



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Elections in Kyrgyzstan

2021 Early Presidential Election

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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January 8, 2021

Frequently Asked Questions

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When is Election Day?

Following the October 4, 2020, parliamentary elections, which resulted in mass protests and invalidation of the election results,¹ the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sooronbai Jeenbekov, issued a public statement of voluntary resignation on October 15. In accordance with the Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, early presidential elections must be scheduled by the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) within a week of resignations or terminations. Moreover, elections must be held within three months of the resignation date. This timeline shortens the standard pre-election period by one month.²

Despite this provision, the *Jogorku Kenesh* did not schedule early presidential elections until October 23, one day after the deadline stated in the Constitution. In accordance with the constitutional law, the Central Election Commission scheduled early presidential elections for January 10, 2021.

Notably, presidential elections will be held concurrently with a nationwide referendum to decide the country's form of government. Citizens will be asked to choose between a presidential or parliamentary government system or vote against all forms of government during the referendum.

What is the current political context, and what is at stake in these elections?

Kyrgyzstan is in the midst of a political crisis. A power vacuum quickly emerged after the October 4 demonstrations against what were perceived as manipulated parliamentary election results, which led to the resignation and removal of several political leaders. This so-called "Third Revolution" immediately following the election was organized by supporters of the parties that lost the parliamentary elections. The early presidential election will take place before new parliamentary elections, with the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) continuing to act on terms that expired on October 15, 2020. On October 22, the deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* adopted a law allowing the next parliamentary elections to be postponed until June 1, 2021. The presidential election will also contend with newly amended electoral legislation and ongoing debates on adopting a new constitution. One recently introduced change in the electoral legislation bars voters from using Form 2 within the country, available in the previous elections, which allowed citizens to change their electoral address. This change was made in consideration of alleged misuse by some political parties during the October 2020 parliamentary election.

The current Constitution limits a president to one six-year term of office. However, under the new Constitution, if adopted, the new president can be elected for two five-year terms. The proposed change was put in place by newly elected Prime Minister and acting President Sadyr Japarov, who assumed power after President Jeenbekov stepped down.

The president of Kyrgyzstan has always played a key role in influencing the country's political orientation and domestic and foreign policy. As head of state, the president is instrumental in setting economic

¹ CEC announcement on recognition of election results as invalid. October 6, 2020.

² Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, "On elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* of the Kyrgyz Republic," Article 48.2.

policy and determining priorities in trade, defense and foreign relations, supported by ministers and in consultation with the prime minister and *Jogorku Kenesh*.

What is the current form of government?

Since 2011, when it changed from a semi-presidential system, Kyrgyzstan has had a parliamentary form of government. Changes to the Constitution since then weakened the office of the president in favor of the Parliament and prime minister. In contrast to this past trend, since the October 4, 2020, election, calls for a change in the government system have increased. On December 10, 60 members of Parliament passed a bill to hold a nationwide referendum on the preferred form of government on the same day as the early presidential election.³ The international community has criticized the referendum for a variety of reasons, including the quick approval process and decision timeline and lack of inclusive discussions and corresponding civic education. Holding the referendum during the presidential election, combined with lack of time for extended voter education on the subject, creates the risk that results may be manipulated or skewed toward a change to a presidential system.

What is the term of the office of the president, and what is the president's role?

The president is elected for a six-year term by direct universal suffrage on the basis of an absolute majority (51 percent). A candidate who receives more than half of the votes cast in the first round is considered elected. There are no turnout requirements. If no candidate receives the required majority, a run-off takes place between the two candidates who received the most votes. The law does not specify a date for the second round but stipulates that it should be held no earlier than two weeks after the announcement of the first-round results.

The president is able to call elections, including early elections, to the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) pursuant to the procedures in the present Constitution. The president can also call elections to local *keneshes* and, in certain cases provided in the law, can dismiss local *keneshes*. The president can sign, endorse and return laws with their objections to the *Jogorku Kenesh*. At the proposal of the Council on Selection of Judges, the president nominates judges of the Supreme Court to the *Jogorku Kenesh* and can also nominate dismissals from the Supreme Court. The president also appoints and dismisses local court judges at the proposal of the Council of Judges.

Who are the candidates?

The Central Election Commission officially registered 18 of the 65 nominated presidential candidates. While seven women were nominated, only one, Klara Sooronkulova, will be running in the election. Along with the “against all” option, the 18 candidates will appear on a ballot paper in the following order based on lot drawn on December 19:

- Japarov Sadyr;
- Isaev Kanatbek;

³ *Jogorku Kenesh*, the draft bills considered on December 10.

- Arstanbek Myktybek;
- Sooronkulova Klara;
- Tashov Imamidin;
- Tagaev Rashid (eventually withdrew from the race on December 30);
- Segizbaev Abdil;
- Madumarov Adakhan;
- Kasenov Aimen;
- Kochkorov Ulukbek;
- Bayguttiev Jenishbek;
- Abakirov Eldar;
- Asanov Kursan;
- Abdyl daev Arstanbek;
- Dzhembekov Ravshan;
- Kalmamatov Baktybek;
- Tolbaev Babyrzhan; and
- Imanaliev Kanybek.

Of the registered candidates, Sadyr Japarov served as acting president after being elected prime minister following the resignation of Sooronbay Jeenbekov. Japarov resigned as acting president on November 14, 2020, in order to participate in the upcoming election. While holding these two top roles, Japarov supported the new Constitution currently being discussed within the Constitutional Council also established by Japarov. In the new version of Constitution, Kyrgyzstan would transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system by expanding the president's powers and introducing advisory, consultative and coordinating assemblies called *kurultais*.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Any citizen between the age of 35 and 70 who has resided in the country for a total of at least 15 years and speaks the state language, Kyrgyz, can run in the presidential election. Citizens with an un-expunged criminal record or have additional citizenships are deemed ineligible. The elected candidate will become the sixth president of Kyrgyzstan.

What are the nomination and registration procedures for presidential candidates?

Candidates may be nominated by political parties or run independently. Of the 65 candidates initially nominated, 18 are currently registered to participate in the race. To be registered by the Central Election Commission (CEC), candidates must submit 30,000 authentic voter signatures and an electoral deposit in the amount of 1 million KGS (around 12,250 USD).⁴ All prospective candidates must also pass

⁴ Electoral Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 49.

a Kyrgyz language exam. Candidates can withdraw their candidacy at any point in the registration process. On December 15, approved candidates were allowed to begin their campaigns.⁵

The nomination process started after the announcement of elections on October 23 and ended at midnight on November 14. A political party nominates a presidential candidate in accordance with the procedure provided for in its charter, legislation on political parties and the current constitutional law. An authorized representative of a political party must submit a protocol of the party's decision to nominate a candidate together with a statement of consent from the candidate to run for president to the CEC in a machine-readable form.⁶ Self-nominated candidates must submit a statement of intention to run for president by self-nomination, with supporting documents. All registered candidates for the 2021 presidential election are self-nominated; however, most are affiliated with political parties. Often candidates will run as independents because the procedures are less stringent than those for candidates nominated by political parties.

In order to be registered for the 2021 presidential election, nominated candidates must have submitted an electoral deposit of 1 million KGS by December 4 and required documents by December 6. Within 10 calendar days from the date of receipt of documents, the CEC must verify them and make a decision on the registration of a candidate. In case of inaccuracies or missing documents, the CEC shall provide a written conclusion on the addition of missing documents or correction of errors. Candidates have three days after receiving the CEC's written conclusion to submit the missing documents or correct the errors. In the event of noncompliance with the requirements specified in the written conclusion, the CEC will make a reasoned decision to reject the registration.⁷ Registration of presidential candidates was finalized on December 14, and the election campaign period began the next day.

What is the campaign and electoral timeline?

The campaign period officially began on December 15 and will conclude 24 hours prior to Election Day, on January 9.

Who is eligible to vote, and how many voters are registered to vote?

On Election Day, only citizens of Kyrgyzstan who are at least 18 years old, have passed biometric registration and are included on the voter list have the right to vote. As of January 2, 2021, the final voter list included 3,563,574 voters, which includes 1,860,477 women (52.21 percent) and 1,703,097 men (47.79 percent).⁸ This is a notable increase from the 2017 presidential elections, when there were 3,025,770 registered voters. Of Kyrgyzstan's population of 6,586,600, 4,081,410 citizens are 18 years and older and are eligible to vote. During 2020 parliamentary elections, however, more than 557,850

⁵ Electoral Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 23.1.

⁶ Electoral Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 49.

⁷ Electoral Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 49.

⁸ CEC-maintained voters portal, https://tizme.gov.kg/overall_info.xhtml?sessionId=ACTvZSJ2NCeBJGD3cHF-l82OAEWwhMshejhVv8g9.tizme1

citizens were omitted from the voter lists due to lack of biometric data. The last day for a voter to register for the presidential election was December 29, 2020.

In order to vote on Election Day, a voter must bring a national passport as identification. The online voter list can be found through the state portal, Tizme, which the Central Election Commission (CEC) maintains to inform voters.⁹ Due to misuse during the parliamentary election in October 2020, which contributed to the cancellation of results, amendments to the electoral legislation ban Form 2, which allowed voters to designate their electoral or voting address. Form 2s still allowed if voting abroad, however.

The CEC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has formed 48 election commissions in 28 countries for the upcoming presidential election. A full list of polling locations allowing out-of-country voting can be found by visiting the CEC or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.¹⁰ The number of registered voters outside Kyrgyzstan, 49,479, is significantly higher than for the 2017 presidential election.¹¹

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?¹²

Within five days after the Central Election Commission (CEC) certifies a nominated candidate's compliance with the requirements of the Constitution and the constitutional law, that candidate must create an election campaign fund and submit the electoral deposit in the amount 1 million KGS.¹³ Expenses of the candidate from the election fund may not exceed 165 million KGS, or approximately 1.98 million USD, which can be comprised of own funds of the candidate, political party donation, voluntary donations from individuals and voluntary donations from legal entities not exceeding the limits.¹⁴

When registering with the CEC, candidates should show opening of a bank account in the bank designated by the CEC for the election. Donations can be made any time until Election Day from the following sources:¹⁵

- The candidate's own funds, which may not exceed the estimated index more than 150,000 times – 15 million KGS, or approximately 180,200 USD
- Funds allocated to a candidate by a political party, which may not exceed the estimated index more than 500,000 times – 50 million KGS, or approximately 600,700 USD
- Voluntary contributions by individuals, each of which may not exceed the estimated index more than 500,000 times – 50 million KGS, or approximately 600,700 USD

⁹ CEC-maintained voter list website, <https://tizme.gov.kg/>

¹⁰ The list of polling stations abroad, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4138/>

¹¹ Voters abroad as of December 23, 2020, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4198/>

¹² Election Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 54.

¹³ Guidelines for a candidate for the office of president of the Kyrgyz Republic.

¹⁴ Guidelines for a candidate for the office of president of the Kyrgyz Republic.

¹⁵ Chapter 10 of the Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic"

- Voluntary donations by legal entities, each of which may not exceed the estimated index more than 500,000 times – 50 million KGS, or approximately 600,700 USD

Voluntary donations to election funds are forbidden from:

- Foreign states, state bodies, institutions, enterprises, legal entities, including their branches and representative offices; foreign citizens; international organizations; and legal entities registered in Kyrgyzstan, but with foreign citizen employees
- Stateless persons
- Government bodies (at all levels)
- State and municipal institutions and enterprises
- Legal entities with state or local tax exemptions
- Military units, institutions and organizations
- Courts and law enforcement agencies
- Charitable and religious organizations
- Anonymous sources (defined as citizens who do not provide one of the following – last name, first name, patronymic, address of residence and passport data – as well as those who provide false information)
- Entities carrying out entrepreneurial activities without registration
- Legal entities with debts to the state budget or the Social Fund of Kyrgyzstan

Political parties must submit final financial reports to the Control-revision Group under the CEC, which oversees the sources of income, accounting, use of funds and financial reports of political parties. The CEC-designated bank provides data on campaign fund expenditures to the CEC weekly, and in urgent cases, the bank should provide this information within 24 hours. Information on the receipt and expenditure of funds from the electoral funds of political parties is made public on the CEC website.

What is the structure and role of the election management body?

Elections in Kyrgyzstan are governed by a three-level election administration: the Central Election Commission (CEC), 56 Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and 2,522 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) in total.

Formed for a five-year period and appointed by the *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament), the CEC is a permanent state body consisting of 12 members who ensure the preparation and conduct of elections and referendums in Kyrgyzstan and that heads the system of election commissions. The CEC is a legal entity with its own budget, special fund, and official letterhead and stamp with the state emblem. The CEC is actively engaged in civic and voter education activities to ensure the participation of youth, voters with disabilities and women in the electoral process. One-third of its members are nominated by the president, one-third by the parliamentary majority and one-third by the parliamentary opposition. No more than 70 percent of CEC members may be persons of the same gender.

TECs are formed by the CEC. Each commission includes at least 11 members who are representatives of political parties and representative local self-government bodies. PECs are formed by regional TECs and

consist of at least seven members who are representatives of political parties and the previously established reserve list of PEC members. Each political party can nominate only one member per commission.

TECs are responsible for organizing the preparation and conduct of elections and referendums within their designated territories; proposing the boundaries of polling stations and constituencies for the CEC's approval; forming and approving the composition of PECs; publishing lists of polling locations in the mass media; receiving reports from PECs on electoral issues; providing legal, organizational, methodological, material and technical assistance to PECs; and maintaining, updating and clarifying the voter list. Currently, 650 citizens serve as territorial election commissioners.

PECs inform voters of the address and telephone number of the relevant PEC, its hours of operation, and the voting date and location. They ensure voters' access to the voter list, and they accept and consider statements about errors and inaccuracies. PECs also oversee compliance with the rules for placing campaign materials in the vicinity of the polling station during the campaign period. PECs ultimately organize voting at polling stations on Election Day. Once voting concludes, PECs count and tabulate voting results and transfer documents related to the preparation and conduct of elections to their respective TECs and archives. PECs receive and maintain written records of complaints and send them to the CEC for inclusion in the relevant register.

The CEC determines the number of members of each PEC, based on the number of voters at the relevant polling station, as follows:

- Zero to 500 voters – at least seven members
- 501 to 1,200 voters – at least nine members
- More than 1,201 voters – at least 11 members

In total, 2,474 polling stations have been designated across the country, and 48 PECs in 28 countries are scheduled to be open outside Kyrgyzstan on Election Day, including 15 locations in Russia. Currently, 31,150 citizens serve as precinct election commissioners.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

The Electoral Law provides for candidates' and citizen observers, as well as for international observation of all stages of the electoral process. To avoid conflicts of interest, the law prohibits certain persons, such as members of Parliament, central and local government officials, members of the election administration, judges, prosecutors and law enforcement agents, to enroll as observers. A nonprofit organization that intends to observe the elections should notify the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Territorial Election Commission (TEC), providing a copy of its certificate of state registration. The CEC and the TEC provide precinct election commissions with a list of nonprofit organizations that have announced their intention to conduct citizen observation of the elections.¹⁶

¹⁶ CEC regulation on citizen observers, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/NablyudateliBaykoochular/obshestvennyj-nablyudatel/pologorku-kenesha-kr/>

As of January 7, 2021, the CEC had accredited 333 international observers from 44 countries, representing 35 international organizations.¹⁷ For the early presidential election, the CEC has also accredited 13 local organizations intending to deploy a total of 16 domestic public observers.¹⁸

What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?

Several provisions are in place to ensure the right of voters with disabilities on Election Day. Persons with disabilities can request to vote the day before Election Day at their homes or alternate locations, including hospitals. In these cases, Precinct Election Commission members visit the specified locations with portable ballot boxes to provide the opportunity to vote.

Election commissions are tasked with ensuring the accessibility of the voting premises. Local self-government bodies and their officials are obliged to take necessary measures to comply with the mandate of the election commission as failure to do so risks liability as established by law. Ahead of the last election, the CEC reported that each polling station was equipped with one voting booth labeled for people with disabilities, where magnifying sheets and braille stencils were available. The CEC reported that more than 83 percent of polling stations (about 2,020) were equipped with ramps as of the beginning of December.¹⁹ The call center organized within the Central Election Commission's headquarters also includes operators with disabilities to assist voters with election-related questions.

What are election authorities doing to safeguard the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?

On September 1, 2020, President Jeenbekov held a meeting of the Security Council about preparation for the parliamentary elections. Following the meeting, the Central Election Commission (CEC), in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Emergency Situations, recommended several measures to safeguard elections and voters. In particular, by September 25, the government of Kyrgyzstan agreed to:

- Provide all members of election commissions, independent observers and other persons involved in the work of polling stations (including those who will work with voters at home) with personal protective equipment (medical masks, gloves, face shields) and, if necessary, protective suits;
- Train those workers on compliance with sanitary and epidemiological safety requirements when coming into contact with voters and processing ballots;

¹⁷CEC news, "CEC accredited international observers in early presidential elections and referendum of the Kyrgyz Republic." January 7, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4291/>

¹⁸CEC news, "In the early elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the CEC registered 16 public observers from 8 NGOs." January 7, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4296/>

¹⁹CEC news on accessibility of polling stations, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4261/>

- Equip all polling stations with disinfectants and noncontact thermometers, and post information about social distancing rules and explain the need to comply with sanitary and epidemiological standards and requirements;
- Organize polling stations in compliance with social distancing rules, including the location of ballot boxes, voting booths and work areas for members of election commissions; and
- Arrange for the disinfection of all polling stations on Election Day.²⁰

According to a public service announcement created by the CEC for the parliamentary elections, voters will have their temperature checked and receive disposable masks and gloves; they must also disinfect their hands.²¹ All surfaces will be disinfected at least twice every two hours. The announcement also advises voters not to touch voting booth surfaces and to stay at the polling station no longer than 15 minutes. Bins will be available at polling station exits for disposal of masks and gloves.

Voters, poll workers and observers will be expected to maintain social distancing of 1.5 to two meters.

What system is used to determine the results of the election? When will official results be announced?

Paper ballots will be scanned electronically on Election Day, with preliminary results sent electronically to the Central Election Commission (CEC). A hand-count verification completed after polling stations close will determine the final results.

Before the vote count commences at precinct election commissions (PECs), the chairman of each PEC will announce the preliminary results of voting based on the scanned data. Following this, documentation of the manual vote count is prepared; attached to the protocol on voting results; and read out to all present members of the PEC, candidates' proxies, observers and representatives of the media.

Voting results are finalized based on the results of a manual vote count. The CEC is required to announce the results of the election by January 24.²² Official results will be published on the CEC website. If no candidate receives an absolute majority, a second round will be required.

What is the process for electoral dispute adjudication?

Kyrgyzstan has established a vertical appeals procedure to respond to election disputes: Precinct Election Commissions, Territorial Election Commissions, Central Election Commission, first instance court and, last, the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

Precinct election commissions consider most election-related complaints, and decisions can be appealed to the courts or higher-level election commissions. Central Election Commission decisions, election-

²⁰ CEC decision #296 about the algorithm of actions to ensure sanitary and epidemiological safety and protect the health of citizens from COVID-19 on January 10, 2021

²¹ CEC voter education materials, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/video/chistye-vybory-zavisyat-ot-kazhdogo00/>

²² Election Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, Art. 37.

related decisions and the actions of other government bodies can also be appealed in court. All electoral stakeholders may file complaints, but election results can only be appealed by candidates or the observers they nominated.

Applications (complaints) received during the electoral period are subject to review by the election commissions or courts within three days of receipt. Complaints received on or the day before Election Day will be dealt with immediately. Appeals should be made within three calendar days of the received decision. In case of appealing on the basis of inactivity, the application (complaint) is submitted to the next higher election commission or court within three calendar days of when action was to be taken.

Resources

- [Central Election Commission](#) official website
- [Jogorku Kenesh](#)
- Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, “On elections of the President and deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh”
- Law about election commissions on conduct of elections and referendums of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Regulations “On the working arrangements, status and powers of international (foreign) observers during the elections and referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic”
- Provision on the state portal Tizme
- CEC guidelines for a candidate for the office of president of the Kyrgyz Republic

IFES in Kyrgyzstan

Operating in Kyrgyzstan since 1994, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked with a variety of local partners to support the development and sustainability of democratic institutions and practices in elections and civic engagement. IFES has helped build and improve the capacity of electoral administration and legislation, strengthened civil society and provided civic education opportunities to high school students through in-class learning as well as extracurricular activities. IFES continues to work in Kyrgyzstan with United States Agency for International Development funding to assist with the ongoing development of electoral democracy and building of political culture.

A recent paper from IFES' *COVID-19 Briefing Series*, [Safeguarding Health and Elections](#), details how to safely conduct elections during a pandemic and other public health emergencies.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Kyrgyz election authorities as of January 8, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

This paper is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The information herein is provided by the author(s) and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.