

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Kyrgyzstan					
Score:	2006	2007	Change	<p>The graph shows authority trends from 1991 to 2007. The y-axis ranges from -10 to 10. A vertical dashed line is at 1991. The score is constant at approximately -3.5 until 2005, then rises sharply to about 4.5 by 2007.</p>	
Polity:	4	3	-1		
Democ:	4	3	-1		
Autoc:	0	0	0		
Durable:		1			
Tentative:		Yes			
SCODE	KYR	CCODE	703	Date of Report	1 November 2008
Polity IV Component Variables					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP
2	2	4	4	2	0
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)					
End Date	25 March 2005		Begin Date	14 August 2005	
Polity Fragmentation: No					
Constitution	21 October 2007				
Executive(s)	President Kurmanbek Bakiyev; appointed acting president, 24 March 2005; directly elected, 10 July 2005, 88.6%				
Legislature	Unicameral: Jorguku Kenesh (90 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 16 December 2007) Ak Zhol: 90				
Judiciary	Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, Higher Court of Arbitration				

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Factional or Restricted Elections (7)

While Kyrgyzstan has often been referred to as the “island of democracy” in Central Asia, the blatant manipulation of the country’s electoral institutions by former-President Akayev undermined the consolidation of democratic politics in this former Soviet republic. While maintaining some degree of democratic legitimacy by holding elections, nevertheless, President Akayev – like his political contemporaries in neighboring Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan – manipulated the political process to extend his terms in office through fraudulent referenda.

President Akayev, who originally gained executive office during the Soviet-era, was reelected to his third presidential term in October 2000 in elections that were neither fair in design nor practice. Although the 1992 Constitution limits any individual to only two presidential terms, President Akayev repeatedly manipulated the political process to prolong his tenure in office. In September 1995 the National Assembly rejected a proposed referendum to extend President Akayev’s first term in office. The President

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

subsequently asked the National Assembly to hold early presidential elections in December 1995. This proposal received support and early elections were held. Given the changes in the electoral timetable no opposition candidate was able to effectively compete against President Akayev. Additionally, three rival candidates were de-registered shortly before the election. In the aftermath of the election, Prime Minister Jumaliev subsequently reasoned, and the Constitutional Court concurred, that President Akayev's first term should not be assessed against the two-term limit on executive power. In general, the incumbent president used his powerful office to influence the outcome of all elections while he was in power. His strongest competitors were refused registration because they either were unwilling to undergo, or did undergo and failed, a Kyrgyz language test administered by the government. Election observers reported instances of ballot box stuffing, voter intimidation, and discrepancies in vote counts in the 2000 election. Despite increased public pressure for Akayev's resignation in 2002, the President survived a national referendum in early 2003 which produced significant constitutional reforms and reaffirmed his continued stay in office.

In June 2003 the Parliament authorized lifetime immunity from prosecution for Akayev, suggesting his resignation. This did not occur until after disputed parliamentary election results in February and March 2005 gave way to political turmoil with different parties claiming control over the government. Facing widespread protests against his rule, Akayev fled the country on April 4, and his resignation was ratified by the Parliament on April 11. Opposition leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev was made Interim President by the Parliament, and presided over an interim period marked by widespread political violence and the degradation of rule of law. Elections for a new president were held on 10 July 2005. Bakiyev won by a landslide, although international observers reported a small number of serious irregularities in vote counting and the candidate eligibility process. Although the resignation of Akayev marked the beginning of a more democratic executive recruitment process, Kyrgyzstan still has substantial work to do towards democratic consolidation.

Executive Constraints: Moderate Limitations (4)

Although the 1993 Constitution defines the form of government as a democratic republic, President Askar Akayev dominated the government during his presidency. Referenda in 1996 and 1998, which were marred by serious irregularities, substantially strengthened the powers of the presidency vis-à-vis the legislative branch. While the National Assembly blocked several of Akayev's presidential initiatives, nevertheless, in most areas it did not effectively check the power of the president. The legislature chosen in highly flawed elections held in February 2005 was packed with supporters of Akayev and this legislature was carried over despite the ouster of Akayev as a result of widespread demonstrations in March and April 2005. As a result, the executive and legislative branches remained largely deadlocked through late 2007. In spite of the deadlock, a new constitution was written and pushed through a public referendum on 21 October 2007 by the government. Following the referendum, President Bakiyev disbanded the legislature and announced new legislative elections to be held on 16 December 2007.

In response to increasing political tensions and demonstrations, President Bakiyev had accepted constitutional changes on November 9, 2006, that limit executive authority and increase the authority of the legislature. This reversed some of the strengthening of the presidency of the late 1990s, and restored substantial limitations on executive power. Whether the new constitution and new legislature will increase the constraints on executive authority and restore the institutions to near-parity remains to be seen. The judiciary, especially, has been dominated by the executive branch and limits citizens' rights to due process, particularly in cases involving prominent opposition figures.

Political Participation: Gradual Transition from Un-institutionalized Competition (5)

President Akayev's authoritarian regime employed a highly circumscribed electoral system and favored pro-presidential, "non-partisan" politicians while restricting the political access and activities of other, excluded groups. Both presidential and parliamentary elections held during 2000 were marred by serious irregularities. The government used bureaucratic means to harass and pressure the independent media, nongovernmental organizations, and opposition parties. While there has been a general respect for human rights in Kyrgyzstan since independence, nevertheless, the government has restricted freedom of assembly. Since the 2000 elections the protection of civil and political rights has deteriorated significantly. In reaction to the tightening of political control by the Akayev regime, public political protests against the government increased. In the spring of 2002 mass protests erupted in the south of the country and in the capital. While these protests were triggered by the arrest of southern-based opposition politician Azimbek Beknazarov, the root cause of the rising tide of violence in this country stemmed from the convergence of

rising poverty, economic stagnation, regional tensions and the increasingly autocratic ambitions of Akayev. This civil unrest ultimately culminated in Akayev's resignation and self-imposed exile in 2005. The 2005 interim period between President Akayev's resignation and the landslide election of Interim President Bakiyev saw a continuation of this unrest, marked by widespread protests, political violence, and a descent into anarchy in many areas of the country. Although the election of Bakiyev and his willingness to relinquish some powers to the legislature stabilized the country, at least temporarily, the durability of this stability remains to be seen.

Kyrgyzstan, like all its Central Asian neighbors, is marked by intense personal, clan and ethnic rivalries. Persistent tension between "southerners" (which consists of a large Uzbek population) and "northerners" is a constant source of political tension in this country. Whereas the North is Russian-speaking, urbanized and enjoys a disproportionate concentration of political and financial power, the South is heavily populated, ethnically diverse, largely rural and more religious. The South is also more affected by poverty and unemployment. While former-President Akayev was from a northern clan, his main political opponent, Azimbek Baknazarov, represented the southern clans, as does President Bakiyev. In addition to this regional cleavage, political tensions run high between Kyrgyz nationalists and Russian immigrants as well as between the secular government and Islamic militants. While the country is slowly developing a sense of national identity, nevertheless, ethnic, regional and clan-based political networks continue to play an important role in the Kyrgyz Republic. Political parties have only come into play since the ouster of President Akayev; they remain very weak, fluid, and underinstitutionalized.

A persistent problem in Kyrgyzstan is the unstable political atmosphere found in the Ferghana Valley. This fertile region, which straddles the borders of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, has long been a source of contention between these countries. At present, Uzbekistan controls the central lowlands, Kyrgyzstan its upper reaches and Tajikistan its western access point. Adding additional fuel to the fire is the actions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an armed group which has been actively engaged in a guerrilla campaign in the region since 1998. The stated goal of the IMU is to unify the region under a strict Islamic regime. While most armed activity has been aimed at Uzbekistan, in 1999 the violence spilled over into Kyrgyzstan. While there has been little direct conflict in Kyrgyzstan since this time, the government is concerned over the possible resurgence of violence in the region and the subsequent refugee problem caused by fighting in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

President Bakiyev's Ak Zho party swept all ninety seats in the new established Jorgoku Kenesh (unicameral legislature) in elections that were called by the President three years early. Although twelve parties entered candidates in the election, only the President's party gained the minimum 5% of the nationwide votes and 0.5% minimum vote in each of the country's seven regions and two major cities. The opposition disputed the elections as fraudulent and OSCE election observers decried the election as a "missed opportunity" to achieve legitimate elections.