



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Elections in Kyrgyzstan

2021 Local Elections and Constitutional Referendum

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | USA | www.IFES.org

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Frequently Asked Questions

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When is Election Day?

On February 8, 2021, the newly elected president of Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov, issued a decree¹ on the timing of the elections of deputies of local councils (*keneshes*). The decree set the date for local elections for 448 city and village councils as Sunday, April 11, 2021. This will include elections for 30 local councils previously scheduled for April 12, 2020, but suspended by former President Jeenbekov² on March 23, 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 12, 2021, President Japarov signed the law On the Appointment of a Referendum on the Draft Basic Law of the Kyrgyz Republic.³ The law mandates a nationwide constitutional referendum on April 11, which will be a single voting day for both the local elections and the referendum.

Why are the referendum and local elections important?

Elections of 30 local councils in Kyrgyzstan have been postponed for one year. As determined by law, the terms of the deputies of these local councils ended in March 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, elections were suspended and later postponed.

This postponement created a tense political environment, with both experts and the populace disputing the legitimacy of deputies of local *keneshes* whose terms have expired, and the extent to which their decisions are authorized. Cities including Bishkek and Osh cannot appoint new mayors until the newly elected officials take office. In Bishkek, 45 elected deputies of the city council select the mayor by secret ballot. This year, 29 political parties have nominated candidates for the Bishkek city council elections. This is the largest political contest for the capital's council in recent years.

The referendum, to be held the same day as the local elections, is on the adoption of a new draft of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. The draft was developed by the Constitutional Council formed on November 20, 2020, based on a decree⁴ of then-acting President Talant Mamytov. There have been multiple rumors and scandals surrounding the referendum and the Constitutional Court. Some domestic and international stakeholders have noted inconsistencies among the multiple versions of the draft law in Russian and the draft in Kyrgyz. The final law will be recognized both in Kyrgyz (state language) and Russian (official language) once completed. On March 26, 2021, the Central Commission for Elections

¹ Official website of the president of Kyrgyzstan. *The Decree on the Appointment of Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes of the Kyrgyz Republic was signed.* February 8, 2021. http://www.president.kg/ru/sobytiya/ukazy/18601_podpisan_ukaz_onaznachenii_viborov_deputatov_mestnih_keneshey_kirgizskoy_respubliki

² Official website of the president of Kyrgyzstan. *A decree was signed on the Suspension of Measures to Implement the Stages of the Electoral Process of Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes...* March 23, 2020. http://www.president.kg/ru/sobytiya/ukazy/16375_podpisan_ukaz_opriostanovlenii_meropriyatiy_porealizatsii_etapov_izbiratel'nogo_processa_viborov_deputatov_mestnih_keneshey_batkenskoy_dghalal_abadskoy_narinskoy_issik_kulskoy_chuyskov_oshskoy_oblastey_igoroda

³ Official website of the president of Kyrgyzstan. *“President Sadyr Japarov signed the Law on the Appointment of a Referendum (nationwide vote) on the Draft Law’...”* March 12, 2021. http://www.president.kg/ru/sobytiya/zakony/18890_prezident_sadir_ghaparov_podpisal_zakon_onaznachenii_referenduma_vsenarodnogo_golosovaniya_poproektu_zako_na_okonstitucii_kirgizskoy_respubliki

⁴ Official website of the president of Kyrgyzstan. *Decree on the Establishment of the Constitutional Conference was signed.* November 20, 2020. http://www.president.kg/ru/sobytiya/18249_podpisan_ukaz_ob_obrazovanii_konstitucionnogo_soveshaniya

and Referenda published the text of the draft Constitution the referendum will consider in special issue #27 of the newspaper *Erkin Too*.^{5,6} Approximately 1 million copies of the publication have been circulated in Kyrgyz and Russian.

If the draft Constitution is adopted, presidential powers will be significantly expanded, and the presidential term limit will increase from a maximum of one six-year term to two five-year terms. In addition, the procedures for the formation of some state bodies and for appointing judges will change. The new Constitution also would reduce the number of seats in the Supreme Council from 120 to 90 and would establish a “People’s *Kurultai*” (Assembly) and a Constitutional Court, with the former consisting of unelected members with some parallel responsibilities to those of members of Parliament. Overall, the passing of the current draft Constitution would significantly reduce the powers and independence of the *Jogorku Kenesh*.

What is the electoral system?

Deputies of city *keneshes* (councils) are elected according to a proportional system, while deputies of *aiyl keneshes* (village councils) are elected through a majoritarian system.

For city council elections, voters may select a political party or vote “against all.” A party must receive at least 7 percent of votes to earn a seat. For village council elections, voters choose their preferred candidates or “against all.” Voters may not select more candidates than the number of seats in an electoral district.

Voting during the nationwide referendum will include one question: “To adopt the proposed draft Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic?” The ballot will include two options: “yes” or “no.” If turnout for the referendum is less than 30 percent, the referendum will be declared invalid.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections and referendum?

Local elections are regulated by the 2011 Law on Elections of Local *Keneshes*,⁷ and the referendum is regulated by the 2016 Constitutional Law on the Referendum of the Kyrgyz Republic.⁸

⁵ <http://erkintoo.kg/>

⁶ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *The CEC decided to publish a special edition of the newspaper*. March 26, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4585/>

⁷ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *Law on Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes*. July 14, 2011. https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/ZakonodatelstvoMyyzambar/ZakonyMyyzambar/O_vyborax_deputatov_mestnyx_keneshei

⁸ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *Constitutional Law on the Referendum of the Kyrgyz Republic*. October 31, 2016. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/konstitucionnye-zakony-kr/konstitucionnye-zakony-kr/o-referendume-kyrgyzskoj-respubliki/>

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

A candidate running for city council must be an eligible voter and at least 21 years old by Election Day. Political parties can run in city council elections, and political parties and self-nominated citizens can run in village council elections.

Registration of candidates for deputies of city *keneshes* ended on March 12, 2021. In total, 56 political parties submitted lists of candidates for 796 seats across 28 city *keneshes*. A total of 11,782 are registered on the lists of political parties, of which 4,482 (38.0 percent) are women. A complete list of political parties and nominated candidates can be found on the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC) [website](#).

Registration of candidates for village council seats ended on March 22. In total, 18,772 candidates were registered for 7,560 seats on 420 village *keneshes*, including 5,300 women (28.3 percent). Only 63 candidates were registered by political parties; the rest were self-nominated. The CEC is required to post the program for the upcoming elections for local *keneshes* on its official website for the first time.

For the referendum, the CEC received 15 applications from campaign groups positioning themselves as For (12) or Against (three) as of March 22.⁹

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

On Election Day, only Kyrgyzstan citizens who have reached the age of 18, passed biometric registration and are included on the voter list have the right to vote.

There are two separate voter lists for the referendum and local elections. The final lists of referendum participants will be posted at 2,483 polling stations before April 4, 2021 at the latest (no later than seven days before Election Day). While the final voter lists for the local elections will be posted at 2,273 polling stations before April 9, 2021 (no later than three days before Election Day).

As of April 1, 3,606,201 voters are included on the final voter lists for the constitutional referendum, including 1,725,849 men (47.86 percent) and 1,880,352 women (52.14 percent). In comparison with the final voter list from the early presidential election and referendum on January 10, 42,627 more voters are registered for the upcoming referendum. The number of referendum participants on the preliminary list for voting abroad is 58,198 citizens. For voters abroad, 48 polling stations will be available outside Kyrgyzstan. All official information about the voter list can be obtained on the state voters' portal, [Tizme](#).

For the local elections 3,318,130 people are currently registered as of April 1, including 1,587,598 men (47.85%) and 1,730,532 women (52.15%).

⁹ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *Resolutions of the CEC of the Kyrgyz Republic*. https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/npacik/Postanovleniya_CIK_KR-BShKnyn_toktomdoru/

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

Elections in Kyrgyzstan are governed by a three-level election administration: the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC), 53 Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and more than 2,000 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).

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 engages in civic and voter education activities to ensure the participation of youth, voters with disabilities and women in the electoral process. One-third of CEC 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 members of the same sex.

The CEC forms TECs, each including at least 11 members who are representatives of political parties and local self-government bodies. Regional TECs form PECs, which consist of at least seven members from political parties and a 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, 638 citizens serve as territorial election commissioners.

PECs inform voters of the address, telephone number and hours of operation of each PEC, along with the voting date. They ensure voters' access to the voter list, and they accept and consider statements about errors and inaccuracies. PECs also oversee compliance with rules for placing campaign materials in the vicinity of polling stations 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 each polling station, as follows:

- Zero to 500 voters: at least seven members;
- 501 to 1,200 voters: at least nine members; and
- More than 1,201 voters: at least 11 members.

Currently, 30,705 citizens serve as precinct election commissioners and operators. In total, 2,435 polling stations have been designated across Kyrgyzstan for the referendum, and 48 PECs will be open in 28

other countries, including in 15 locations in Russia. In total, the CEC organized 2,273 polling stations for the local elections.

What is the campaign timeline and process?

Registration of the lists of candidates for deputies of city *keneshes* ended on March 12, 2021, and registration of candidates for deputies of village *keneshes* ended on March 22. The election campaign period began on the final day of the registration period and will end 24 hours before the start of voting, at 8:00 a.m. on April 10 (designated as a day of silence).

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

Campaign expenditure and donation limits differ for elections to city and village *keneshes*.

Electoral deposits for city council elections have a limit of KGS 20,000 (approximately USD 236) for all cities except Bishkek and Osh, which have a limit of KGS 50,000 (approximately USD 590). For city elections outside of Bishkek and Osh, election expenditures cannot exceed KGS 5 million (USD 59,000). For Bishkek and Osh elections, the maximum is KGS 15 million (USD 177,000).

Donations to campaigns for city council elections in Bishkek and Osh may be made at any time until Election Day from the following sources and up to the limits listed below:

- Personal funds of a candidate included in the list of candidates should not exceed KGS 100,000 (approximately USD 1,180);
- Funds donated by a political party should not exceed KGS 500,000 (approximately USD 5,897);
- Donations from individuals should not exceed KGS 100,000 (approximately USD 1,180); and
- Donations from legal entities should not exceed KGS 300,000 (approximately USD 3,538).

For village elections, electoral deposits should not exceed KGS 1,000 (approximately USD 12), and expenditures by candidates are limited to KGS 500,000 (approximately USD 5,897).

How are election authorities safeguarding the elections and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?

On March 14, 2021, the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC) approved the Algorithm of Actions to ensure sanitary and epidemiological safety and protect the health of citizens during the preparation and conduct of elections and referendums in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰ The algorithm, developed by the Ministry of Health and the CEC, was approved in accordance with Articles 7 and 18 of the Law on Election Commissions for Holding Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic. It includes requirements that must be upheld by all state bodies, local self-government bodies, election commissions, candidates, political parties, both For and Against groups and their representatives, representatives of the media, internet publications, legal entities and individuals participating in the

¹⁰ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *CEC approved the Algorithm for ensuring sanitary and epidemiological safety in a referendum.* March 14, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4522/>

electoral process. For example, voters, poll workers and observers will be expected to maintain social distancing of 1.5 to two meters.

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

Several provisions ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their electoral rights.

Electoral commissions are tasked with ensuring the accessibility of voting premises. Territorial Election Commissions, along with the territorial divisions of the authorized state social development body, must identify and map the needs of voters with disabilities no later than 60 calendar days before Election Day. Based on the findings, the relevant election commission shall organize an inspection of the voting premises for compliance with the needs of voters with disabilities in coordination with representatives of local government bodies and disabled persons organizations no later than 50 calendar days before Election Day.

If a polling station is not appropriately equipped for voters with disabilities, no later than 40 calendar days before Election Day the relevant election commission shall submit an appeal to the relevant local government bodies to take measures to ensure the accessibility of the polling station. Local self-government bodies and their officials must immediately take steps to comply with the appeal. Failure to do so risks legal liability. Election commissions should take the necessary special measures to properly inform voters with disabilities. For this, information materials should be prepared in audio and video formats (on digital media) using sign language translation or subtitling, printed in an enlarged font, easy to read, as well as using Braille or other special means for voters with disabilities.

Campaign groups for the referendum must publish and distribute accessible campaign materials using sign language translation or subtitling, printed in an enlarged font, easy to read, as well as using Braille or other special means for referendum participants with disabilities, in an amount not less than 1 percent of the total circulation of all campaign materials.

Persons with disabilities can request mobile voting at their homes or alternate locations, including hospitals with a written request at least three days before Election Day. In such cases, Precinct Election Commission members visit the specified locations with portable ballot boxes.

What provisions are in place to guarantee equal access to the electoral process for women?

On August 8, 2019, the former president signed Amendment No. 117 to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic On Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes. The amendment guarantees women 30 percent of seats in the upcoming council elections in accordance with a gender quota. This includes elections for the Bishkek city council. The upcoming local elections will be the largest implementation and observance of this quota since the amendment was passed.

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

The Electoral Law provides for candidate and citizen observers, as well as international observation at 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 Commission for Elections and Referenda (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 expressed their intention to observe the elections.

As of April 8, the CEC has accredited 183 international observers from 31 countries, including 10 election commissions of other countries, 10 international organizations and 16 diplomatic missions. In total, 126 representatives of international organizations intend to observe the constitutional referendum.¹¹

From the 183 international observers of the referendum, 91 will also observe local council elections.¹² Nine local organizations expressed their intention to observe the elections of deputies of local *keneshes*.¹³

When will official results be announced?

The results of elections to local *keneshes* will be determined by the relevant Territorial Election Commissions based on protocols received from Precinct Election Commissions no later than 20 calendar days after Election Day — May 1, 2021.

The Central Commission for Elections and Referenda will publish election results within 10 calendar days after the date when they are determined, or no later than May 10. The published results will include the number of votes received by each candidate, the list of candidates, and votes cast against all candidates and all lists of candidates, as well as additional data contained in the protocols of voting results.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Kyrgyzstan responds to election disputes through a vertical appeals procedure. Appeals are considered, in sequence, by Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), Territorial Election Commissions, the Central

¹¹ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *As of April 8, 2021, 183 international observers were accredited.* April 8, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/4644/>

¹² Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *General list of international observers.* <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/NablyudateliBaykoochular/MejdunarodnyyElaralyk/vybory-deputatovmk-referendum-11042021g/obshhiyispokmn/>

¹³ Official website of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda. *List of non-profit organizations that notified the CEC of the Kyrgyz Republic of their intention to observe the elections of deputies of local keneshes, scheduled for April 11, 2021.* March 23, 2021. <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/NablyudateliBaykoochular/obshhestvennyj-nablyudatel/perechen-nekommercheskih-organizacij-avedomivshih-cik-kr-o-namerenii-osushestvlyat-nablyudenie-na-vyborah-deputatov-mestnyh-keneshej-naznachennyh-na-11-aprelya-2021-goda/>

Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC), the first instance court and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

PECs consider most election-related complaints, and their decisions can be appealed to the courts or higher-level election commissions. CEC decisions, election-related decisions and the actions of other government bodies can also be appealed in court. All electoral stakeholders may file complaints, but only candidates or the observers they nominate can appeal election results.

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. Appeals regarding inactivity must be submitted to the next higher election commission or court within three calendar days after an action was to be taken.

Resources

- [Central Commission for Elections and Referenda official website](#)
- [Jogorku Kenesh official website](#)
- [Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)
- [Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes](#)
- [Law on Election Commissions on the Conduct of Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)
- [Regulations on the Working Arrangements, Status and Powers of International \(Foreign\) Observers During Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)
- [Provision on the State Portal, Tizme](#)

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 and 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 April 9, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

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