevant reforms [3].

The WJP interprets the rule of law in a broad (substantive) sense. According to the WJP definition, the rule of law is a durable system in which accountability (both the government and citizens are equally accountable under the law), just laws (legislation that is publicly promulgated and protects fundamental rights), open government (transparency in government activities), and accessible and impartial justice (the ability of every individual to protect their rights) are ensured. These principles are measured in the WJP Index through eight core factors: (1) Constraints on Government Powers, (2) Absence of Corruption, (3) Open Government, (4) Fundamental Rights, (5) Order and Security, (6) Regulatory Enforcement, (7) Civil Justice, and (8) Criminal Justice [5]. The WJP also recognizes the importance of the concept of informal justice; however, due to the lack of sufficient survey data, this dimension is not included in the overall calculation of the Index.

Alternative Indicators. Other international indices aimed at measuring the rule of law also exist, and their results serve to complement and provide a comparative reference to the WJP indicators. For instance, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International assesses the level of corruption in the public sector. Between 2017 and 2022, Uzbekistan's CPI score increased from 17 to 31 [6], making it one of the countries in the region that demonstrated positive progress. In addition, within the framework of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) research project, a set of comprehensive indicators for measuring the rule of law has been developed. These integrate such criteria as judicial independence, compliance of public officials with the law, bureaucratic impartiality, and corruption-free governance, on the basis of which the V-Dem Rule of Law Index is constructed. The V-Dem Index is based on expert assessments and even covers historical periods from 1900 to the present.

Empirical studies demonstrate that the results of the WJP Index show a high degree of correlation with these alternative indices. For example, scholars testing a new global rule of law index found that the correlation coefficient between the V-Dem indicators and the WJP Index amounted to 0.91. This indicates that, despite differences in methodology, various indices largely confirm one another in measuring the state of the rule of law across countries. Nevertheless, each index has its own analytical focus. For example, the WJP Index places strong emphasis on public opinion and judicial and law enforcement practice, whereas V-Dem

relies primarily on academic expert evaluations, and Transparency International measures only the scope of corruption. WJP experts themselves emphasize that no single index can provide a fully comprehensive picture and therefore advocate the combined use of multiple sources and indicators in the analysis of the rule of law. Accordingly, examining the WJP Index together with other indicators of the legal state represents a scientifically sound approach.

Global Trends. In recent years, the results of the WJP Index have recorded a decline in rule of law indicators in many countries. In particular, since 2016, a global “rule of law recession” has been observed, manifested in the growing powers of the executive branch, the restriction of civil rights, and the insufficient effectiveness of judicial systems in many states. According to the 2023 global report of the WJP, during the period from 2016 to 2023, the rule of law index declined in 78% of countries, with the “Fundamental Rights” factor experiencing the most significant deterioration (in 77% of countries) [7]. Civil liberties, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association, have continued to shrink worldwide in recent years.

At the same time, during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, many states temporarily suspended or restricted the functioning of their justice systems, which negatively affected judicial effectiveness. For instance, in 2023, the Civil Justice indicator further declined in 66% of countries, with delays in case adjudication becoming more widespread. Signs of weakening were also observed in the criminal justice system: while a decline was recorded in 55% of countries in 2022, this figure increased to 56% in 2023.

On the other hand, the pace of the global decline slightly slowed in 2022–2023. For example, in 2021, the rule of law index worsened in 74% of countries, while this share decreased to 61% in 2022 and to 59% in 2023. This indicates that some countries have begun to recover their lost positions as a result of new reforms and changes in government. For instance, in 2022–2023, Bulgaria, Honduras, Kenya, Slovenia, and Jordan significantly improved their indicators, whereas others, such as Belarus, Iran, and Sudan, experienced sharp declines.

Overall, the global **WJP ranking** continues to be dominated by the Scandinavian countries, which consistently occupy the top positions (in 2023, Denmark ranked 1st, Norway 2nd, and Finland 3rd), while authoritarian regimes remain at the bottom (in 2023, Venezuela, Cambodia, and Afghanistan occupied the lowest ranks).

Notably, Uzbekistan has stood out positively in this global context in recent years. WJP reports consistently identify Uzbekistan among the countries that have significantly improved their rule of law index since 2016. In other words, while the majority of countries worldwide have experienced setbacks in the legal sphere, Uzbekistan has been recognized as a state demonstrating steady positive progress in strengthening the rule of law.

The WJP applies a complex and multi-stage methodology in constructing the Rule of Law Index. First, the Index relies on two primary sources of original data collected through large-scale surveys. Within the framework of the General Population Poll (GPP), interviews are conducted in each participating country with a sample of approximately 1,000 ordinary citizens. The questions cover such aspects as individuals’ legal experiences, their satisfaction with the enforcement of laws, and their trust in institutions. Whereas these surveys were previously conducted only in the three largest cities of each country, in recent years they have

been implemented at a nationally representative level, that is, among randomly selected respondents across the entire country.

The second source is the Qualified Respondents' Questionnaire (QRQ), under which legal scholars and practitioners in each country complete a special questionnaire once a year. These experts assess issues such as the effectiveness of courts, the enforcement of laws, and the functioning of accountability mechanisms. The WJP also uses third-party sources, such as statistical data on specific topics (for example, armed conflicts provided by international organizations), which account for approximately 8% of the overall Index score.

The process of constructing the Index is scientifically well developed. First, the scores collected for each question are normalized on a scale from 0 to 1 (where 1 represents the best possible outcome and 0 the worst). Then, more than **550 sub-indicators** are aggregated into **44 sub-factors** under the eight main dimensions mentioned above. For example, under the "Absence of Corruption" dimension, corruption in the executive branch, the judiciary, the police, and the legislature is assessed as separate sub-factors. At the final stage, separate scores are calculated for each of the eight main factors, and their average value constitutes the country's overall **Rule of Law** score.

One of the key strengths of the WJP methodology lies in its ability to reflect the quality of justice through a combination of the perspectives of ordinary citizens and the assessments of qualified experts. This approach makes it possible to link the results to real-life problems faced by people and to measure actual practice rather than merely the formal existence of legislation. At the same time, certain limitations of the Index construction are also acknowledged. For example, difficulties in conducting surveys in some countries and the lack of comprehensive national statistics for all indicators may lead to measurement errors.

The results of the analysis show that Uzbekistan's Rule of Law Index has improved significantly over the past five years. In 2020, Uzbekistan's overall score stood at 0.47, which was a relatively low indicator on a scale from 0 to 1, and the country ranked 92nd out of 128 countries globally. In 2021, the country's score increased to 0.49 (+0.02), and its position in the global ranking rose to 85th out of 139 countries. This represented a 4.1% increase within one year, and in the 2021 WJP Report Uzbekistan was recognized as the country with the largest annual improvement in the world. In 2022, the positive trend continued, with Uzbekistan's overall ranking further improving to 78th place among 140 countries (compared to 85th in 2021). According to WJP data, while the Index improved in only 54 countries worldwide in 2022 and deteriorated in 85 countries [8], Uzbekistan was among the states that recorded positive changes. It was particularly emphasized that in that year Uzbekistan's Index improved slightly across all eight dimensions.

In 2023, despite certain changes introduced into the global ranking methodology (including the inclusion of new countries and other adjustments), Uzbekistan's position remained stable, once again ranking 78th out of 142 countries. Considering that the Index continued to decline in a number of countries during this period, Uzbekistan's ability to maintain its position represented a relatively advanced result within the regional context. Finally, according to the latest 2025 report, Uzbekistan's Index score stood at approximately 0.51, and the country ranked 81st

among 143 states worldwide. The slight decline in the ranking position (from 78th to 81st) is explained by the inclusion of new countries and changes in the performance of other states; nevertheless, it is emphasized that Uzbekistan's score continued to increase at a rate of less than 1 percent. Overall, from 2020 to 2025, Uzbekistan's global ranking improved from 92nd to 81st place, which constitutes a highly positive dynamic, especially taking into account the expansion of the Index with newly added countries during this period.

The results of regional comparison indicate that Uzbekistan's position has also been steadily strengthening in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. According to the WJP classification, Uzbekistan belongs to the **"Eastern Europe and Central Asia"** region, which includes approximately 15 countries such as **Albania, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine**, and others. In 2020, Uzbekistan ranked 12th out of 14 countries in this region; in 2021 it rose to 10th place; and in 2022 it moved closer to the 8th–9th positions (with a global rank of 78th among 140 countries, Uzbekistan surpassed such regional neighbors as Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus). According to the most recent data for 2025, Uzbekistan currently occupies 8th place among 15 countries in the region [9]. Within the region, Georgia remains the leader in terms of the rule of law (52nd globally in 2025), followed by Montenegro and Kosovo, which also occupy relatively high positions. Uzbekistan, in turn, holds the highest result among the Central Asian states and has risen above the regional average. The lowest positions in the region belong to Belarus, Turkey, and Russia [10], where a sharp deterioration in the rule of law has been recorded in recent years according to WJP reports.

An analysis of the structural dimensions of the Index reveals which areas in Uzbekistan are relatively strong and which remain weak. The best-performing area has traditionally been **"Order and Security,"** as the country demonstrates low levels of crime and a high degree of internal stability, resulting in a very high score in this dimension. For example, in 2022 Uzbekistan ranked among the top 20 countries in the world in **"Order and Security"** (16th place), while in 2021 it also ranked 16th out of 139 countries, taking first place in the region and first place among low-income countries. Sub-indicators such as the low level of violence against persons and property, and the public's tendency to resolve disputes without the use of force, have been assessed at nearly maximum levels in Uzbekistan (for instance, in 2020 the score for the **"Absence of Internal Conflict"** sub-factor was 1.00). The indicator of **"Absence of Corruption"** has also shown improvement in recent years: in 2021 Uzbekistan rose to 70th place globally in this dimension, ranking 6th in the region and 4th within its income group (among 35 lower-middle-income countries). This reflects improvements across WJP sub-factors relating to corruption in the executive, judiciary, police, and legislature, a trend that is also confirmed by **Transparency International's CPI**, where Uzbekistan's score increased from 23 in 2018 to 31 in 2022.

At the same time, although Uzbekistan's performance in the **"Civil Justice"** and **"Criminal Justice"** dimensions remains below the global average, significant improvements have been observed. In 2021 Uzbekistan ranked 78th globally (out of 139 countries) in civil justice, rising to 75th place in 2022. Positive changes have been recorded in areas such as improved access

to courts (reduction of barriers to bringing cases before courts) and the effectiveness of enforcement of judicial decisions. In criminal justice, Uzbekistan ranked 67th in 2021, taking 5th place in the region, and improved to 65th place in 2022. Although sub-factors such as the effectiveness of criminal investigations, the impartiality and timeliness of trials, and the treatment of detainees are still assessed at a moderate level, notable positive progress has been recorded in certain indicators (for example, the absence of corruption in criminal justice). The WJP 2025 report likewise recognizes Uzbekistan as one of the few countries in the region that has managed to preserve judicial independence and stability in the civil justice system at a time when judicial institutions have weakened in many other states. This can reasonably be regarded as a positive outcome of judicial and legal reforms, including increased transparency of the judiciary, the expansion of lawyers' rights, and the development of online court proceedings, among others.

Based on the above analysis, the Index data confirm that positive changes are taking place in Uzbekistan: as a result of anti-corruption efforts and judicial reforms, the country has, within a relatively short period, become one of the states demonstrating the most significant progress worldwide. The government's strategy of systematic engagement with international rankings (in particular, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-91 of June 19, 2024 "On Additional Measures to Improve the System of Work with International Ratings and Indices and to Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight in This Area," which designated the WJP Index as one of the priority rankings) may also have contributed to these achievements. According to WJP experts, in 2022 Uzbekistan moved up seven positions in the ranking due to comprehensive reforms aimed at improving the state of the rule of law, implemented under the principle of "valorization of human dignity." In particular, measures such as increasing the transparency of public authorities, implementing administrative reforms, and strengthening accountability to parliament have been noted as factors that have reinforced Uzbekistan's standing in international indices.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the WJP Rule of Law Index demonstrates that, over the past five years, Uzbekistan has taken significant positive steps toward the formation of a legal and democratic state. The increase in both the Index scores and the country's ranking confirms this progress. Nevertheless, systemic problems persist in the areas of human rights, transparency, and institutional constraints on public authority, indicating the need for continued and consistent efforts to address these issues.

According to the methodological recommendations of the WJP Index, in order to ensure the full realization of the rule of law, the results of this Index should be consistently compared with other sources such as **Transparency International and V-Dem**. This requires conducting a deeper diagnostic assessment for each dimension and implementing reforms within a comprehensive and integrated framework.

In the case of Uzbekistan, particular emphasis on ensuring transparency, expanding freedom of the press, and guaranteeing the genuine independence of the judiciary will be of decisive

importance for sustaining upward movement in the Index in the future and, most importantly, for securing the effective implementation of the rule of law in practice.

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