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for Democracy and Solidarity

Kyrgyzstan

Last update:	11 November 2016
Population:	5,957,000 million (World Bank 2015 est.)
Prime minister:	Sooronbay Jeenbekov
President:	Almazbek Atambayev
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	Ata Meken; Social Democratic Party; Ar Namys
Last election:	4 October 2015 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	October 2017 (presidential elections)
Sister parties:	

After the Tulip revolution in March 2005, and the fleeing of president Askar Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev was elected President. However, he was ousted in April 2010 after being accused of nepotism and corruption. An interim government was established, led by interim President Roza Otunbayeva (SDPK). She called a referendum in June 2010 in which Kyrgyz citizens voted in favor of the introduction of a parliamentary democracy and constitutional changes, including curbing presidential powers. The first largely free and fair parliamentary elections took place on 10 October 2010, followed by presidential elections in October 2011, which were won by Almazbek Atambaev. The country became the first parliamentary republic in Central Asia. The process of democratization, however, did not happen without the disbandment of several coalitions between 2012 and 2015. In October 2015, the second free and fair parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan, leading to a big victory for the Pro-Russian Social Democratic party (SDPK).

Political Situation

Political overview since Kyrgyz independence

From Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991 until 2005 the republic was ruled by President Askar Akayev. At first, Akayev was considered a liberal President, but his regime turned more authoritarian the longer he was in charge. In 2002 demonstrations against his rule broke out for the first time. Akayev promised to step down from office in 2005 after three presidential terms, but instead he tried to secure his power in other ways. Mass protests erupted in March against his rule following the parliamentary elections in February 2005, because of the obvious failure to meet (international) democratic standards, such as a balanced media coverage. This led to the Tulip Revolution that officially started on 24 March 2005. The term 'Tulip Revolution' was used by Akayev himself in a speech, warning that no "Color Revolution" should happen in Kyrgyzstan after the non-violent revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2004. During the Tulip Revolution, the opposition marched to the government building to demand the resignation of President Akayev and after a clash with pro-government protestors, the opposition took over the building. On 24 March 2005 Akayev fled to Kazakhstan and later to Russia where he was invited by Russia's President Putin to stay. Subsequently Kurmanbek Bakiyev, opposition leader and former prime minister, was appointed as acting PM in March 2005, but he was ousted in 2010. Thereafter an interim government took control and a new parliament was elected.

Tulip Revolution

After the parliamentary elections of February 2005, in which the opposition parties lost to pro-government parties, protests started over alleged election fraud. Protesters, especially in the southern part of the country, demanded new elections and the resignation of President Askar Akayev. When a bomb exploded in the house of oppositionist Roza Otunbayeva, many blamed the government for the attack. Opposition MPs gathered outside the parliament building and protests throughout the country intensified. In the south of the country many violent altercations between protesters and police took place. The fragmented opposition came together in Jalalabad and gathered over 50,000 people in protest. On 24 March large protests were held in Bishkek, and protesters occupied several government buildings as Akayev fled to Kazakhstan but refused to resign. A number of political prisoners were released and the election results were declared invalid. An interim government was formed, with former prime minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev named as interim President, and Felix Kulov interim Interior Minister. Because of the breakdown of the government, lawlessness was present in Bishkek and the rest of the country. Akayev loyalists tried to take back power. On 28 March the old parliament was dissolved and the new parliament was legitimized, while on 5 April Akayev resigned as president. The interim parliament was accused of continuing some of Akayev's policies and unrest remained. In the following presidential elections of July, Bakiyev and

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Kulov ran against each other. Bakiyev won the elections and became President, while Kulov became Prime Minister until Bakiyev ousted him in 2007.

Violent anti-government demonstrations & ethnic violence in 2010

In April 2010 thousands of demonstrators went out to the streets of Bishkek to air their dissatisfaction with the regime. When President Bakiyev came to power he was soon seen as an autocratic ruler. The protests turned violent on 7 April, after Bakiyev ordered security forces to arrest demonstrators. Consequently, protesters attacked the police and tried to storm the government building. Police reacted by shooting at the demonstrators, killing an estimated 85 and leaving many more injured. The violence continued for several days and Bakiyev fled to the southern part of the country, where most of his supporters lived. In Bishkek the opposition forces formed an interim coalition government, led by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Roza Otunbayeva, who announced plans to call new elections in six months. Ultimately Bakiyev fled to Belarus, while a court in Bishkek began hearing the trial of Bakiyev and 27 of his aides in connection with the shooting of protesters that April.

Meanwhile tensions between the Kyrgyz and the ethnic Uzbek minority in the south of Kyrgyzstan came to the fore. On 11 June 2010 ethnic violence erupted in Osh and Jalalabad, forcing about 400.000 Kyrgyz from Uzbek descent to leave their homes. According to official numbers over 400 people were killed. By the end of June the situation was stabilized. It is thought that the ouster of Bakiyev contributed to the tensions, as the Uzbeks mainly supported the interim government, while many Kyrgyz backed Bakiyev. Interim Leader Otunbayeva acknowledged that her government was not able to ease the tensions in Osh. The Kyrgyz interim government appealed for Russian assistance, but Moscow refused to send in peacekeepers, as did the other Central Asian countries. Both the UN and the EU raised concerns about the situation.

Customs Union

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has sought alternative forms of cooperation with the former Soviet states. In 2010 it launched the Customs Union, of which Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan are part. The goals of this Union were “to eliminate trade and non-trade barriers within the union, and to agree on the common external tariff”. Kyrgyzstan also stated it wants to join. Kyrgyz Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev stated that the road map for the country to join the Customs Union “has been practically accomplished” and “will be approved soon by the union’s member states”.

However, not everyone agreed. In May 2014 around 100 activists representing several Kyrgyz nongovernmental organisations held a protest against Kyrgyzstan joining the Russian-led Customs Union. During the protest they declared that “Kyrgyzstan’s joining of the Customs Union would lead to the limitation of its political and economic independence”.

Gender representation

Women make up 52 percent of the Kyrgyz society and 42,5 percent of the Labour force. Article 3 of the constitution of Kyrgyzstan prohibits all discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic origin or religious belief. The civil, penal, labour and family codes of Kyrgyzstan all uphold equal rights and the legal framework protecting Kyrgyz women’s rights complies with international standards. However, the widespread discrimination and violence against women are increasing. Women are generally ill-informed about their rights and the traditional patriarchal system perpetuates gender-based stereotypes. In Kyrgyzstan 28 of the 120 seats in parliament are allocated to women, which makes up 23.3 percent of the seats.

Elections

Political parties in Kyrgyzstan are highly personified. People tend to vote for a person rather than for the party’s ideology or program. Accordingly, the political parties focus on their list of candidates which they constitute out of people enjoying popularity and influence among the population. Similarly, most politicians do not regard political parties as much more than a vehicle to get into the parliament. One of the results is the existence of more than hundred political parties in the republic.

Parliamentary Elections

On 4 October 2015 parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan. 14 political parties participated in the election. One of the

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requirements for parties to register for election, is to have a list of 120 candidates and both genders have to make up at least 30 percent of the voting lists. Ethnic minorities have to make up at least 15 percent of the voting list. No party is allowed to occupy more than 65 seats in the 120 seat parliament, while a 7 percent threshold is in place for election. An estimated 60 percent of the 2.7 million eligible voters cast their ballots in the elections.

According to the Central Election Commission the Social Democratic Party (SDPK) was the official winner of the elections of 2015, gaining 27 percent of the votes, which corresponds with 38 seats. In total 6 parties passed the electoral threshold and entered parliament.

Election results

Party	Seats in parliament	% of the votes
Social Democratic Party (SDPK)	38	27,4 %
Respublika-Ata Jurt (Fatherland)	28	20,1 %
Kyrgyzstan Party	18	12,8 %
Onuguu (Progress)	13	9,3 %
Bir-Bol (Unity)	12	8,5 %
Ata-Meken (Fatherland) Socialist Party	11	7,7 %

Observers

During the elections biometric ID cards were used to identify voters. The cards were scanned to identify voters by their fingerprints in order to stamp out voter fraud, which had led to protest in previous elections. There were some flaws with the system, leading to problems for 3 to 5 percent of the voters. According to the OSCE the elections were fair and transparent, which is unique for the region, although there were some reported small flaws and irregularities.

Presidential Elections

On 30 October 2011 presidential elections were held in Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE said the elections were conducted in a peaceful manner, but improvements must be made to comply with international standards. Sixteen candidates competed in the race, but a total of 24 showed up at the ballot, with eight names crossed out because they withdrew from the race shortly before the elections. Almazbek Atambaev, former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan, won the elections in the first round with 63 percent of the votes. The turnout was 57 percent.

Election results

Candidate	Votes	% of votes
Almazbek Atambaev	1,173,113	63,2 %
Adakhan Madumarov	273,577	14,7 %
Kamchybek Tashiev	265,460	14,3 %
Temirbek Asanbekov	17,174	0,9 %

Campaigning

The campaigns of the candidates focused mainly on personality and how the candidates related to the deep divide between the north and the south of the country. Atambaev campaigned as a leader that might be able to unite the country again, after the violent protests of April 2010. The wealthy businessman had the best-funded campaign and enjoyed significant public exposure by serving as prime minister until the elections. His two main rivals, Madumarov and Tashiev campaigned as nationalists both from the south, with especially Tashiev using harsh rhetoric.

Observers

Both the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) noted irregularities with regard to the voter

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rolls. Many names were missing, thus preventing people from voting. There were also problems with counting and tabulation of votes in some districts, with observers being completely barred from this part of the process. The OSCE also reported that media were severely restricted in their reporting on the campaigns in hopes of preventing biased journalism. Finally, it was noted that the Central Election Commission, although impartial in its work, should strive to be more open in order to raise public confidence. Most of its meetings were behind closed doors.

Constitutional Referendum 27 June 2010

On 27 June 2010, the Kyrgyz citizens voted in a referendum for the introduction of a parliamentary democracy after the ethnic unrest in the preceding weeks. Many people were unsure whether to proceed with the referendum considering the many (Uzbek) people who were homeless at that time. The interim government decided to pursue the referendum, because it would also give legitimacy to the new government. Over 90 percent of the participants voted in favour of the proposed constitution.

According to the new constitution, no political party can be created on religious or ethnic grounds, and members of the armed forces, police, and the judiciary are not allowed to join a party. Another significant change is that the president has lost the right to appoint all 13 members of the Central Election Commission. This key electoral body now consists largely of independent civil society leaders.

The voter turnout at the referendum was nearly 70 percent. OSCE monitored the elections and stated that “although there were evident shortcomings, the reported high turnout indicates citizens' resilience and desire to shape the future of their country”. Some Uzbeks had problems with voting, because their passports were destroyed during the riots or they were afraid to leave their neighbourhoods to vote. The interim government decided that people could vote without their passport if they registered their home address at a municipal office. Overall, the international election commissions administered the process in a largely transparent, collegiate and timely manner.

(Social) Democratic Parties

Social Democratic Party (SDPK)

Party Leader: Bakyt Beshimov

Number of seats: 38

<http://www.sdpk.kg/>

The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) was founded in 1993 by Abdygany Erkebaev, who was replaced by Almazbek Atambaev as its chairman in 1999. After Atambaev was elected President he had, in accordance with Kyrgyz law, to distance himself from the party and Chynybay Tursunbekov became the party's chairman. The party formed a coalition with the larger El Party in preparation for the February 2005 parliamentary elections.

The SDPK emphasizes a socially oriented development, economic revival and has been a great proponent of the establishment of a parliamentary system. The party played an important role in the Tulip Revolution of 2005 and in large-scale public protests against the Bakiev government in April and November 2006. Prominent members are Roza Otunbayeva, interim President from April 2010 until December 2011, and current President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev. The SDPK has contacts with the Socialist International (SI), but does not have any status within the organization. The SDPK came in first in the 2015 parliamentary elections and gained 38 seats in parliament.

Ata Meken (Fatherland) Socialist Party

Party Leader: Omurbek Tekebayev

Number of seats: 11

<http://www.atameken.kg/>

Omurbek Tekebavev founded Ata-Meken in 1992 following a split from the Erkin Kyrgyzstan party. He has been the party leader

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ever since. The party participated in all parliamentary elections, winning seats in the Kyrgyz parliament in 1994 and 2000. Tekebayev was Speaker of Parliament from March 2005 until February 2006, but resigned after a clash with former President Bakiyev.

The party favors parliamentary democracy and economic reforms and can be considered as positioned at the center-left. It favors a compromise between various social sectors and government bodies. Ata-Meken is popular mostly in the north of Kyrgyzstan. Therefore the party is trying to strengthen its ranks with members of the parliament representing different regions, hoping to widen its support bases. In the parliamentary elections of 2015 the party just passed the electoral threshold and holds 11 seats in parliament.

The Party of Communists

Party Leader: Bumairam Mamaseitova

Number of seats: 0

The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (KPK) says to have about 2000 members and is one of the largest parties in Kyrgyzstan. The party was founded in 1992. The party's ideology could be considered as social democratic. It accepts a pluralistic political system and a market economy but is strongly opposed to the privatization of public assets such as the energy system.

Mamaseitova's, the current chairman of the party, predecessor was Iskhak Masaliyev. He is the son of former party-leader Absamat Masaliyev, who led the party until his death in 2004. Iskhak Masaliyev resigned in August 2010 as he was detained in May that year, accused of planning mass disorder and attempting to overthrow the government. His case was sent to court on 25 October 2010. Masaliyev said his detention prevented him from campaigning for the parliamentary elections. The Communists failed to garner enough votes in the parliamentary elections to have seats in the parliament.

Other Parties

Respublika-Ata Jurt (Fatherland)

Party Leader: Kamchybek Tashiev

Number of seats: 28

<http://atajurt.kg/>

The right-wing party Ata Jurt won the most seats (28) in the parliamentary elections of October 2010. The party was founded in 2004 by interim President Otunbayeva (2010-2011) and several others. Otunbayeva however later became a member of the SDPK. Ata Jurt has a strong base in south Kyrgyzstan, because of its hardline nationalistic rhetoric and call for economic support of the southern part of the country, and they supported ousted president Bakiyev.

In 2014, however, Ata Jurt merged with Respublika, a nationalistic party that embraces Kyrgyzstan's ethnic diversity. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, that were held just after the formation of Respublika, the party gained 23 seats. In the 2015 parliamentary elections the combined Respublika – Ata Jurt party became the second largest party with 20 percent of the votes and 28 seats in parliament.

Kyrgyzstan party

Party Leader: Kanatbek Isaev

Number of seats: 18

<http://kyrgyzstan7.kg/>

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The Kyrgyzstan party was created in May 2015 by former Respublika MP Kanatbek Isaev. It has a strong support base in the south of the country. In the 2015 parliamentary elections Kyrgyzstan gained 12.8 percent of the votes and 18 seats in parliament.

Bir-Bol (Unity)

Party Leader: Altynbek Sulaimanov
Number of seats: 12

Former Respublika MP Altynbek Sulaimanov founded Bir-Bol in 2014. Bir-Bol is a technocrat party that is supported throughout the country. The party supports the return to a presidential system instead of the parliamentary system. In the 2015 parliamentary elections Bir-Bol gained 8.5 percent of the votes and 12 seats in parliament.

Onuguu (Progress)

Party Leader: Bakyt Torobayev
Number of seats: 13
<http://www.onuguu.kg/kg>

The Onuguu (Progress) party was founded in 2012 by former deputy speaker of parliament and Respublika politician Bakyt Torobayev. It has a stronghold in the southern part of the country. In 2013 Onuguu was joined by the Unity of Peoples party, another party that had strong support in the south. From the start, Onuguu-Progress has opposed the government in Bishkek, as well as an alternative to the traditional opposition party Respublika-Ata Jurt. In the 2015 parliamentary elections Onuguu-Progress gained 9.3 percent of the votes and 13 seats in parliament.

Butun Kyrgyzstan- Emgek (United Kyrgyzstan)

Party Leader: Adakhan Madumarov
Number of seats: 0

Butun Kyrgyzstan is a nationalist party popular in the south of the country. The party's leader, Adakhan Madumarov, previously served as the national security council chief under former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev. In 2015 Butun merged with the Emgek (Labor) party, but during the 2015 parliamentary elections they gained 6.18 percent of the votes, just below the 7 percent threshold and thus did not enter parliament.

Zamandash

Party Leader: Muktarbek Omurakunov
Number of seats: 0

The Kyrgyz diaspora has created parties representing the interests of hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz labour immigrants abroad. The biggest of those parties is called Zamandash, which was established in 2007. In the 2015 parliamentary elections Zamandash gained 2.8 percent of the votes, gaining no seats in parliament.

Biographies

Almazbek Atambayev

President

Almazbek Atambayev was born on 17 September 1956 in the village of Arashan in the north of Kyrgyzstan. He graduated from the Moscow Institute of Management with a degree in economics and went into business afterwards, becoming director of

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manufacturing companies. From 1983 to 1987 he served in the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz SSR.

Atambayev is one of the founding members of the Social Democratic Party and became its chairman in 1999. He ran for president in the 2000 elections, but was unsuccessful. In 2005 and 2006 Atambayev headed the Ministry of industry, trade and tourism, but resigned in April 2006, accusing Bakiyev of corruption and of blocking reforms. Nonetheless, in April 2007 he became Prime Minister under Bakiyev in an appointment that was seen as a concession to the opposition. However, in November 2007 he resigned again, because of Bakiyev's nepotism and corruption.

He ran in the 2009 presidential elections and received about 8 percent of the vote. Together with others he claimed there were mass violations, but his protest was unsuccessful. He was elected President in the 2011 elections.

Sooronbay Jeenbekov

Prime Minister

Sooronbay Sharipovich Jeenbekov (1958) is the current Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, who assumed office on 13 April 2016. He is a zoological engineer, having degrees from the Kyrgyz Agricultural Institute and the Kyrgyz Agrarian University. In 1995 he became a Deputy of the Assembly of People's Representatives. Since then, he has held several positions as a senior civil servant: Minister of Agriculture, Head of the State Administration and the governor of the Osh region. In March 2016 he was appointed First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration after which he got his current position.

Kamchybek Tashiev

Leader Respublika - Ata Jurt

Kamchybek Tashiev is a relative newcomer to the Kyrgyz political scene and was seen by many as the most controversial of the presidential candidates for the presidential elections in 2011. He has been a member of parliament and served as minister under President Bakiyev. Disagreements led to his resignation in 2009, leaving Tashiev free to emerge as an influential opposition leader as the Bakiyev administration fell. But critics still accuse him of links with the former President.

Tashiev's numerous followers in the cities of Osh and Jalalabad credit him with stopping the bloodshed during ethnic clashes there in June 2010. But his claims that Uzbek community leaders instigated the violence earned him the image of a divisive nationalist, a label that has also been attached to his party Ata-Jurt. Tashiev is known to be a supporter of strong presidential power. In the latest presidential elections of 2011 Tashiev came in third with 14.3 percent.

Omurbek Tekebayev

Leader Ata Meken

Omurbek Tekebayev was born in 1958 in Jalalabat, Kyrgyzstan. Tekebayev graduated in physics and in law from the Kyrgyz State National University. In 1991 he was one of the founders of the Erkin Kyrgyzstan National Democratic Party. One year later the party split and he founded the Ata-Meken Party and served in the Kyrgyz parliament from 1995 to 2005. Tekebayev ran for president in 2000, receiving 14 percent of the votes. When Akayev was ousted in 2005 he became the speaker of the new parliament. Tekebayev resigned in 2006 and played a key role in organizing protests against Bakiyev in 2006. He founded the For Reforms Party, demanding reforms from Bakiyev.

Tekebayev stepped down as chairman of the party in March 2007, but remained politically active and an outspoken critic of Bakiyev. He was arrested on 6 April 2010 during the violent protests against Bakiyev, but was released later that day. Tekebayev was appointed to serve as deputy in charge of carrying out constitutional reforms by interim President Roza Otunbayeva. Despite hailing from the south, Tekebayev is seen by many as one of the few politicians who attracts support (and vehement opposition) across regional cleavages. When the new parliament was formed, Tekebayev was nominated as speaker for the ruling coalition. However, he narrowly failed to win the majority vote required to endorse his candidacy. Ata-Meken subsequently entered opposition as the smallest of the five parties in the national legislature.

Roza Otunbayeva

Interim president 2010-2011

Roza Otunbayeva was born on 23 August 1950 in Osh. She graduated from the Philosophy Faculty of Moscow State University in 1972 and went on to teach as senior professor and head of the philosophy department at the Kyrgyz State National University. Her

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political career began in 1981 in Bishkek as the second secretary of the Lenin “rayon” council of the Communist Party. From 1986 to 1989 Otunbayeva was the deputy chairwoman of the council of ministers. Subsequently she served as head of the USSR Delegation to UNESCO in Paris and as the Soviet Ambassador in Malaysia. In 1992 Otunbayeva became the Kyrgyz ambassador to the USA and Canada and from 1994 until 1997 she served as the Kyrgyz Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister under Akayev. After that she became the Kyrgyz ambassador to the United Kingdom and the United Nations special deputy to Georgia.

Otunbayeva returned to Kyrgyzstan in 2004 and founded the Ata-Jurt party together with three other opposition parliamentarians. She was a driving force behind protests against Akayev and after the Tulip Revolution she was appointed Foreign Minister by the new President Bakiyev. However the parliament failed to confirm her in the post. Otunbayeva then went into opposition as a member of the Social Democratic Party. She played a key role in the November 2006 protests that pressed successfully for a new democratic constitution, and became highly critical of Bakiyev, saying that his government continued the corruption and nepotism of Akayev. Otunbayeva was elected into parliament in December 2007 and served as head of the parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party from October 2009.

On 7 April 2010 Otunbayeva was selected by opposition leaders as the interim President, receiving overwhelming popular support in the June referendum. She was the first female interim Head of State in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. Otunbayeva was prohibited from running in the following presidential elections that were held in 2011. Her term ended on 1 December 2011 after Almazbek Atambayev was elected in the presidential elections on 30 October 2011.

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