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Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic

2015 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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September 28, 2015

Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Kyrgyz Republic electoral authorities as of September 28, 2015 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Why are these elections so important? What is the political context?

The elections taking place on October 4, 2015 will be the Kyrgyz Republic's second cycle of parliamentary elections since the adoption of a new Constitution and significant political transition that occurred in 2010, six months after the revolution that ousted then-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. While the Kyrgyz Republic has experienced one of the most noteworthy transformations among the former Soviet republics in recent years, challenges to advancing democratic gains remain.

The 2015 parliamentary elections are predicted to be competitive, highly contested and potentially acrimonious. If successful, the elections will bring into office a new Parliament, tasked with overseeing the consolidation of the Kyrgyz Republic's democracy. Due to recent changes to electoral legislation, including the introduction of new technologies and the collection and use of biometric data, Kyrgyz election management bodies and the State Registry Service (SRS) will implement new voting procedures using new equipment and administer voter verification, respectively.

The upcoming elections will also be an important precursor to the presidential election slated for 2017, which will be heavily watched by the international community. As a result, the Kyrgyz Republic's ability to conduct the elections in a credible and transparent manner while learning from this first use of new equipment and corresponding procedures will be critical to its path forward and serve as a strong indicator of the country's commitment to democratic electoral practice.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Voters will elect representatives of political parties to become members of the unicameral 120-seat Parliament (*Jogorku Kenesh*) for a five-year term under a closed-list proportional system. In order to gain seats in the *Jogorku Kenesh*, a political party must receive a minimum of 7 percent of the votes cast nationwide and 0.7 percent in each oblast.

What are the major parties running for election?

Out of 203 political parties registered with the Ministry of Justice, 34 parties originally declared their intention to stand for the elections. However, the number of parties was reduced as Election Day approached due to unfulfilled requirements for signatures and a required, refundable¹ monetary deposit of five million KGS, approximately \$75,500 (USD). It is difficult to differentiate the participating parties as none of them represent a specific ideology or set of principles.² It is expected that the greatest competition will take place between the President's Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and the main

¹ The election deposit is fully refundable provided a political party receives 5 percent or more of the votes cast on Election Day.

² Ibraimov, B. (2015, August 25). Kyrgyzstan Braces for Jogorku Kenesh Elections. Silk Road Reporters. <http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2015/08/25/kyrgyzstan-braces-for-jogorku-kenesh-elections/>

opposition party, Ata Meken, which absorbed a number of smaller parties and holds significant influence in the country's south.

As of September 16, the following 14 major parties presented their candidate lists and have been registered by the Central Election Commission:

- Ata Meken
- Bir-Bol
- Ar-Namys
- Inyugyu-Progress
- Azattyk
- Respublika Ata-Jurt
- Aalam (party of non-party people)
- Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK)
- Byutun Kyrgyzstan Emgek
- Zamandash
- Uluu Kyrgyzstan
- Meken Yntymagy
- Kyrgyzstan Party
- Congress of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan

Who can run for a seat in Parliament?

Political parties may submit lists to the Central Election Commission (CEC) with between 120 and 200 candidates. Candidates must be over 21 years of age and have the right to vote. Citizens are ineligible for candidacy if they hold unresolved criminal convictions. Each candidate must be part of a party list, as independent candidates are not permitted to contest the parliamentary elections.

There are several requirements a party must fulfill in order to register a candidate list. Each party must pay a deposit of five million KGS, which is about \$75,000 (USD), to register a candidate list. The required deposit has increased significantly from the 500,000 KGS required in previous elections. While the cash deposit is a potential difficulty for smaller parties to overcome, there is hope that this requirement will be a positive step toward consolidation of political parties, encourage more inclusive and professional political entities, and in the process provide a more distinct choice for voters.

In order to support the political participation of women, a gender quota is in place stipulating that no more than 70 percent of candidates can be of the same gender. Every fourth candidate on a party list must alternate by gender. Additionally, a minimum of 15 percent of candidates on each list must be younger than 35, at least 15 percent must be of different national minorities, and every list must include at least two candidates with disabilities.

The possibilities for cancellation of registration of candidates and candidate lists under the electoral law are many, such as campaign rules violations, election fraud committed by candidates or party representatives, or campaign finance violations.

Who is eligible to vote?

Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic who are 18 years old by Election Day, officially registered in the *Jogorku Kenesh* Elections Voter Register and have provided their biometric data to the State Registration Service are eligible to vote. On Election Day, voters may use a biometric ID card or passport as voter ID. Previously permitted identification such as military or pensioner cards are no longer accepted. Kyrgyz citizens who are serving a prison sentence do not have the right to vote, nor do those who are declared incapacitated.

How is the voter register compiled and what changes have occurred in the electoral system?

Ahead of the 2015 parliamentary elections, changes were made to the voter registration process with the intent to improve the accuracy of the voter register.

The Unified Population Register (UPR) is now used to draw up voter list information, including personal and biometric data (photo and fingerprints) on those citizens who registered. The UPR is managed by the State Registry Service (SRS), whereas the previous voter lists were managed by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The SRS campaign to register citizens through the UPR began in the fall of 2014 with assistance from international partners. While public outreach efforts were made, including mobile registration, concerns about potential gaps in registration rates and data remain. According to SRS figures, approximately 2.75 million citizens are listed on the voter register and will be included in the voter list. However, CEC information suggests the real number of voters who should be included in the voter registry is closer to 3.5 million voters. There is no mechanism for citizens who do not appear on the voter list to vote, even provisionally, on Election Day. In addition, the adjustment in responsibilities between the SRS and CEC is untested, with the SRS taking on a complicated system of voter verification.

After August 15, 2015, the SRS compiled the voter lists from Provincial Election Commissions to provide them to the CEC. Between August 20 and September 19, these lists should be available to voters to verify their information and request corrections if necessary. Voters may be added to the voter register or may request corrections to their registration up to 15 days before Election Day when the list becomes final. In addition to managing the voter list, the SRS has also taken over the role of verifying voter identity on Election Day through figure print identification. The inking of fingers was eliminated under the new rules.

How many polling places are there on Election Day?

There will be an estimated 2,374 polling places on Election Day. These locations will be opened from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. For voters who cannot come to the polling places due to health issues and who officially applied for mobile voting, the poll workers will go to them the day before Election Day. Other than approved requests for mobile voting, early voting is no longer allowed.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

The Central Election Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic plans to set up polling locations in 26 countries around the world. Out-of-country-voting will be conducted according to the same procedures as in-country voting. Biometric data could be provided by citizens abroad to their respective Kyrgyz diplomatic missions until September 19. As of that day, voter lists are closed and citizens who are not included will be unable to vote. Citizens who are registered and vote abroad will verify their identity and registration on Election Day through biometric voter verification run by State Registry Service personnel deployed to these voting locations.

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

The government body that administers elections in the Kyrgyz Republic is the Central Election Commission, an independent government entity. There are two additional levels of this body, the 56 Territorial Election Commissions and 2,374 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). For the first time in these elections, verification of voter registration on Election Day will be managed by the State Registry Service as a result of changes in the electoral law. It previously was managed under the purview of the PECs.

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

Local civil society organizations, representatives of political parties and international organizations will be able to observe the October 4 parliamentary elections. Legal changes made prior to the 2011 presidential election allow for a more open observation process, whereas previously observers were only allowed to observe on Election Day. Under the current laws in place, both international and domestic observers will be able to observe pre-election preparation, Election Day, counting and post-election activities. Additionally, these changes will allow observers to:

- Monitor election commission formation process at any level;
- Monitor the voter list formation process;
- Monitor the voter registration process;
- Review election materials;
- Be at or outside voting premises at any time on Election Day;
- Openly express his/her opinion via mass media;

- Observe the voting process;
- Approach the election commission Chairperson;
- Review election protocols and receive copies of the protocols; and
- File or appeal a complaint on the election process and attend a recount.

Election observers will also be allowed to photograph or film all proceedings as long as it does not impede the work of a polling station or compromise the secrecy of the ballot.

International observers may receive accreditation from the Central Election Commission (CEC) provided they received an invitation from the President, the *Jogorku Kenesh*, the Prime Minister and his/her cabinet, or the CEC to become accredited through a sponsoring organization. International organizations that have not been specifically invited may also observe, but they too should apply to the CEC. Accredited international observers are then allowed to move freely among polling stations and observe election and election-related processes as desired.

Local observers are able to register through a sponsoring local organization. They must submit a letter from their organization indicating their first name, last name and patronymic, place of residence, number of the polling station and the name of the election commission(s) to which he/she is directed. This letter, along with an official form of identification must be presented to the appropriate electoral authorities while observing. They will be able to observe only at the specific polling station at which they were registered. In the case of long-term observation, the letter must be presented to the appropriate Provincial Election Commission (PEC) or Territorial Election Commission where the observer will be working. For short-term observation, the letter must be presented directly to the selected PEC.

On September 15, 2015, the CEC granted accreditation to the following international observers: Central Commission for Elections and Referenda of Turkmenistan; Community of Independent States Election Observation Mission; General Election Commission of Mongolia; and the Observation Mission of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States

In addition, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has requested 350 short-term observers from participating States, and will deploy 22 long-term observers throughout the country.³ To date, the media reports 234 short and long-term observers have been accredited by the CEC.⁴

³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Parliamentary Elections, 4 October 2015. (n.d.). <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>

⁴ Podolskaya, D. (2015, September 23). Kyrgyz CEC registers 78 other election observers. KG24. <http://www.eng.24.kg/election2011/177174-news24.html>

What is the process for electoral dispute adjudication?

Voters, candidates, political parties, nonprofit organizations and their representatives, observers and election commissions may file complaints when they believe electoral rights have been violated during the pre-election period or on Election Day. There are several different avenues through which one may bring a complaint.

Election Commissions

Complaints should be addressed first to the lowest-level election commission, which is the Provincial Election Commissions, then up to the Territorial Election Commissions and lastly to the Central Election Commission (CEC). If they remain unsatisfactorily resolved they may be appealed to a special court called the Pervomaiski Court and lastly to the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic. As suggested, decisions or actions taken by election commissions and their officials that violate electoral rights can be appealed to the superior election commission. A decision made by the CEC may be appealed to the court of original jurisdiction, and from there to the Supreme Court. Election commissions have three days to respond to an appeal on a specific decision or action taken by a lower election commission; unless the decision being appealed occurred on the day before Election Day or on Election Day, in which case it must be considered immediately.

Prosecutors, Police or Courts

Individuals or entities can submit a complaint by bringing a statement to the prosecutor's office, police or court in accordance with the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic. Law enforcement bodies are responsible for complaints related to breaches of public order and actions that cause administrative liability in accordance with the applicable law. Prosecuting authorities supervise the application of electoral laws and are responsible for prosecuting criminal activity.

If a statement is received by any of the above mentioned authorities during the pre-election period they have two days to respond. If the statement is received on Election Day, a response must be immediate. If authorities refuse to consider a complaint they must immediately issue a reason for the refusal.

Disputing Election Results

If a person or entity submits a complaint in regards to the determination of votes or election results, they must submit their statement to the superior election commission. Only when the Central Election Commission makes a decision, may the party appeal to the court of original jurisdiction and then the Supreme Court.

How will security be provided during the parliamentary elections?

More than 8,800 police officers and over 8,000 citizen patrol members will be involved in the protection of public order during the parliamentary elections on October 4. Each polling station will be protected by police. Police forces will protect ballots during printing and at polling stations. They will escort the delivery of ballots to polling stations. During the pre-election period as well as on the day of the vote, police will work closely with local election commissions to prevent violations of electoral legislation and to protect public security and order.

Resources

- AkiPress ([Kyrgyz](#))
- Central Election Commission ([Kyrgyz](#))
- KG24 ([Kyrgyz](#)) ([English](#))
- [Kyrgyz Republic, Parliamentary Elections, 4 October 2015: Needs Assessment Report](#)
(Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights)