

# Kyrgyzstan

by Erica Marat

*Capital:* Bishkek  
*Population:* 5.3 million  
*GNI/capita, PPP:* US\$2,200

Source: The data above was provided by The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2011*.

## Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Electoral Process	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.00
Civil Society	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	5.00	4.75
Independent Media	5.75	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50
Governance*	5.50	6.00	6.00	n/a						
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.50
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25
Corruption	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.25
Democracy Score	5.46	5.67	5.67	5.64	5.68	5.68	5.93	6.04	6.21	6.11

\* Starting with the 2005 edition, Freedom House introduced separate analysis and ratings for national democratic governance and local democratic governance to provide readers with more detailed and nuanced analysis of these two important subjects.

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The year 2010 brought dramatic changes to Kyrgyzstan, including the violent overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, vicious interethnic strife, and the most free and fair elections in Central Asia to date. Conditions at the beginning of the year were considerably worse than in March 2005, when protesters forced the resignation of then president Askar Akayev and brought Bakiyev to power. During the intervening five years, over a dozen journalists and opposition figures were assassinated. All domestic media outlets were placed under tight control, while access to foreign-based online media was restricted. Bakiyev created a special committee responsible for selecting an interim president should he leave his post prematurely, and organized an elite security force to protect him and other top political officials. He also appointed his son Maksim to a key post, fueling predictions of an eventual dynastic succession.

Because Bakiyev's hold on power seemed so firm by early 2010, his overthrow on April 7 came as a surprise to many. Angered by the arrest of several prominent opposition leaders, protesters gathered in the town of Talas on April 6, and spontaneous demonstrations to demand Bakiyev's resignation soon spread across the country. The next day, a reported 86 people died during clashes with police, and roughly 1,000 more were injured in antigovernment protests in central Bishkek. When the violence reached its peak, Bakiyev fled the capital, and opposition leaders were freed from prison. They quickly announced the formation of a provisional government composed of three parties—the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), Ata-Meken, and Ak-Shumkar—and headed by Roza Otunbayeva of the SDPK as interim president. It is notable that the protests, unlike those in March 2005, were not coordinated by opposition leaders, who remained behind bars during their most crucial stages.

From its earliest days, the interim leadership considered amending the constitution to limit the power of the presidency, and planned to hold free and fair parliamentary elections to help legitimize the new regime. For the first time, multiple cohesive political parties would compete among themselves in pursuit of a common goal: international recognition of their new leaders. The government scheduled a constitutional referendum for June 27 and parliamentary elections for October 10. Otunbayeva appointed nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders to head the Central Elections Commission and formed a special Constitutional Council to organize public debates on the new constitution. These steps marked the NGO community's return to public life—one of Kyrgyzstan's major achievements to date.

However, despite these positive changes, the interim government was unable to establish effective control over security forces and local government officials.

Particularly in southern Kyrgyzstan, the police were headed by local leaders who remained loyal to Bakiyev. This lack of clear lines of authority partly explains the rapid spread of ethnic violence in the southern cities of Osh and Jalabad in June 10–14. What began as a scuffle among young patrons of a local bar in Osh on June 10 grew into one of the bloodiest incidents in Kyrgyzstan's recent history. The ethnic strife resulted in over 450 deaths and forced some 400,000 ethnic Uzbeks to flee their homes. International human rights organizations reported acts of torture, extortion, and illegal arrests during police raids of Uzbek neighborhoods. Although some ethnic Uzbek refugees have returned to Kyrgyzstan, over 40,000 have emigrated to Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries because they feared more violence and persecution.

Both the June 27 constitutional referendum and the October 10 parliamentary elections took place peacefully, dispelling concerns that renewed ethnic or political violence might interrupt the voting process. Turnout on June 27 was approximately 70 percent, and 90 percent of those voting supported the new constitution and parliamentary system. The new charter increased the number of seats in the parliament from 75 to 120 and banned any single party from gaining more than 60 percent of the seats. Both the referendum and the parliamentary elections, which amounted to perhaps the most transparent and orderly votes ever held in Kyrgyzstan, received largely positive assessments from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In an indication of the country's newly open political environment, the main winners of the elections were anti-Otunbayeva opposition groups and a party that was infamous for propagating ethno-nationalism. A total of five political parties surpassed the 5 percent vote threshold to win representation in the parliament: Ata-Jurt, the SDPK, Ar-Namys, Respublika, and Ata-Meken. In line with the electoral code, women and ethnic minorities, including Uzbek leaders, were included in the party lists, though they remained unrepresented in the new parliament.

Civil liberties and freedom of the media generally improved in 2010. However, these gains were mostly seen in northern parts of the country and among mainstream Kyrgyz and Russian media and the larger civil society groups. Following the June violence, ethnic minorities, especially Uzbeks, experienced increased insecurity. Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement structures often either refused or were unable to protect the Uzbek population from everyday discrimination and acts of violence driven by ethnic hatred.

**National Democratic Governance.** Kyrgyzstan's political regime changed in April 2010 as a result of clashes between demonstrators and government troops. While the new leadership failed to respond to ethnic violence in the south in June, it undertook major reforms designed to liberalize the political system. The interim president governed with transparency, and authority is now shared between the executive and legislative branches. *As a result of these positive changes, Kyrgyzstan's national democratic governance rating improves from 6.75 to 6.50.*

**Electoral Process.** After referendum voters approved a new constitution in June, Kyrgyzstan held comparatively free and fair parliamentary elections in October. The work of the Central Elections Commission was free of government pressure, and only minor irregularities were reported on election day. Both rounds of balloting were recognized as legitimate by the international community and domestic political forces. *Kyrgyzstan's electoral process rating consequently improves from 6.25 to 6.00.*

**Civil Society.** Civil society played an important role in overseeing the new government's work as well as the electoral process. After the regime change, local NGOs were once again able to function freely and without fear of government repression. *Although some NGO leaders were unable to work in the country's south, cooperation between government and civil society greatly improved; therefore Kyrgyzstan's civil society rating improves from 5.00 to 4.75.*

**Independent Media.** The interim government lifted controls on Kyrgyz mass media after the April power transfer, and television and online media played important roles during the election campaign, allowing equal access for all competing political parties and civil society voices. However, such clear improvements were offset by the media's skewed and incomplete coverage of the midyear violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. Reporting on the crisis was scarce and often shaded with ethno-nationalist undertones. *In light of these conflicting trends, Kyrgyzstan's independent media rating remains unchanged at 6.50.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** The parliamentary elections in late 2010 ensured that all parts of the country will be represented in the legislative branch, but it remains unclear how this will affect local governments. Some local officials were reluctant to support the interim leaders in Bishkek, preferring to strengthen their own autonomy at the expense of the fragile central government. Local authorities also failed to curb the ethnic violence in the south, and in some cases may have been complicit in the attacks. *Therefore, Kyrgyzstan's local democratic governance rating remains unchanged at 6.50.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** The broken judicial system and corrupt law enforcement agencies often created or exacerbated instability in southern Kyrgyzstan during 2010. Local courts, particularly in the south, proved unable to rule impartially in the ethnically charged cases that followed the June violence, and failed to hold perpetrators accountable. Moreover, entrenched practices including arbitrary detention and physical abuse by the security forces continued after the change in regime. *The country's judicial framework and independence rating worsens from 6.00 to 6.25.*

**Corruption.** Corruption remains a problem in Kyrgyzstan, but there were some positive changes in 2010. Otunbayeva's interim government disbanded the Bakiyev regime's Central Agency on Development, Investment, and Innovation, which

had been a major source of corruption. Kyrgyzstan's lucrative hydroelectric energy sector showed signs of gradual recovery thanks to more transparent administration. *Given these promising developments, Kyrgyzstan's corruption rating improves from 6.50 to 6.25.*

**Outlook for 2011.** Significant positive changes took place in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Civil society and mass media were released from government control, and free and fair elections were held. These changes are likely to be sustained in 2011, at least as long as Otunbayeva remains in power. Tensions in Kyrgyzstan's south will also continue, however. Maintaining political and social stability is therefore Kyrgyzstan's key challenge for the coming year.

The new parliamentary system will be a primary potential source for instability in the near term. Should the ruling coalition collapse during 2011, triggering new parliamentary elections, uncertainty about the country's future political development will intensify. Conflicts over government positions will continue to be the parliament's major concern, leaving other important issues—such as economic recovery, the reconstruction of Osh, and reforms of the security forces—on the back burner. On the other hand, if the new government survives and seeks effective solutions to the most pressing challenges, Kyrgyzstan will be the only Central Asian state where the political leadership enjoys a high degree of legitimacy.

Kyrgyzstan's south is another major potential source of unrest. Law enforcement agencies there have protected the ethnic Kyrgyz population while turning a blind eye to mistreatment of ethnic Uzbeks. Low levels of violence and law enforcement agencies' unprofessional conduct forced additional ethnic Uzbeks to leave Kyrgyzstan even after the attacks peaked in June. The likelihood of more violence remains high, as most perpetrators have gone unpunished, and prosecutions have focused instead on ethnic Uzbeks.

A presidential election scheduled for late 2011 will serve as an important milestone in Kyrgyzstan's political development. Competition between major political parties will intensify as the poll approaches. Rather than forming coalitions, the leaders of the five parties represented in the parliament are likely to compete against one another for the presidency. The high value some of the leaders attach to the post is alarming, as it seems to contradict the recent constitutional changes granting most powers to the parliament. Rival political forces might opt for violence and try to shift power back to the executive branch. Alternatively, if the elections are as transparent and free of government pressure as the October 2010 parliamentary elections, and no political force tries to amend the current constitution, Kyrgyzstan's democratic development has a chance to succeed.

Finally, progress toward economic recovery will be a necessity in 2011. Kyrgyzstan's state budget deficit will increase over the winter months and remain high throughout the year. Social tensions and discontent may grow across the country should the government fail to pay salaries, pensions, and benefits.

# MAIN REPORT

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## National Democratic Governance

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
n/a	n/a	n/a	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.50

In the year leading up to his ouster, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev seized control of virtually all political and economic institutions in the country, appointing his son Maksim and other relatives to key positions. Journalists and civil society activists were under constant pressure; over a dozen opposition figures, including politicians, journalists, and rights activists, were killed during Bakiyev's five-year tenure. As public frustration grew, Bakiyev ensured that all security forces were loyal to him personally. Kyrgyzstan seemed primed for a dynastic transition of power.

However, Bakiyev's increased reliance on security institutions to suppress his opponents had eroded his grasp of the popular mood, and he was unprepared for the extent of anger shown in Talas, where antigovernment protests began on April 6, 2010. The president dispatched police and other officials led by Interior Minister Moldomusa Kongantiyev to deal with the situation, but was stunned when the crowd took the minister hostage and severely beat him.

The Talas demonstrations grew into a wave of spontaneous protests across the country, with participants demanding Bakiyev's resignation. After an elitesecurity unit attacked a crowd of at least 10,000 citizens gathered in central Bishkek on April 7,<sup>1</sup> the protesters fought back and ultimately seized control of the government headquarters. At least 86 people died during clashes with police, and roughly 1,000 more were injured. Bakiyev sought refuge in southern Kyrgyzstan, prompting opposition leaders in the capital to announce the formation of a provisional government headed by Roza Otunbayeva of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK).

As with the so-called Tulip Revolution that brought Bakiyev to power in March 2005, the April 7 violence was followed by looting in the capital. Many shops, automated teller machines, and businesses were destroyed. Despite a grassroots mobilization against looters, a large number of Bishkek business owners sustained property damage. The economic situation in Kyrgyzstan remained dire in the subsequent months, partly because Kazakhstan kept its border with the country closed until July.

The interim government needed to decide quickly whether to hold parliamentary and presidential elections and how to divide power in the new regime. After weeks of deliberation, the interim authorities scheduled parliamentary elections for October 10 and a presidential election for the end of 2011. The government also drafted and distributed the text of a proposed constitution in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek in May, and held a referendum in which voters approved the draft on June 27.

Meanwhile, the interim government took a number of other steps to bolster its domestic and international legitimacy. For example, Bakiyev and several of his

closest supporters—including his brother Zhanysh and former prime minister Daniyar Usenov—were tried in absentia on charges of mass murder in connection with the April 7 events. Some of those charged were arrested, but Bakiyev and his family members remained at large, either hiding in Kyrgyzstan or having sought refuge abroad. In addition, the national media were freed from government control, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was allowed to resume its broadcasts in the country, and strategic economic assets that had been controlled by Maksim Bakiyev were renationalized.<sup>2</sup> With some exceptions, civil society groups were able to function freely, and the interim government was open to collaboration with various social groups and organizations. Otunbayeva announced that she would leave her post in 2011 to create a precedent for a peaceful transfer of power. She also sought to make government officials more accessible to the public by setting up special telephone hotlines, a press service, and a frequently updated government website. However, most members of the government and the parliament elected in October did not seem to share Otunbayeva's democratic values. The president at times stood as the only voice advocating genuine democratic change, and was surrounded by politicians with corrupt backgrounds and authoritarian tendencies.

The regime change in Bishkek was followed by a series of violent incidents fueled by ethnic, economic, and political disparities. These clashes underscored the new government's lack of control over large parts of the country, and particularly over local police forces. Various politicians, including those in the parliament, enjoyed informal power over their respective districts. Police forces in the southern city of Osh, for example, were loyal mostly to the city's mayor, Melis Myrzakmatov, rather than to the central government in Bishkek. As a result of ineffective leadership, what initially seemed to be political disagreements descended into large-scale interethnic conflict.

The first case of violence occurred on April 19, on the outskirts of Bishkek. A group of villagers, reportedly ethnic Kyrgyz, attacked a Meshketian Turkish community in Mayevka village, killing five Turks. Several houses occupied by local Turks were burned down. The police were nowhere to be seen, perhaps due to a slow reaction by political leaders in the central government who were preoccupied with filling key security posts in the Interior Ministry.

Events took a more ominous turn when violence arose between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks, who make up some 13 percent of the population. On May 19, roughly 1,500 people marched toward a private university in the southern city of Jalalabad, demanding that the interim government terminate its support for Kadyrzhan Batyrov, a prominent ethnic Uzbek and one of the school's founders.<sup>3</sup> The crowd was reportedly dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz who still supported Bakiyev and accused Batyrov of participating in burning the deposed president's home in Teyit village. Local media reports also suggested that hundreds of local Uzbeks mobilized to resist the group. Overall, roughly 5,000 people gathered in front of the university. Two ethnic Kyrgyz were shot and killed, and over 60 people were injured as a result of the clashes.

Jalalabad had been racked by tensions since Bakiyev left the country on April 15. According to Kyrgyz NGO leaders, the interim government failed to react to the

growing concerns in the south swiftly enough, preferring instead to blame Bakiyev for instigating local unrest. While Bakiyev's family might indeed have been behind the disturbances in Jalalabad, the government eventually stretched its accusations beyond the point of credibility.

On June 10, a scuffle among young patrons of a local bar in Osh escalated into one of the bloodiest outbreaks of ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan's recent history. The strife between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks continued for roughly four days, resulting in over 450 deaths and forcing some 400,000 Uzbeks to flee their homes. Most Uzbek communities and businesses in the Osh area were burned down and looted. Observers reported acts of torture, extortion, and illegal arrests during subsequent police raids of Uzbek communities.<sup>4</sup>

As the violence spread across Osh on the morning of June 11, the Kyrgyz military acted chaotically, often responding to rumors spread by provocateurs. A shortage of troops, equipment, fuel, and reliable communication devices made matters worse. Otunbayeva was forced to call up reservists to sustain a 24-hour curfew in the city. Meanwhile, Moscow rejected Bishkek's pleas to deploy troops from the Collective Security Treaty Organization to help quell the violence, asserting that the growing interethnic conflict was Kyrgyzstan's internal problem. The police were ordered to shoot to kill on June 13, but they had already been randomly using firearms against the civilian population. The violence was halted only on the fourth day.

Ethnic Uzbeks, who form the largest ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan after Russians and constitute a majority in Osh and Jalalabad, are largely excluded from Kyrgyzstan's political system, though they dominate the country's merchant class. Disputes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz over land use, private property ownership, and cultural differences are common in the south. The Soviet leadership had tried unsuccessfully to suppress ethno-nationalism in the area. In 1990, when the Soviet military was unable to put a stop to a three-month battle between the two groups in Osh, it was taken as a sign of Moscow's diminished power over its regions.

During the early years of Kyrgyz independence, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were generally able to settle disputes without resorting to violence. Former president Askar Akayev made the advancement of ethnic minorities a priority, allowing the establishment of Uzbek-language universities under a policy known as "Kyrgyzstan, Our Common Home." Uzbeks' fortunes dimmed after Bakiyev replaced Akayev in 2005. While he never directly suppressed the Uzbek community, Bakiyev largely ignored their grievances and allowed ethnic relations to return to a state of animosity. Moreover, under his leadership, drug traffickers and organized criminal groups found a safe haven in Kyrgyzstan's south. Nevertheless, the president's firm grip on the security forces appeared to keep ethnic violence to a minimum.

There is no single explanation for the June 10–14 bloodshed. Most international media outlets described the violence as an interethnic clash that reopened long-standing political and economic grievances between the two groups. For its part, the interim government accused abstract "third forces" of provoking the violence, including not just Bakiyev's proxies, but also Batyrov and radical Islamist movements. Local NGOs have put forward yet another interpretation of

the conflict—that the government’s lack of authority in the south forced many people to appeal to their ethnic and kinship groups to protect themselves at a time of great political uncertainty.

Many ethnic Uzbek refugees had returned to Kyrgyzstan by the end of 2010, but over 40,000 emigrated to Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries because they feared more violence and persecution.

### Electoral Process

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.00

Kyrgyzstan’s citizens went to the polls twice in 2010—once for the constitutional referendum on June 27, and again for the parliamentary elections on October 10. Both rounds of voting took place in a relatively stable environment, despite fears that renewed ethnic or political violence might interrupt the process. Before each vote, interim president Otunbayeva warned that she would cancel the balloting should political parties resort to violence.

Turnout on June 27 was approximately 70 percent, and 90 percent of participating voters supported the new constitution and its creation of a parliamentary system to replace the existing strong presidency. The new charter increased the number of seats in the parliament from 75 to 120, and banned any party from gaining more than 60 percent of the seats. The framers of the constitution wanted to prevent a single political force or leader from usurping state power. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) praised the vote, which was perhaps the most transparent and orderly referendum ever held in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>5</sup>

However, the referendum took place barely two weeks after the violence in Osh. Given the binary choice of accepting or rejecting the new constitution, many voters—particularly those in the south—may have felt compelled to approve the charter to avoid extending the political uncertainty in the country and weakening the central government. Furthermore, some of the victims of the June violence had not yet received new identification documents at the time of the balloting, which prevented them from participating.

In addition to major parties such as Ata-Meken, the SDPK, and Ar-Namys, whose leaders were already well known nationally, a myriad of new parties were formed after the April revolt. Ultimately, 29 political parties registered to participate in the October parliamentary elections, though only a few people on their candidate lists were familiar to the general public.

As the election campaign officially began on September 10, concerns mounted that major parties would resort to force to prevail over their competitors. Tensions were especially high among parties that aspired to form a parliamentary majority and those unlikely to meet the robust thresholds for representation—5 percent of the national vote, and 0.5 percent in each of the seven regions plus the cities of

Bishkek and Osh. None of the fears of violence materialized, however, and with minor exceptions, the campaigning proceeded peacefully overall.

The parties' campaigns tended to promote individual political leaders rather than ideas. Candidates participated in public debates, but there were only a few analytical discussions that compared party platforms. Most parties offered similar messages about the need to avoid falsification of election results and reduce corruption in the government, while endorsing different plans to promote economic development. Two of the five parties that ultimately won seats—Ata-Jurt and Respublika—were formed after April 7, but they managed to win support through intense campaigning. In the case of Ata-Jurt, ethno-nationalist appeals helped it to gain the backing of a majority of ethnic Kyrgyz living in southern Kyrgyzstan. The party also advocated the return of Bakiyev, as most of its leading members had worked closely with the former leader. Nevertheless, most of the major political parties slowly—and reluctantly—recognized the need for interethnic reconciliation.

Turnout for the parliamentary elections was about 57 percent. Partly because of the newly unfettered political environment in Kyrgyzstan, anti-Otunbayeva opposition parties such as Ata-Jurt, Ar-Namys, and Respublika won the largest share of votes. In effect, the results demonstrated that the interim government did not intervene in the electoral process or pressure the Central Elections Commission (CEC) to ensure victory for its constituent parties.

Overall, five political parties were able to overcome the 5 percent threshold: Ata-Jurt (8.47 percent, for 28 seats), SDPK (7.83 percent, for 26 seats), Ar-Namys (7.57 percent, for 25 seats), Respublika (6.93 percent, for 23 seats), and Ata-Meken (5.49 percent, for 18 seats).<sup>6</sup> In keeping with electoral code requirements, ethnic minorities occupied at least 15 percent of the slots on party lists, and made up about 25 percent of candidates overall. However, most were not placed high on the lists, and Uzbeks were underrepresented; minorities ultimately accounted for less than 12 percent of the new parliament. Similarly, women made up a third of the candidates on party lists, but they took only about 23 percent of the seats.

Some minor balloting irregularities and problems involving opaque campaign financing were reported. Several political parties that did not pass the 5 percent threshold, including Butun Kyrgyzstan, refused to recognize the official results. Butun Kyrgyzstan leader Adakhan Madumarov announced that he would not concede and demanded that his party be included in the parliament. Butun Kyrgyzstan initially appeared to have passed the threshold, but when all the ballots were counted, the necessary figure rose by a few thousand votes. Madumarov mounted rallies in Osh and Bishkek in the weeks following the elections. Partly because of this dispute, it took the CEC several weeks to announce the final results.

Despite these shortcomings, the OSCE endorsed the election process, emphasizing that political competition took place in a free environment, the CEC's work was genuinely "impartial and independent," and all participating political parties had equal access to the media. Many international observers have called the October 10 elections the most free and fair in Central Asia's history.

It took the winning parties two months to organize a ruling coalition. The first attempt, by the SDPK, Respublika, and Ata-Meken, quickly fell apart after Ata-Meken leader Omurbek Tekebayev failed to gain enough votes to be elected as speaker. A new coalition led by Respublika included the SDPK and Ata-Jurt. As with the earlier effort, the three-party alliance was formed based on an agreement over the distribution of key government posts. Political platforms played only a minor role in the negotiation process.

According to the coalition pact, SDPK leader Almazbek Atambayev became prime minister. Akhmatbek Keldibekov of Ata-Jurt secured the post of parliament speaker, and Respublika leader Omurbek Babanov received the deputy prime minister's position. According to an informal agreement among the parties, if the prime minister is a representative of the north, the parliamentary speaker has to come from southern Kyrgyzstan. The SDPK is mostly popular in northern Kyrgyzstan, while Ata-Jurt's support is concentrated among ethnic Kyrgyz voters from the south.

Although senior government posts were filled by year's end, internal splits in the ruling coalition remained a significant risk. Should the current coalition collapse, the parliament will have only one more opportunity to agree on a majority coalition before the president has the right to call for early elections. Fresh balloting would further weaken the state structure and challenge the country's fledgling parliamentary system.

The new government formed in late 2010 did not include a single woman in a key position, while only a handful of officials belonged to ethnic minority groups.

#### Civil Society

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	5.00	4.75

The April 2010 regime change lifted restrictions on the country's NGO community, which had been forced underground during Bakiyev's presidency. With exceptions related to ethnic violence in Osh and Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan's NGO leaders were able to act without fear of government pressure. Several groups closely observed the way the interim government drafted the new constitution and prepared for the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections. The president and some members of the interim government were open to collaboration with civil society representatives, inviting NGO leaders to participate in discussions on the new constitution, observe CEC activities, and monitor the overall voting process. The new government also lifted bans on visits by foreign human rights activists.

Unlike in 2005, when most civil society groups threw their support behind the Bakiyev government during the first few months of his leadership, in 2010 NGOs immediately assumed a critical stance toward the interim government. The activities of the new leaders were scrutinized, and actions by individual politicians were brought to public attention. Specifically, NGOs reminded Otunbayeva and

her partners that their legitimacy was incomplete until Bakiyev officially resigned and a newly elected parliament appointed a new government. Civil society groups hoped to stave off any repeat of the Bakiyev experience, in which another leader elected on a wave of popular protest turned to authoritarian rule.

Civil society played a significant role in the electoral process. A number of NGOs took an active part in preparing both government institutions and voters for the parliamentary balloting in October. The NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society dispatched its own observers across the country to oversee both local election commissions as they prepared for the vote and the CEC's work on election day. Any instance in which observers or the CEC failed to abide by the rules was immediately reported. NGOs also closely observed the vote counting, often offering the most comprehensive assessment of the returns across the country.

Under the interim government, various political forces and NGOs were free to stage demonstrations. Victims of the April 7 violence, supporters of the opposition Butun Kyrgyzstan party, and young activists objecting to Russia's growing political influence were all able to hold protests.

The main challenge to NGO activities during the year came from local law enforcement agencies. Groups like *Kylym Shamy* and *Tolerance* investigated reports of torture by law enforcement personnel in the south, and several other NGOs sought to help children and families affected by the June violence. A number of rights activists were threatened for trying to uncover atrocities committed by the police. Fearing persecution for her work in southern Kyrgyzstan, *Tolekan Ismailova*, leader of *Citizens Against Corruption*, had to flee the country. Other activists, including *Aziza Abdurasulova*, avoided traveling to southern Kyrgyzstan to observe court proceedings related to the June violence because they feared that the local police would not protect them from attacks by victims' relatives.

Youth played a key role in Bakiyev's downfall. Most of those killed in the April clashes were young, educated Bishkek residents protesting against the government. The youngest victim was 16 years old. Following the demonstrations, even more of Bishkek's younger residents joined citizen groups that formed to protect neighborhoods from looters. Young activists have criticized the ethno-nationalist ideas propagated by some incumbent political leaders and have appealed to the government to free ethnic Uzbek rights activist *Azimjan Askarov*. Youth activists have also mobilized on a variety of other political and social issues. The youth networks in Bishkek that are seeking equal rights for sexual minorities are perhaps the most outspoken advocates for this community in the Central Asian region.

The new political climate in 2010 led to widespread internet discussions, especially by users in their 20s and early 30s. The Twitter microblogging service, the social-networking website Facebook, and local portals like *Kloop.kg* and *Diesel.elcat.kg* attracted numerous new users aspiring to make their voices heard amid rapid political change. Various youth groups used these tools to urge citizens to participate in the October elections.

Notably, many of the positive changes for civil society during the year were concentrated in northern parts of the country and among the largest NGOs. By

contrast, ethnic minorities, especially ethnic Uzbeks in the south, experienced increased insecurity. Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement structures often either refused or were unable to protect them from everyday discrimination or acts of violence driven by ethnic hatred.

NGO financing remains a problem, and most civil society groups still depend on external funding. Many local activists want to participate in the country's political and social life, but they can rarely find local resources to finance their operations.

### Independent Media

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
5.75	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50

In the first months of 2010, President Bakiyev ordered Kyrgyztelecom, the country's main telecommunications provider, to block access to several widely-read independent news websites critical of the regime, including *Centrasia* and *Ferghana*. In March, the government also pressured state and private broadcasters to stop airing Radio Free Europe (Radio Azattyk) programs.<sup>7</sup> On April 1, police raided the headquarters of Stan TV, citing reports of pirated Microsoft software on the station's premises.

Bakiyev's tight grip on Kyrgyzstan's news media slipped on the night of April 6–7, as online outlets began reporting on the growing antigovernment demonstrations and the detention of some opposition leaders. After Bakiyev's fall, the media sector became relatively free and diverse, though these gains were offset by news outlets' biased and frequently misleading coverage of the year's ethnic violence.

The new constitution includes articles that decriminalize defamation and libel in the mass media, though the new parliament has yet to issue legislation to implement these provisions. At least one party represented in the parliament, Ata-Meken, has indicated an interest in pursuing such a law.<sup>8</sup> A new supervisory board for Kyrgyzstan's public service broadcaster was appointed in August, and there are signs that the board takes the independence and impartiality of the news broadcaster quite seriously. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, commended the appointment.<sup>9</sup>

News websites and television stations played a key role in the run-up to the October elections. NGOs were granted open access to the media to voice concerns about the electoral process. The 29 participating political parties ran advertisements and announcements in major outlets, and embraced new campaign techniques and technologies as they attempted to stay ahead of their opponents. In such a competitive environment, televised debates, print interviews, and interactive online discussion flooded the media landscape, contributing to a rapidly evolving culture of civic engagement. Rival political forces avoided using smear tactics and "black public relations" schemes for the duration of the electoral campaign.

Print media contributed to this improved atmosphere, with some major newspapers running disclaimers explaining that certain articles had been financed

by political parties, a practice that was rarely acknowledged in previous elections. Investigative journalism, though still in its nascent stage of development, became more popular during the year. Newspapers like *Delo Nomer* have proven to be reliable sources of investigative reporting, helping the public understand corrupt practices among top officials.

There were important changes in social media as well. The number of Kyrgyz politicians using online social networks sharply increased in the preelection period, as the open political competition forced parties to rely more on their messages than on older techniques such as charity events or distributing goods to attract votes. When campaigning for the parliamentary elections informally began after the constitutional referendum in June, over a dozen Kyrgyz politicians quickly joined Twitter, Facebook, and other online forums. Interim president Otunbayeva became perhaps the country's most popular politician on Twitter, with over 2,480 followers.

The media's problems with ethnic issues during the year included a reluctance on the part of major online and television outlets to publish reports by Human Rights Watch and other organizations that criticized law enforcement agencies in southern Kyrgyzstan. Instead, Kyrgyz mass media cited commentaries claiming that the violence in Osh and Jalalabad had been planned in advance by external "third forces," and that ethnic Uzbeks might have instigated the fighting. In late April, four television stations and a number of newspapers from the Osh region were prohibited by national authorities from broadcasting certain news—coverage of pro-Bakiyev protests, for example—without prior approval.<sup>10</sup> In June, Osh TV and Menon TV, both independent stations with Uzbek owners, were temporarily shut down by Osh's mayor, Melisbek Myrzakmatov.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after Osh TV resumed programming, its offices were raided without a search warrant by the State Service for National Security, which confiscated the station's computers and archive material, and detained its editor.<sup>12</sup>

Kyrgyz media also offered scant reporting on court proceedings related to the June violence, including repeated incidents in which Uzbek defendants were attacked by relatives of Kyrgyz victims. Ethno-nationalist politicians and activists were given free rein to air their views in the newly unfettered media, and some media reports openly incited hatred against ethnic minorities. A number of journalists, many of them ethnic Uzbeks, faced threats from authorities and in some cases were forced to leave the region and suspend coverage of the violence. Two journalists, Azimjon Askarov and Ulugbek Abdusalomov, were arrested and charged with inciting ethnic unrest.<sup>13</sup> Askarov has been sentenced to life in prison for inciting ethnic hatred and complicity in the murder of a policeman, among other charges,<sup>14</sup> and reports emerged in November that he had been repeatedly beaten while in custody.<sup>15</sup> Abdusalomov's trial had been postponed as he remained under arrest in a hospital following a stroke.<sup>16</sup>

## Local Democratic Governance

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

The new constitution adopted on June 27 established a parliamentary system designed to ensure broader representation and prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one leader. Since competing political parties had to overcome a 5 percent nationwide vote threshold and a threshold of 0.5 percent in each region and the cities of Bishkek and Osh, they placed representatives from across the country on their candidate lists. As a result, despite the use of a nationwide party-list system, all parts of Kyrgyzstan are represented in the new parliament.

Balanced representation could strengthen the lines of communication and authority between the central government and local government officials, something Otunbayeva failed to achieve after coming to power. The interim government was often unable to coordinate the activities of local officials, especially in southern Kyrgyzstan, where most were Bakiyev allies.

After the April 7 regime change, with the interim government exercising weak control over the security forces across the country, local government officials sought to increase their own influence over local businesses. Cases of racketeering and raids by criminal groups and local political bosses were reported in every region.

One vivid example of how remnants of the former regime retained strong local control is the case of Melisbek Myrzakmatov, who had become the mayor of Osh thanks to his wealth and the support of Bakiyev's political party, Ak Zhol. Myrzakmatov, an ethnic Kyrgyz, was accused of instigating ethnic conflict in Osh and Jalalabad in 2010. Among other suspected motives, he was said to be pursuing profits for his real estate and construction businesses. The mayor was actively promoting Osh development projects before the June clashes, and after the violence he pushed for local government to be involved in reconstruction of Uzbek residences.

Myrzakmatov also allegedly controls the illegal drug trade in parts of southern Kyrgyzstan, perhaps serving as a proxy for Akhmat Bakiyev, the former president's brother, who is believed to have overseen virtually all drug routes in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>17</sup>

The interim government appeared unable to remove Myrzakmatov, in part because of the possibility that he would respond by using local security forces and other resources to stir up more disorder in the south. Like most other prominent Kyrgyz political leaders, Myrzakmatov allegedly commands an informal "army" of martial-arts experts and former military and law enforcement personnel.<sup>18</sup> This manpower is a key pillar of his strength, and can be mobilized against government forces when needed. Myrzakmatov's control in Osh is so strong that the interim government will need to create parallel state structures to compete with his influence over the city's existing government and law enforcement entities.

## Judicial Framework and Independence

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25

The aftermath of the June ethnic violence in the south revealed some of the worst traits of Kyrgyzstan's judicial system and the underlying problems of the security forces. The underfinanced, underequipped, and poorly trained military and police forces lacked experience in dealing with ethnic conflict. When the violence erupted in Osh on June 10, they responded chaotically, with little credible information or clear political leadership.

Shortly after the clashes were quelled on June 14, international observers reported that the Kyrgyz military and police had abused the rights of ethnic Uzbeks. Cases of arbitrary detention, severe torture, and beatings were widely reported. Most severe human rights abuses allegedly took place during police forces' sweeps of Uzbek neighborhoods in search of weapons and suspected instigators of violence.

Kyrgyz NGOs have also accused the central government of turning a blind eye to widespread human rights abuses in the south. Lawyers and defendants in cases stemming from the June violence were under constant threat of being attacked by victims' relatives in the latter half of the year, and fights or severe beatings of ethnic Uzbek defendants were frequent occurrences during the trials. Local police, made up mostly of ethnic Kyrgyz, were reluctant to defend ethnic Uzbeks from such attacks. Although some of the prosecutions targeted ethnic Kyrgyz suspects, the court hearings were often delayed because of fears of violence. Lawyers repeatedly appealed to the government for protection, as they continued to risk their lives in the interests of restoring justice despite the dysfunctional judicial system and corruption in the police force.

A typical case is that of Azimjan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek human rights activist. He was detained on June 15 and accused of inciting interethnic and religious hatred.<sup>19</sup> Later, the charges were changed to allege that he had actually organized the interethnic clashes. In September, Askarov was sentenced to life in prison after widely criticized court proceedings. According to his lawyer, Nurbek Toktakunov, Askarov was tortured while in detention and denied an appropriate legal defense.<sup>20</sup> His case has shown that despite president Otunbayeva's effort to introduce democratic reforms, she had limited influence over regional courts and was unable to mitigate corrupt, controversial judicial practices.

In November, a court in Bishkek opened a controversial trial of former president Bakiyev, former defense minister Baktybek Kalyev, and 27 other members of the former regime. They were charged with violently suppressing the April 6–7 demonstrations. Bakiyev and six of the other defendants were tried in absentia. The proceedings were chaotic, with victims' relatives shouting, throwing objects, and threatening defendants and their lawyers with physical violence. Hundreds of people gathered around the court building to demand the most severe punishment for all defendants. Local NGOs denounced the interim government for failing to organize the trial in a more civilized manner, and expressed suspicions that some

members of the government simply wanted to settle scores with former regime officials.

The international community's limited attempts to assist Kyrgyzstan in the wake of the June violence encountered resistance. In July, the OSCE announced that it would deploy a special 52-member Police Advisory Group (PAG) to Kyrgyzstan, part of a larger OSCE effort to reform Kyrgyzstan's police. Senior security officials initially supported such foreign involvement. Interior Minister Kubatbek Baibolov said that the OSCE was welcome in Kyrgyzstan, noting that it was the only international force that had responded to the country's plea for help.<sup>21</sup> However, other security and political officials spoke against the OSCE's potential mission. Feliks Kulov, a former KGB general and head of the Ar-Namys party, was one of the most vocal opponents. He argued that the OSCE police would be unarmed and therefore of limited use. According to Kulov, Kyrgyz forces would have to guard the foreign police instead of carrying out their own duties. OSCE policemen were likely to form one-sided conclusions, according to senior government official Azimbek Beknazarov. He rejected the OSCE's offer as too little and too late, saying the situation in southern Kyrgyzstan seemed to have settled down. Both politicians also associated the PAG with an unwelcome Western intervention in domestic politics. By the end of 2010, only six OSCE policemen had been deployed.<sup>22</sup>

The dire need for a credible international investigation into the Osh violence is obvious. Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies lack the capacity to conduct such an investigation, and security forces in Osh itself have opposed any type of probe, preferring instead to silence those who might challenge their actions, including local NGO activists and foreign journalists. The police in particular seemed desperate to conceal their crimes. Moreover, any national commission to investigate the violence, drawn from the country's NGO and scholarly community, would risk bias stemming from its ethnic composition. Having no investigation at all would hinder reconciliation efforts in southern Kyrgyzstan. Months after the violence, inflammatory and misleading rumors about exactly what happened and who was to blame continued to circulate. Otunbayeva asked Finnish lawmaker Kimmo Kiljunen to lead the first attempt to investigate the causes of the violence. But since his commission lacks the formal backing of the United Nations and the OSCE, its investigation and eventual findings may not be widely accepted in Kyrgyzstan.

## Corruption

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.25

Corruption remains a problem in Kyrgyzstan, and the country ranked 164th out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index. Pervasive corruption during Bakiyev's regime left the country's budget on the brink of collapse. On the night Bakiyev fled, his family reportedly

transferred \$170 million to offshore accounts through Aziauniversalbank; the sum amounted to nearly 10 percent of the country's reserves.<sup>23</sup>

The interim government enacted a number of positive changes. For example, it disbanded the Central Agency on Development, Investment, and Innovation, previously led by Bakiyev's son Maksim. The agency had controlled all foreign financial inflows, including development aid and credits, as well as the country's major hydroelectric and gold-mining companies.

The Bakiyev regime's mismanagement of the important hydroelectric sector was particularly grave. In the winter of 2008–09, his government had to begin rationing electricity production due to low water levels in the Toktogul Reservoir, which had been caused by excessive selling of water abroad. His related decision to increase electricity tariffs by 200 percent in February 2010 was one of the catalysts for the April 6–7 demonstrations that led to his ouster.

After the Bakiyev government fell, the interim authorities accused former energy minister Iliya Davydov of helping Bakiyev and his family to embezzle revenue from hydroelectric energy exports. Osmonbek Artykbayev, an entrepreneur and former lawmaker, was appointed to replace Davydov. Initially, some Kyrgyz experts were skeptical about the new energy minister, arguing that his business background did not meet the requirements of the position. However, Artykbayev showed a determination to reform the energy industry. Shortly after taking office, he announced an open tender for foreign energy sales and launched a special website that monitored the energy sector's functioning.<sup>24</sup>

More transparent and efficient governance allowed the interim authorities to stabilize electricity supplies ahead of the 2010–11 cold season and avoid sharp increases in tariffs. Improved management of the hydroelectric sector was evidenced by the rapidly increasing water level at the Toktogul Reservoir. Within four months after the regime change, the water level reached 17.6 million cubic meters, compared with 10.4 million in 2009. Electricity rates will eventually need to increase in order to sustain the sector and allow for investment in new hydroelectric projects, but the increases could be gradual. If the government continues to manage the sector transparently and invest in its efficiency, a phased rate increase would be justified.

Otunbayeva has also sought to increase the transparency of jet fuel contracts with foreign entities. The president expressed her disappointment with the U.S. Defense Department's decision in November 2010 to renew its contract with Mina Corp Ltd., a Gibraltar-registered company that had supplied jet fuel to the U.S. military's Manas air base near Bishkek for the past six years.<sup>25</sup> The one-year, \$315 million contract will allow Mina to supply another 96 million gallons of fuel to Manas and can be extended for another year.

At the time of the renewal decision, Otunbayeva's government was still investigating the company's operations. She alleged that the business was highly secretive, and that it was difficult to trace how its complex corporate and contracting structures functioned. Both the U.S. Defense Department and Mina claimed that they were not aware of any corruption schemes led by Kyrgyz contractors, but the company has been accused of having improper links to Maksim Bakiyev. The Kyrgyz

government has urged the United States to terminate the contract with Mina until the investigation is completed. Otunbayeva announced that a new state agency would be formed to manage the fuel trade with the base. The Kyrgyz government is also pushing for local companies to gradually take over the fuel supply business, hoping to increase their involvement from 20 percent to 50 percent during 2011.

Among other anticorruption efforts, the new government nationalized over 30 properties that were reportedly acquired illegally by members of Bakiyev's regime. They included Aziauniversalbank and various other financial institutions, construction companies, and resorts on the shores of Issyk-Kul Lake. Whether the government will be able to establish transparent ownership remains to be seen.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> President Bakiyev acquired control over these sites during privatization, through proxy companies/entrepreneurs.

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<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Where Is the Justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and Its Aftermath* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 16 August 2010), <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/08/16/where-justice-0>; and International Crisis Group, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 23 August 2010), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/193-the-pogroms-in-kyrgyzstan.aspx>.

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