

KYRGYZSTAN

2021 Parliamentary Election Report



FEBRUARY 2022



Foreword

For the past three decades the countries of central Asia have at best aspired to democracy, but lately they have all fallen deep into authoritarianism. The one holdout was the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, which maintains higher freedom ratings than its neighbours, particularly in regards to internet and press freedom. This has been significant because many believe that a free press is the key to freedom. Therefore, it was likely that Kyrgyzstan could pull itself out from authoritarianism.

In the past year, a new president, Sadyr Japarov, has taken power after freeing himself from jail and has rapidly consolidated power, granting the executive branch power over the legislative and judiciary of the country. The overall fairness and openness of parliamentary elections has decreased as well. Currently, the president's supporters hold a solid legislative advantage and are set to have at least 4 years to further consolidate their power.

The people of Kyrgyzstan have many serious problems in their daily lives and have for a long time been increasingly apathetic regarding the political situation. This has reached a new low. This year saw the adoption of a constitutional amendment with only 30% voter participation and now a parliamentary election with the same level of participation. It is a dark day for democracy, as the one remaining beacon of light for freedom in central Asia is set to be extinguished.

Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy

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Kyrgyz Republic



The central Asian country has a population of **6.5 million people**, and was a constituent republic of the USSR until it declared its independence on the 31st August 1991. In 1994, it joined **CSTO**. According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Score, the country is '**Partly Free**' with a score of 53/100. This score has been steadily declining since 2016, when it scored 65/100.

Kyrgyzstan's political system features a President as the head of state and the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers as head of government. In 2005, Kyrgyzstan transitioned back to a **unicameral legislature** after a brief experiment with a bicameral system. The Legislative Assembly (Myizam Chygaruu Jjiyny) initially had 75 seats, elected for five-year terms. In 2007, the number of seats were enlarged to **90 seats and party-list voting** was introduced. Party-list voting is a proportional representation system of voting, where candidates are selected from central party lists rather than locally elected. In April 2021, a **new constitution** was created that would increase the President's power. The voting process behind the installment of the constitution has been heavily criticized by independent observer missions as lacking credibility.



Following the annulment of the election results of October 2020, parliamentary elections were held on the **28th November 2021**.

The October 2020 election results were annulled due to widespread protests against the election's conduct.

Seven parties passed the 5% threshold in the 2021 elections and will take seats in the government. **Voter turnout was at a record low** at less than 35%.

Parties & Coalitions



**АТА-ЖУРТ
КЫРГЫЗСТАН**

AJK | ATA-JURT KYRGYZSTAN

Economic liberalism, Kyrgyz nationalism
Elections | 2020 6.96% | 2021 19.08%



ИШЕНИМ

ISHENIM

Center-right, communitarism
Elections | 2020 - | 2021 15.03%



ЫНТЫМАК

YNTYMAK

Direct democrac, social conservatism
Elections | 2020 - | 2021 12.12%



BK | UNITED KYRGYZSTAN

National conservatism, ethnic nationalism
Elections | 2020 7.25% | 2021 7.76%



ALLIANCE

AK - A JUST KYRGYZSTAN

KLDP - KYRGYZ LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

BB - BIR BOL

Liberalism, Russophilia
Elections | 2020 - | 2021 9.19%



YN | LIGHT OF FAITH

liberalism, Populism, Reformism
Elections | 2020 - | 2021 6.78%



AM | ATA MEKEN SOCIALIST PARTY

Social democracy, Third way

Elections | 2020 4.10% | 2021 3.94%



SDK | SOCIAL DEMOCRACRATS

Social democracy

Elections | 2020 2.17% | 2021 3.51%



UB | ULUTTAR BIRIMDIGI

Cultural Nationalism

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 2.70%



EÜ | EL ÜMÜTÜ

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 4.96%



AZATTYK | AZATTYK DEMOCRATIC PARTY

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 4.49%



ORDO | THE CENTER

Populism

Elections | 2020 0.22% | 2021 0.51%



UJ | ULUU-JURT

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.81%



ME | MEKENCHIL EL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Social Conservatism

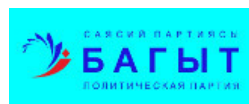
Elections | 2020 - | 2021 1.76%



ARUUZAT | PARTY OF PEOPLE'S DIGNITY - ARUUZAT

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.51%



BAGYT | LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF KYRGYZSTAN 'BAGYT'

Liberalism

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 1.08%



KJP | PARTY OF GREENS

Green politics

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.45%



LEGALISE | POLITICAL PARTY 'LEGALISE'

Cannabis decriminalisation

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.69%



KR | STRONG REGION

Regionalism

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.70%



JK | LONG LIVE KYRGYZSTAN

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 0.48%

PPEK | KYRGYZSTAN PATRIOTIC PARTY OF UNITY

*

Elections | 2020 - | 2021 1.06%

*Not available

Key Developments

NEW PARTIES AND COALITIONS AHEAD OF THE CAMPAIGN

On 4th October 2020 parliamentary elections were held to dispute the 120 seats of the Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan. Prior to the election, disagreements inside the governing Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan led to members leaving to form new parties. Those in support of the, then, President Sooronbat Jeenbekov joined Birimdik, while supporters of the former President Almazbej Atambayev went to the Social Democrats.

Both Presidents were affiliated with the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, although the former President's membership was suspended in 2019 as well as his immunity due to the criminal charges Atambayev was facing. Later that year he was arrested on corruption charges. Mekenim Kyrgyzstan ran together with Ata-Zhurt.

Furthermore, Ata Meken Socialist Party formed a coalition titled "New Breath", with the Liberal Democratic Party, New Breath Youth Association and Association 'Green Alliance of Kyrgyzstan. While several parties requested for the postponement of the election due to the ongoing pandemic, the election carried on. The conduct of the election was highly criticised, as reports of voter buying and hostility toward journalists was present. Additionally, it was brought to attention the high costs of running a campaign, which put smaller parties into a disadvantage.

Earlier that year, criticism fell over the government as access to *change.org* was restricted after the creation of a petition calling for the resignation of the then President Sooronbat Jeenbekov. The blocking of the website was justified by the government as a prevention against extremist content based on an anti-extremism law used in 2017 to also block access to the *Internet Archive*.

TURMOIL AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RESULTS

Over 56% of voters attended the election, which brought two new parties to parliament. The newly founded Birimdik garnered 46 seats (24,90%), followed by Mekenim Kyrgyzstan with 45 seats (24,27%). Only two additional parties were above the 7% threshold, Kyrgyzstan and United Kyrgyzstan, with 8,90% and 7,25% correspondingly. While two parties who were in parliament lost their seats, Ata Meken Socialist Party and Bir Bol.

Following the election, various parties disputed the result, a protest was organised in the capital city Bishkek and the government cut access to the internet for a few hours during the protests.

After the results were announced, 12 parties created a petition for the government to hold new elections due to irregularities in the conduct of the election. Protestors freed former President Atambayev, charged with corruption, from jail and occupied several other institutional buildings.

The protests continued for another day, and on the 6th October the Prime Minister and Parliament Speaker resigned.

Mekenchi's leader Sadyr Zhaparov, the nationalist opposition party, was then named acting Prime Minister. Until his placement Zhaparov had been serving a sentence for having taken a government official hostage in 2013.

ANNULMENT OF THE 2020 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Subsequently, a group of 13 opposition parties formed a council proposing to assume responsibility.

The country faced a deadlock as the newly chosen acting Prime Minister found himself without enough political backing to govern, only being elected on the 10th October.

In the following days the Parliament Speaker would be replaced after resigning. On the 15th, President Jeenbejev announced he, too, would resign leaving the presidency position for the most recent speaker Kanatbek Isaev, who left it for Prime Minister Zhaparov.

Elections were, eventually, called for the 20th December but were later delayed to 2020.



Opposition protests from the 5th to the 13th October 2020. The images show protestors breaking into the presidential office building, the White House, and gathering at the Old Square in Bishkek.

Election Observation

JOURNALISM AND HOSTILITY BY THE KYRGYZ AUTHORITIES

Kloop Media is a Kyrgyz news organisation, who after covering the 2010 revolution in the country became an organisation of reference and recognition nationwide, earning several awards for their reporting and investigations of corruption and crime in the country.

In 2020, Kloop Media started monitoring elections in Kyrgyzstan and has since faced various hurdles by the authorities while applying for permission to become a registered election observer.

Kloop's observers have also been the target of threats of firing from their jobs for working with the organisation.

As a result, hostility from the government and authorities is not unfamiliar for Kloop Media, which in the 2020 elections registered over a thousand election complaints.

KLOOP'S ELECTION MONITORING

As in the previous election, Kloop trained and sent over 1400 observers on election day to register violations at 700 of the 2500 voting stations of the country.

While Kloop Media Foundation was not approved for election monitoring, a second entity named Koomar Media within the foundation was approved by the Central Election Commission (CEC).

Two days before the parliamentary election on the 26th November 2021, Youtube removed a Kloop's video on 'harassment and bullying' claims. The video contained a manual for election observers.

Kloop's appeal was denied by YouTube, which later stated it was a repercussion due to the nature of their work, raising questions on whether the company was collaborating with the Kyrgyz government or if it was simply due to a poorly designed algorithm.

Access to Kloop's Youtube channel was restored on the 1st December, three days after election day, which was also the deadline for complaints to be made on election procedures to the respective Kyrgyz authorities.

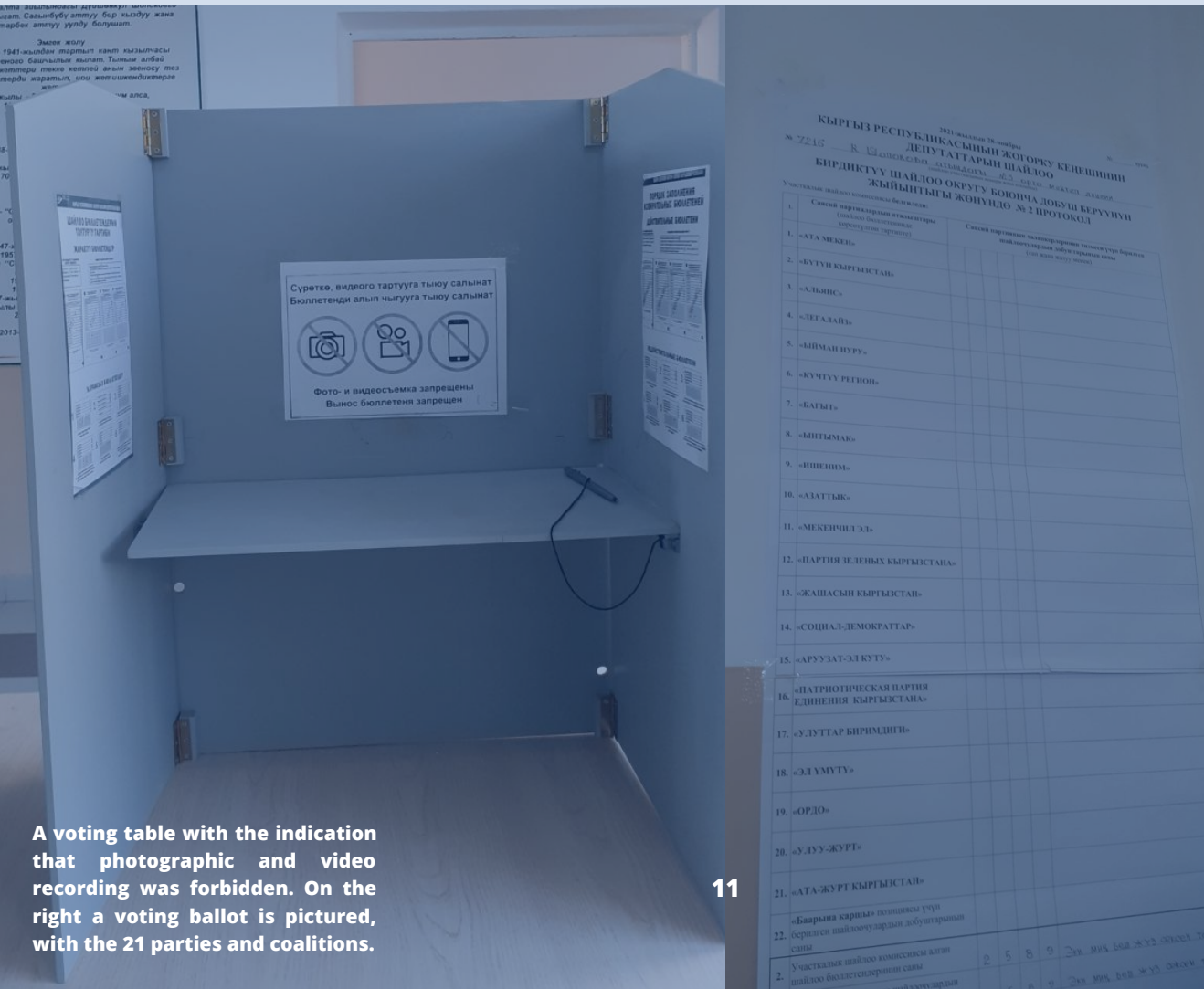
According to Kyrgyz election law, election complaints have to be submitted up to three days after the election, and a new election can be called upon being proven in court that there was fraud or if the majority of votes are blank.

Election procedures dictate that votes be counted twice, by the automatic ballot boxed and manually, although it is the manual count that is considered for the results.

**observers have
faced threats of
firing for being
affiliated with
Kloop Media**



Two polling stations in Kyrgyzstan. In both pictures, the registration table, the voting table and the ACS are present.



A voting table with the indication that photographic and video recording was forbidden. On the right a voting ballot is pictured, with the 21 parties and coalitions.

REPORTING OF VIOLATIONS

A system for reporting election violations was put in place by Kloop Media to be used by the observers. The form collected information on the district, violation hour, type of violation, name of observer, evidence, link to file and the option to forward it to a lawyer.

The form, made publicly available by Kloop Media, shows 12 types of violations as it follows: (1) Prior to the opening of the site; (2) When checking the voter; (3) Secrecy of voting; (4) Voter rights; (5) The work of ACS (ballot boxes); (6) Agitation/ bribery/ stuffing; (7) Rights of observers; (8) General violations in counting; (9) Violations when working with ballots; (10) Violations when working with the protocol; (11) Rights of observers during counting; (12) Other.

election complaints have to be submitted formally up to three days after the election to the Central Election Commission

To read the information reported on the forms by the observers on the violations during the election, click [here](#) for the original Kyrgyz version, and [here](#) for the English version.

A subtype of violations includes further violations: (A) The voter photographed his ballot; (B) Voting for other voters; (C) Two or more people vote in the same voting booth; (D) ACS are too far from the voting booth; (E) An outsider or a member of the PEC stands near the urn; (F) The voter is assisted by an observer or a member of the party.

All of this information is available to the public, including the filled forms with the corresponding violations and comments by the observers.

VIOLATIONS ELECTION UPON ELECTION

In 2019, the Common Cause Public Foundation was established in Kyrgyzstan with the goal of monitoring elections in the country, as well as promoting civil participation in the governance.

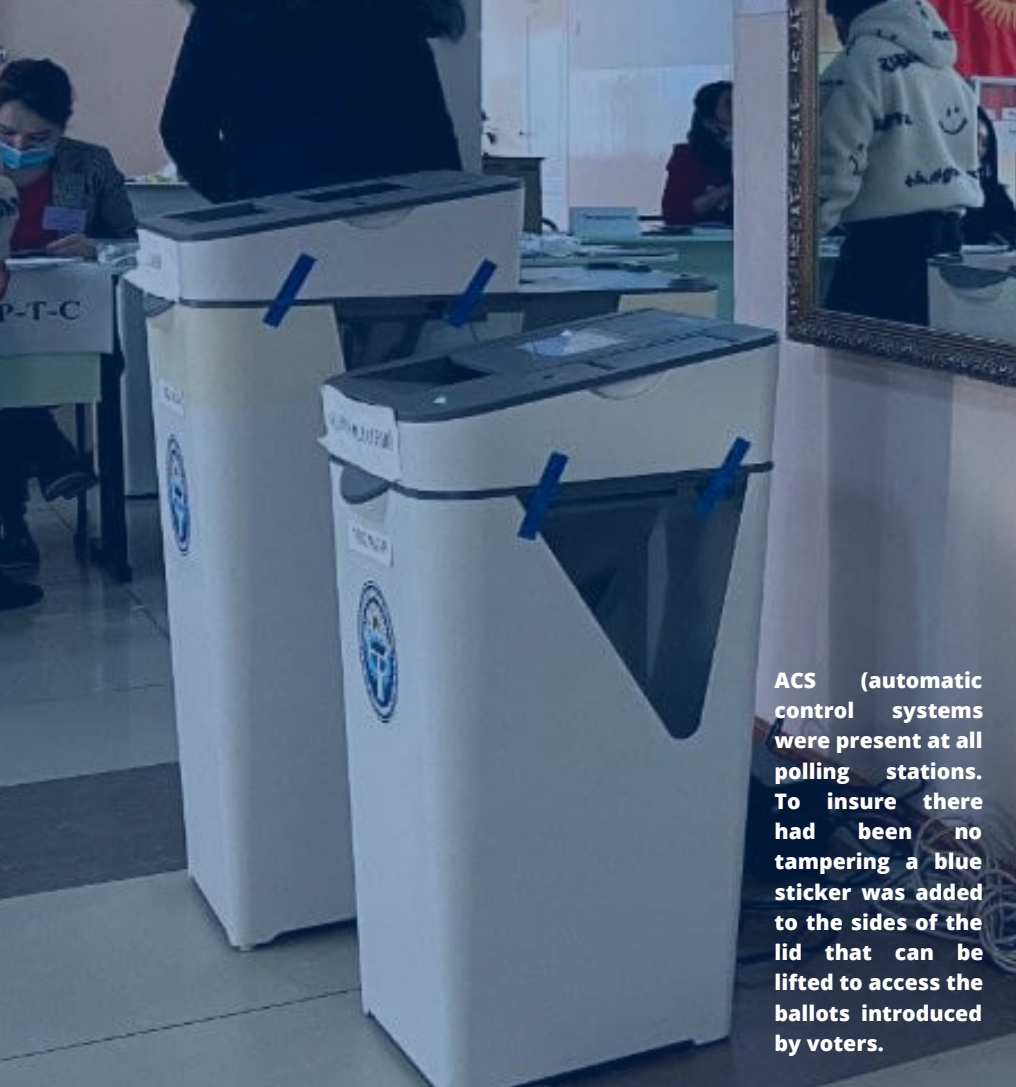
On the parliamentary election of 2021 the organisation monitored 300 polling stations across Kyrgyzstan, with the aid of a total of 672 observers, and an additional 74 people as coordinators, call centre operators and lawyers.

Observers were present at polling stations, as well as on the day of the mobile voting.

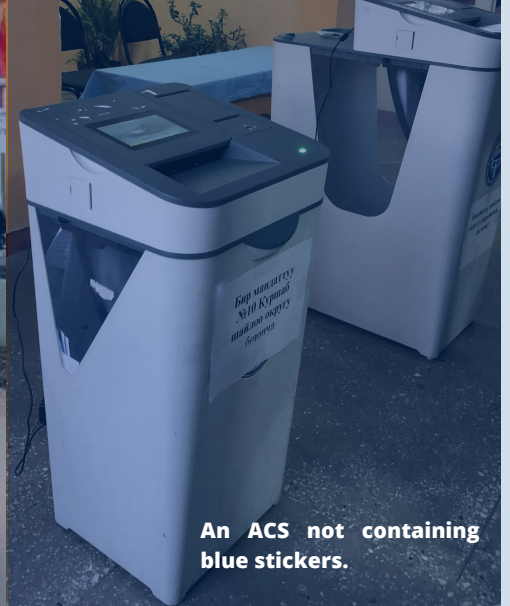
The observation of the election included from the moment of the opening of the polling stations, voting and subsequent counting, and tabulation of the results.

Common Cause reported on various issues from ACS failures to inaccuracies in regards to the preliminary results, procedural violations to more serious cases of voter bribery.

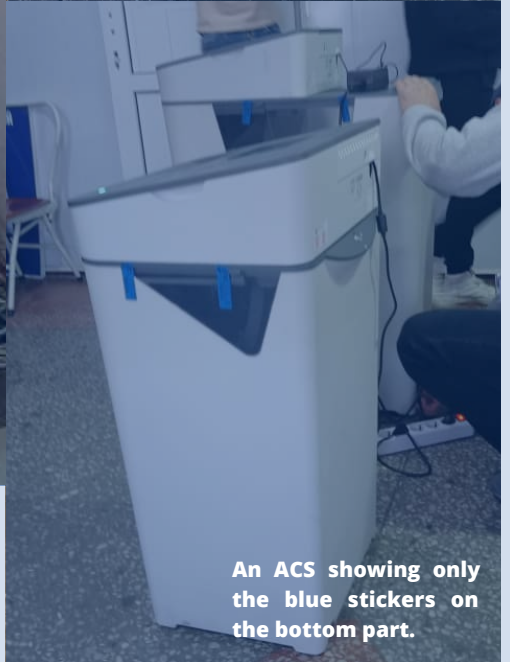
It also highlighted the low voter turnout of under 35%, less active campaigning and statements of political figures which violate campaigning rules.



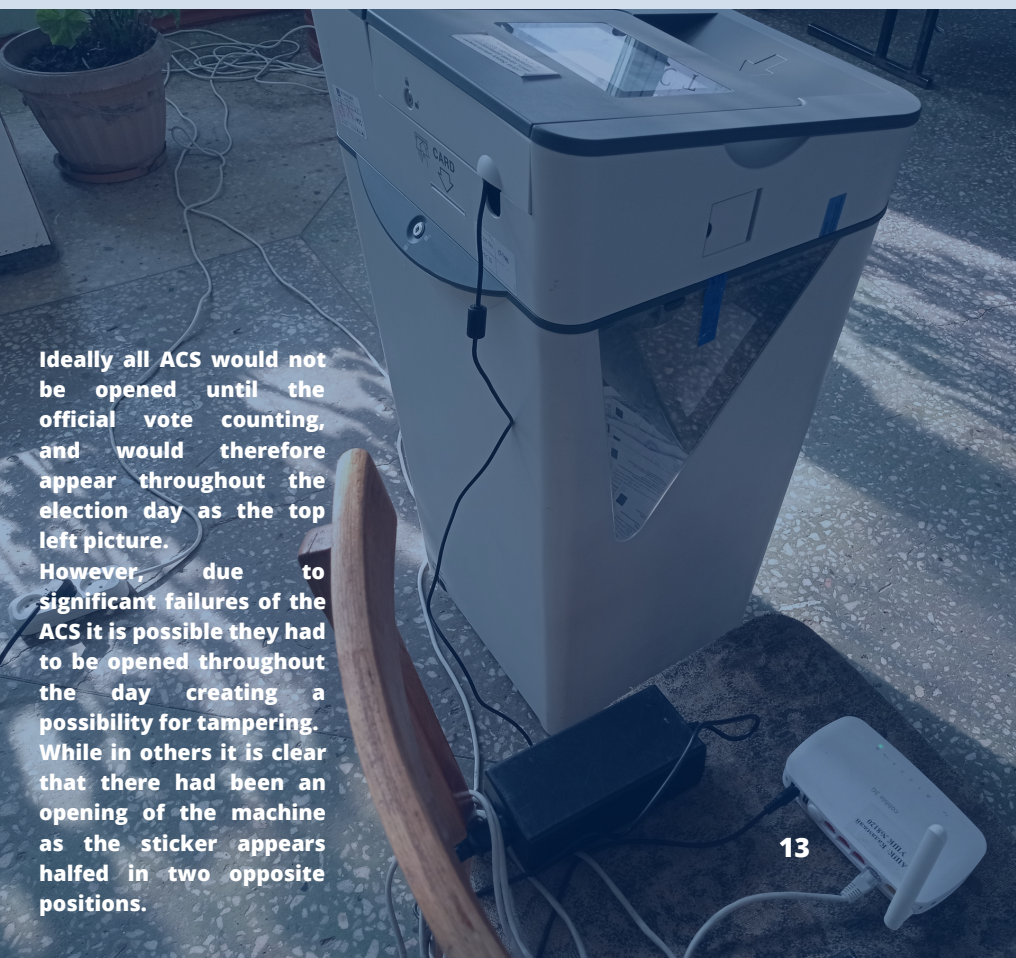
ACS (automatic control systems) were present at all polling stations. To insure there had been no tampering a blue sticker was added to the sides of the lid that can be lifted to access the ballots introduced by voters.



An ACS not containing blue stickers.



An ACS showing only the blue stickers on the bottom part.



Ideally all ACS would not be opened until the official vote counting, and would therefore appear throughout the election day as the top left picture. However, due to significant failures of the ACS it is possible they had to be opened throughout the day creating a possibility for tampering. While in others it is clear that there had been an opening of the machine as the sticker appears halved in two opposite positions.

Overall, the foundation recorded 60 occurrences, and at 90 of the 300 polling stations there were ACS failures.

As a result of this, Common Cause called for a manual count of the votes in every polling station as per the electoral law.

Kloop's election observers, on the other hand, had observed over 400 violations over the 700 polling stations it had been present in.

Over half of these were violations of the secrecy of the vote, followed by the failure of the ACS. It also accounted for the possibility of 33 cases of illegal campaigning and voter buying.

Additionally, Kloop recorded PEC's officers rewriting election protocols and forging signatures in the Isyk-Ata and Kemin districts. In Lenin district a Kloop observer was pressured and threatened by the commission at a voting station. It is deeply concerning to note how these violations were committed in such a conspicuous way, even in front of election observers. This emphasises how dire the electoral situation is in Kyrgyzstan and how a democratic process is utterly disregarded.

VOTE COUNTING AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

An initial vote counting from the ACS indicated a total of 150% of which 130% were attributed to the winning parties.

This result led to many parties doubting it and calling for a manual count. Soon after the release of the information, the Central Election Commission (CEC) retracted it.

The following morning five parties argued for the need of a re-election and demanded the resignation of the Cabinet.

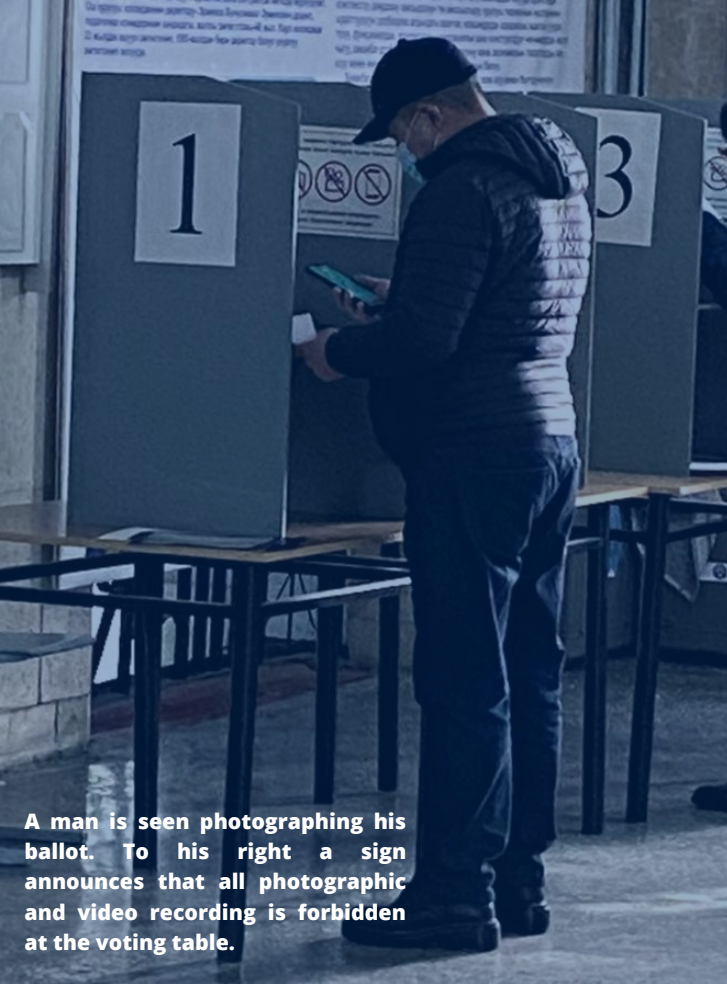
The same day the CEC apologised for the error of the previous day, calling a 'technical error', but the updated result did not garner higher levels of approval.

By the end of the 29th November six parties announced their rejection of the preliminary results and requested for the CEC to resign within two days and hold new elections.

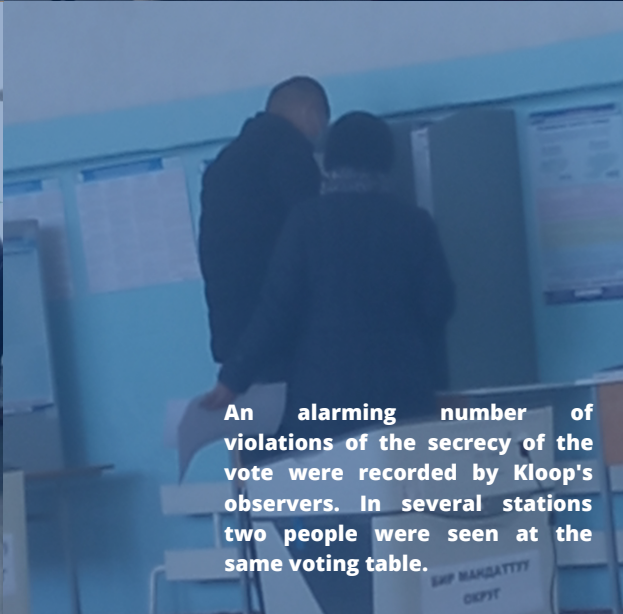
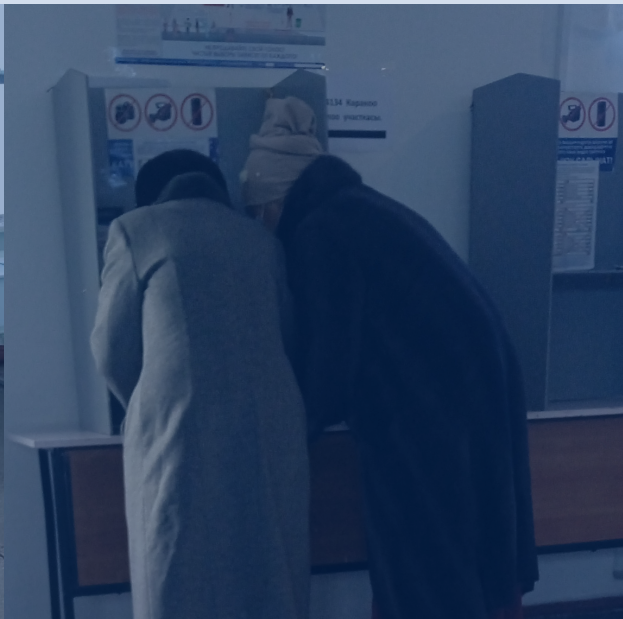
The most common reported issues were the failure of the ACS [...] more serious violations included the lack of voting secrecy and illegal campaigning.

To watch the videos Kloop Media published on the violations recorded on Isyk-Ata, Kemin and Lenin districts, refer to below:

- Elections to the Parliament: The [Leninsky District Commission](#) pressures and threatens the Kloop observer
- Elections to Parliament: Protocols are being rewritten and even signatures are forged in the [Issyk-Ata OIK](#).
- Elections to the parliament: In the [district commission No. 30](#), members of the election commissions rewrite the protocols.



A man is seen photographing his ballot. To his right a sign announces that all photographic and video recording is forbidden at the voting table.



An alarming number of violations of the secrecy of the vote were recorded by Kloop's observers. In several stations two people were seen at the same voting table.

Election Results

SUMMARY

The parliamentary elections held in Kyrgyzstan on the 28th of November 2021 were a direct result of the annulment of the previous elections held on the 4th October 2020.

The 2020 election results were annulled due to widespread claims of voter fraud resulting in nationwide protests and political instability.

In the 2021 election, seven parties passed the 5% threshold and will take seats in the parliament. Most of these parties are seen as pro-Jabarov, the current president of Kyrgyzstan.

Voter turnout was at a record low, with less than 35%. The country has been on a steady descent of voter participation on election days, but this year took a plunge with over 20% less voters.

The recent 2021 parliamentary election has also been surrounded with controversy, especially with opposition parties claiming voter fraud, as none of them gained seats in parliament.

Observers from the OSCE assess, however, that elections were "competitive" and "transparency was overall ensured".

2021 - A YEAR OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The parliamentary elections of 2021 were held in Kyrgyzstan on the 28th of November 2021, after the annulment of the 2020 parliamentary election.

The large-scale protests against the 2020 parliamentary election results resulted in the annulment of these and the resignation of previous president Sooronbay Jeenbeko. Since then, the country has seen a massive political transformation.

On the 10th of January 2021, a presidential and governmental referendum was held in which Sadyr Japarov was elected as the new President with a majority of voters approving of his vision for constitutional reform and a return to the country's former presidential system.

Other changes were implemented in relation to the voter process, and the number of overall seats in parliament was decreased.

As a result of the recent political changes and instability, Kyrgyzstan suffered a democratic backslide and was placed in the 'Not Free' category according to Freedom House - thus joining its neighboring countries.

The 2021 parliamentary elections saw one of the lowest voter turnouts with only 32.25% of the electorate casting their ballots.

**in 14 months there
have been 4
elections in
Kyrgyzstan**

This is a major decrease from the turnout of the annulled 2020 parliamentary elections, in which the turnout was of 58.89%. The low voter turnout is most likely due to growing discontentment of the population and the unpopular and irregular changes the country has seen in the last months.

2021 ELECTION RESULTS

Only seven parties passed the 5% threshold for taking up seats in parliament. It was expected prior to the elections that the voter turnout would favor allies of the populist President Sadyr Japarov, who has become even more popular since entering office. This prediction was congruent with election results.

The political party Ata-Jurt Kyrgyzstan gained most seats in the election and holds 15 seats in the 90-seat parliament. This was closely followed by Ishenim with a total of 12 seats and Yntemak with 9 seats.

**the opposition
declared the
election as
fraudulent as a
blackout
capped 25-30%
of votes of some
parties**

Alliance, United Kyrgyzstan and Light of Faith won respectively 7, 6 and 5 seats in the parliament while the remainder of the political parties garnered too few votes to meet the 5% threshold.

With the exception of the Social Democrats who gained a singular seat. The remaining 35 seats are held by independents.

CONTROVERSIES AROUND THE 2021 ELECTIONS

On the 29th of November, after the announcement of the preliminary results of the vote, opposition parties denounced the election results as fraudulent as some parties were seen to have lost significant votes during a blackout.

Opposition parties, including Ata-Meken, Azattyk (Liberty), the Social Democrats, and Uluttar Birimdigi held a press conference in the capital city Bishkek after the preliminary vote totals were disclosed stating they would not recognize the results as valid.

The main concerns about the legibility of the 2021 election results stems from a blackout of the tabulation screen.

Leaders and other political actors from opposition parties have claimed that they lost votes during the blackout, and that some parties lost 25-30% of the ballots in their favor.

"This is what raises great doubts. Especially since the authorities themselves cannot explain the reason for what happened.", said Turat Akimov, who ran for Uluttar Birimdigi (Unity of Ethnicities), one of the opposition parties that failed to enter parliament.

Some officials stated that the malfunction only occurred on the data display and not in the counting system itself, meaning it did not affect the results.

Other officials have stated that the malfunction was due to a hacking attempt.

The contradicting storylines from officials is a contributor of the decrease in trust in the 2021 election process, and for the claims of electoral fraud that have been raised in the country.

As of January 2022 there is yet to be response of what caused the blackout or an explanation on the loss of votes some parties had during it.

CHRONICALS FROM THE VOTING STATIONS

There have also been complaints about other irregularities during the election day with some claiming that political parties or individual candidates were paying people to take minibuses, which took them to and from the polling station in exchange for their vote.

People have been seen photographing their votes before putting them in ballot boxes, which in the past has been an indicator of people being paid to vote for specific candidates – using the picture as proof of their compliance. In various cases, more than one person was seen at an individual voting booth, violating at the very least the secrecy of the vote.

Other complaints persisted of the e-ballot boxes malfunctioning during election day and voters being asked to instead leave their completed ballots on tables by the poll workers until the problem was fixed. In some cases, poll workers said they would deposit the ballots for them.

INVALID VOTES

Approximately 116,246 ballots – 9.64% of the vote – was additionally declared invalid and thus thrown out.

The official reason for this remains to be heard, but there were initial concerns

officials contradicting stories on the blackout have contributed to distrust

going into the election that the mixed system of voting being employed – whereby 54 of the 90 seats in parliament were selected by party lists and the remaining 36 seats in single-mandate districts – would confuse some voters. Thus, ballots most likely were incorrectly filled out and categorized as ‘invalid’.

PARLIAMENTARY SELECTION

All winners in the single-mandate districts were men despite Kyrgyzstan's rules that require at least 30 percent of the seats in parliament to be occupied by women. In practice, this has never been the case but this time it appears parliament will be well short of that quota.

Despite the malfunctions with the electronic voting machines and the other reported irregularities, the parliamentary election was overall less chaotic than previous elections.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sent hundreds of monitors and the group's assessment on the 29th November noted that elections were "competitive" and "transparency was overall ensured."

THE POLITICAL FUTURE

Despite general protests against the election results, the aftermath of the election has this far been relatively calm compared to the chaos following the October 2020 elections. The groundwork has, however, been laid for complaints and protests in the future days.

With mainly pro-government candidates winning in the single-mandate districts, the government of President Sadyr Japarov should have solid parliamentary support with pro-government parties holding a commanding majority of the seats.

It is difficult at this juncture to predict how the new Kyrgyz parliament will behave. Under the new constitution, its powers are diminished but it may nevertheless try to reclaim some of that lost power.

What is not so difficult to predict is the challenges facing Japarov and his government, most prominently the coming winter, but also the pandemic, the economy, and occasionally tense relations with neighboring Tajikistan.

Electricity and heating through the winter are major concerns at the moment and following a drought this summer, Kyrgyzstan's reservoirs are critically low. Shortages and rationing are expected throughout the winter.

The low voter turnout also presents a very serious democratic concern, as the standing members of parliament were only elected by less than 35% of the Kyrgyz population, especially as elections continuously report electoral violations which seem to be quite widespread.

With only around 1/3 of the electorate having voted, a presumable minority of the population is supportive of the current government.

In such a political climate, President Japarov and the sitting government must act quickly on the upcoming electricity shortages and raising food prices if they are to avoid popular discontent. Previous rounds of political instability in Kyrgyzstan were triggered, in part, by such issues.

the future of the country is in the hands of those elected by only 1/3 of the electorate, after an election which reported significant electoral violations

Abbreviations used throughout this report:

ACS - Automatic Control Systems

CEC - Central Election Commission

CSTO - Collective Security Treaty Organisation

PEC - Precinct Election Commission