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JENNIFER MURTAZASHVILI, PHOTO OF NOOKAT DISTRICT GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

# DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

AUGUST 2018 [REVISED DRAFT]

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CAMI	Community and Municipal Governance Initiative “Igiliktyy Aimak”
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CEC	Central Commission for Elections and Referenda
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGPAS	Good Governance and Public Administration Strengthening Project
GKNB	State Committee for National Security
GOK	Government of Kyrgyzstan
GIZ	German International Cooperation Agency
ICG	International Crisis Group
KGS	Kyrgyz Som (about \$0.02)
KTRK	Kyrgyzstan Public Television
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
ORT	Russian Public Television
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PRO	Program Office
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SDPK	Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Assessment of Kyrgyzstan was undertaken to provide a consistent and unifying analytic foundation for program and project development. It analyzes current political dynamics and their structural underpinnings and presents recommendations to inform the future direction of DRG assistance programming. This DRG assessment is based on USAID's latest DRG Assessment Framework.<sup>1</sup> It is based on interviews and focus group discussions with more than 200 people in six locations in Kyrgyzstan—Bishkek, Talas, Tokmok, Osh, Aravan, Jalalabad and Nookat—in June 2018. The assessment team consisted of two USAID officers (one American, one Kyrgyzstani) and two independent academic researchers (one American, one Kyrgyzstani) with a broad range of experience both in Kyrgyzstan and in other contexts, including some who were very familiar with the history of USG support to Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan remains the most democratic country in Central Asia. It is a parliamentary republic that now has a record of peaceful transfer of executive power through regular elections that are competitive, offer meaningful choice and are largely free and fair. Yet this democracy remains challenged and increasingly constrained as corruption and inclusion problems have worsened in recent years. For many, government is increasingly a source of aggravation rather than a provider of collective goods. Thus, citizens are increasingly turning away from the state not only for public goods and services, but also for political meaning. The result is a vibrant and diverse private and social sector that is becoming the focal point of political life in the country.

Sustained improvement in economic conditions has led to an optimism among citizens that is evident in recent public opinion surveys. Increasingly, Kyrgyzstanis believe that the country is moving in the right direction, although citizens do not attribute economic improvements to improvements in government performance.

The last eight years has also seen a rise of Islam and customary tradition in society as alternative ideologies. Such ideologies are typically separate from the state, as there is a strict prohibition against political parties that have a religious or ethnic affiliation. Russian efforts to maintain cultural and political influence have also increased and become more targeted. Collectively, these changes in context have created a much more competitive organizational life outside the realm of the state. They can also present a threat to stability, in so much as these ideologies can compete for control of the state.<sup>2</sup>

While Kyrgyzstan is shedding much of its Soviet legacy, the economy is now centered on a massive labor migration, overwhelmingly to Russia, for remittances that fuel economic stability. Loans from China, especially investments in infrastructure, have yielded greater influence for that country. The influence of the United States began to wane with the closure of the Manas Air Base in 2014 and the subsequent rejection of a bilateral agreement between the two countries which would have facilitated aid and cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> USAID, "Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategic Assessment Framework." (Washington, DC, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> ICG, "Kyrgyzstan - State Fragility and Radicalisation" (Osh/Bishkek/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2016).

The assessment identifies the problems of democracy, human rights, and governance in the country in five key areas. With regard to **consensus**, the assessment found that there is little consensus about the rules of the political game, with the cost of losing an election very high; no consensus on the scope and role of government in society; and no consensus on national identity, as ethnic minorities face discrimination, and regionalism plays an important role in national politics.

Kyrgyzstan suffers from a broad range of **rule of law** problems: Many laws are well written, but not well enforced; rule of law bodies are used politically or for personal gain; pervasive corruption weakens the state at all levels; and access to justice is a problem for all members of society, but likely to be experienced more acutely by minority populations and women. Suppression of religious groups has decreased, however.

In the past eight years, the country has successfully held two presidential elections, two parliamentary elections and two constitutional referenda. While elections are hotly contested, **competition and political accountability** are increasingly marked by fewer meaningful choices in parties, transactional voting, and creeping reconsolidation of executive power. Public television has developed better and more diverse content during this period but is politically controlled; the internet provides much more diversity and some public oversight.

**Inclusion** issues have worsened in recent years, with ethnic minorities—especially Uzbeks—and women often excluded from participation in politics, access to justice, and the ability to participate equally in economic life. One area where inclusion has improved is in the attitudes towards most strands of Sunni Islamic practice. Islam is undergoing a revival throughout Kyrgyzstan, and there is growing acceptance of Islam in public life.

With regard to **government effectiveness**, things are better because government's role in life has decreased, not because government has become more effective in producing collective goods and services. The government continues to struggle to provide public goods and services to citizens. Under-resourced, under-paid civil servants create systemic incentives for corruption and capture. Chronic turnover and instability in government also contributes strongly to ineffectiveness. Local self-governing units (*aiyl okmotu*) provide for participation and feedback but have a limited mandate and are often punished for taking initiative. Public councils have a mixed record but are mostly ineffective. The prolonged inability of the government to deliver services effectively in many sectors has led many citizens to turn away from the state and either provide such goods on their own in their communities or turn to other, third-party providers, such as religious or other communal organizations.

Taking this all into consideration, this assessment concludes that the primary problem (or opportunity) of democracy, human rights and governance in Kyrgyzstan today is that **ineffective, unaccountable and often predatory government and rule of law institutions fail to deliver public goods or to protect the rights of all citizens. This prolonged inability to “deliver” has encouraged new forms of association outside the government sphere to fill in the gaps or address grievances, as new orientations and organizational forms compete to provide meaning and prosperity for the people.**

USAID has invested heavily over the past twenty-six years in democracy programs in Kyrgyzstan across a broad spectrum of sub-sectors. Since 2010 DRG programming has been active across nearly all DRG sectors, but funding for DRG programming in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Mission's top line budget, are



decreasing steadily from the high-water mark after 2010. The U.S. is investing in programming to address the violent extremist recruitment problem both among labor migrants and within Kyrgyzstan itself. The U.S. is also actively seeking to counter Russian and Chinese influence in Central Asia when that influence works against U.S. interests or has a detrimental impact on the development of democracy in the region. Finally, USAID globally hopes to move countries over time away from development assistance and towards a “Path to Self-Reliance.”

The inability of the government to move forward with promised reforms at the national level, the general citizen shift away from government institutions, budget constraints, and the new emphasis on self-reliance all suggest that USAID consider shifting how it envisions DRG programming in the Kyrgyz Republic. Rather than focusing primarily on institutional reforms at the national level, programs should target where opportunities are the greatest—and that is at the level of citizens and citizen engagement.

**The assessment’s most important recommendation is that, going forward, the DRG strategy should seek to engage the dynamic, contradictory and vibrant forces in civil society in Kyrgyzstan and focus on promoting citizen resilience and local self-governance, especially in those areas where government performance remains weak yet where action is important to citizens.** Secondly, USAID should continue to support advocacy and citizen engagement with government officials to promote policy change from the bottom-up where political will exists. This means that USAID should continue to engage in policy areas where there seem to be opportunities for reform and engagement, but rather than exclusively working with state organizations at the national level, engagement should be at the local level where opportunities for both implementation and impact on citizen lives are the greatest. Future USAID DRG work in the Kyrgyz Republic should harness the active non-state sector in the country and build citizen ability to address problems and, where possible, promote government reform, by focusing on problem solving and public goods provision at the local level, and on bringing citizens together with the government to improve accountability and performance in specific areas.

Two critical issues potentially cut across the three programming areas discussed in more detail below:

**Corruption** is the most important issue facing the people of the Kyrgyz Republic. Given the broad concerns across almost all segments of society with corruption, USAID should consider amplifying its anti-corruption programming. This can be done two ways: systematically as a fundamental cross-cutting issue that can be messaged by each individual program in the DRG portfolio and modeled in the work of each implementing partner, and/or as a stand-alone anti-corruption program that focuses on access to justice at the local level.

Changing **gender** dynamics in the country are another cross-cutting concern. USAID may consider a stand-alone gender program to address the changing environment in the country and focusing efforts on civic engagement or anti-corruption around women’s groups or issues that affect women.

Specific programming areas suggested include the following:

**Engaging new forms of community organization.** Future activities should engage with citizens in the way that they organize in their communities, real-world, on-line and both. The focus should be on generating advocacy and mobilization around issues of collective concern that reflect local needs and support local initiatives. Programming not only be collaborative but also encourage citizens to speak up

about violations of human rights and corruption and provide support for such activities in the form of advice on legal issues and training in such topics as safe internet use, effective communications strategies and on-line outreach. Possible program engagements might include the following:

- Work with community-based organizations and new organizational forms where we find common cause, including with traditional and religiously-oriented groups.
- Issue-based investigative journalism—especially for internet-based journalists who are working in communities throughout the country in concert with activists—to help citizens redress grievances as they seek to fight corruption.
- The entire on-line media environment is an emerging opportunity (and threat) that USAID should monitor for programmatic opportunities.
- Voter and civic education.
- Local level activism that addresses the erosion of the position of women.

**Helping government deliver on the local level.** USAID efforts to bolster dynamic civic associations at the local level should be accompanied by work with officials at the local level who can channel demands of civic organizations into better government policy, where possible. This engagement should happen in local self-governing units as well as in government ministries that serve subnational units.

- Continue the Community and Municipal Governance Initiative (CAMI) program
- Support better point-of-delivery mechanisms for government services, such as through a GGPAS-like program if this work becomes possible again.

**Engaging opportunistically in systemic national-level reform.** The following reform areas are potentially high impact. Political will to move forward is currently lacking or unclear, but USAID should be ready to respond should the new president initiate meaningful reforms in these areas of civil service reform; judicial, prosecutorial and police reforms; and/or electoral reform.

**Areas of limited effectiveness** include: political party strengthening; public broadcasting; electoral administration; defense bar; and parliamentary support.

Finally, the assessment team offers a number of suggestions for how to approach implementation of DRG programming:

- **Implement adaptive management models:** Chronic instability in government creates enormous challenges for achieving desired program outcomes. USAID defines adaptive management in ADS 201.6 as “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments to new information and changes in context.”<sup>3</sup> According to USAID, this approach is not about “changing goals during implementation, it is about changing the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than assuming linear theories of changes, this approach uses close monitoring of both context and outcomes to feed back into program design on a frequent basis.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-adaptive-management-0>

<sup>4</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-adaptive-management-0>



- **Re-imagine programs and use new techniques:** USAID should consider adopting new, sector specific approaches to project implementation across the DRG sector. Some models of grants, trainings, efforts to build organizational capacity, and partnerships with certain programs have been used for 15 years or more. The new five-year strategy is an excellent opportunity to examine whether new, sector-specific implementation tools can be rolled out across the portfolio. Without such a reexamination, USAID runs the risk of having the most important recipients tune out programming because the tools used by such programs do not resonate as deeply with citizens as they once did.
- **Shed old terms that have lost their meaning or have become politically charged:** Civil society, human rights and gender are just a few such terms that came up in the team’s interviews. Even the term “democracy” is now associated with a Western rather than a local message. USAID should consider how outcomes associated with these concepts are important rather than elevating the concepts themselves.
- **Reach out to other USAID missions with a similar problem set:** While it has always been obvious that Kyrgyzstan shares a common past with other Central Asian countries and other post-Soviet countries, the further away Kyrgyzstan gets from the Soviet Union, the more it looks like its Asian cousins. South and Southeast Asian countries have long histories of engaging and working with Islamic civil society and traditional social movements and in managing mass labor migration. The USAID missions in these countries (Indonesia and Bangladesh, for instance) could be useful partners for the Mission.

## INTRODUCTION

Kyrgyzstan remains the most democratic country in Central Asia, yet this openness has contracted in recent years. It is a parliamentary republic that now has a record of peaceful transfer of executive power through regular elections that are competitive, offer meaningful choice and are largely free and fair. Yet this democracy remains challenged and increasingly constrained as corruption and inclusion problems have worsened in recent years. Chronic instability fueled by constant government turnover means that citizens no longer look only to government to solve problems. For many, government is increasingly a source of aggravation rather than a provider of collective goods. Thus, citizens are increasingly turning away from the state not only for public goods and services, but also for political meaning. The result is a vibrant and diverse private and social sector that is becoming the focal point of political life in the country.

Kyrgyzstan is shedding much of its Soviet legacy. The country's economy is now centered on a massive labor migration, overwhelmingly to Russia, for remittances that fuel economic stability. Loans from China, especially investments in infrastructure, have yielded greater influence for that country. The influence of the United States began to wane with the closure of the Manas Air Base in 2014 and the subsequent rejection of a bilateral agreement between the two countries which would have facilitated aid and cooperation. The closure of Manas was also symbolic, as it seemed to signify a disillusionment with the promise of Western models of democracy and civil society. Perhaps the most surprising change since the last U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Assessment in 2013<sup>5</sup> has been the revival of Islam in every aspect of the life of Kyrgyzstan. Today post-colonial Russian influence and post-independence Western influence compete with a rising Islamic and customary political identity that increasingly echoes developments in neighbors in South and South East Asia. The vibrant mix, or perhaps clash, of these models and the opportunity they present are the most significant takeaways of this assessment.

The sustained improvement in economic conditions has led to an optimism among citizens that is evident in recent public opinion surveys.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, Kyrgyzstanis believe that the country is moving in the right direction. Paradoxically, citizens do not attribute economic improvements to improvements in government performance. On the contrary, citizens appear to be more disillusioned with the performance of the public sector, as three quarters of the population believes corruption is a “very big problem” in the country today. Just eight percent of the population believes that changes in government have an impact on their individual financial situation, suggesting that most believe the state is weak. Sustained corruption and political upheavals, along with an inability to deliver services, seem to have turned citizens away from political engagement and interest in politics as just seven percent in 2017 said they were very interested in politics. This is down from 19 percent who had high interest in 2015 and 20 percent in 2013.

In Step One, the “problem statement” we offer is also an “opportunity statement.” The sense of economic desperation that existed in Kyrgyzstan during its first twenty years of independence seems to have passed. People themselves have more resources. They have new ways to address their problems

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<sup>5</sup> [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00JCG9.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JCG9.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Public opinion data cited in this paragraph come from: Center for Insights in Survey Research, “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan” (Bishkek: International Republican Institute, 2018).

that draw on new cultural models of organization. Some of these do not involve the state delivering anything except the room to act.

This DRG assessment is based on USAID’s latest DRG Assessment Framework.<sup>7</sup> The assessment methodology proceeds through four steps. The first identifies the key problems of democracy, human rights, and governance in the country; the second conducts an analysis of the actors and institutions that are likely to play key roles in addressing the issues identified in step one; the third considers the United States Government (USG) and USAID’s interests and resources. The final step offers strategic and programmatic recommendations given the problems, actors, and institutional constraints identified. It is based on interviews and focus group discussions with more than 200 people in six locations in Kyrgyzstan—Bishkek, Talas, Tokmok, Osh, Aravan, Jalalabad and Nookat—in June 2018.

The assessment team consisted of two USAID officers (one American, one Kyrgyzstani) and two independent academic researchers (one American, one Kyrgyzstani) with a broad range of experience both in Kyrgyzstan and in other contexts, including some who were very familiar with the history of USG support to Kyrgyzstan. The team was co-led by Jennifer Murtazashvili, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Director of the International Development Program in the Graduate School for Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, and Gavin Helf, Ph.D., Senior Democracy and Governance Advisor in USAID’s Asia Bureau. Other team members included Mahabbat Alymkulova, USAID/Kyrgyz Republic, and Asel Murzakulova, Ph.D., Independent Researcher.

The assessment team would like to acknowledge the incredible team at USAID/Kyrgyz Republic: Nazgul Akisheva, Erkin Konurbaev, Timurlan Baiserkeev and Office Director Cory Johnston. They were all active participants and true members of the team throughout, providing not only extraordinary logistical support and access to key interlocutors, but very important substantive input as well.

## **STEP ONE: DEFINING THE DRG PROBLEM**

### **CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY**

There is something about Kyrgyzstan that sets it apart from the more politically stable yet autocratic neighbors that surround it. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan has suffered from an unstable and sometimes explosive politics that has seen cycles of autocratic consolidation followed by unexpected democratic breakthroughs, often accompanied by ethnic violence. It has proven quite difficult to maintain democracy in Kyrgyzstan, but it also has proven equally difficult to sustain autocracy.

Kyrgyzstan is a land-locked mountainous post-Soviet republic near the geographic center of the continent of Asia. Its population of roughly 6.1 million is one third urban and two thirds rural. Unlike many of its neighbors, it has no hydrocarbon resources to draw on. Economically, it is a lower middle-income country largely dependent on gold mining, which represents 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 26 percent of tax revenues, and on remittances from roughly 880,000 labor migrants, mostly working in Russia, who sent back \$2.2 billion in 2017, which represents up to one-third of GDP. The rest is largely subsistence agriculture. The physical, educational, medical and social services

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<sup>7</sup> USAID, “Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategic Assessment Framework.” (Washington, DC, 2014).

infrastructure of Kyrgyzstan is substantial and represents the legacy of seven decades of Soviet subsidy and investment, but is now, twenty-six years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, largely crumbling and suffering from overuse, neglect, and a lack of qualified talent.

The population is divided both ethnically and geographically. The Kyrgyz are the majority nationality, making up some 73 percent of the population, followed by Uzbeks (14 percent), Russians (6 percent) and small numbers of others. The Uzbek population is largely concentrated in the Ferghana Valley in the South. The Ferghana Valley is somewhat arbitrarily divided between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, leaving a large Uzbek diaspora in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Large-scale ethnic violence has broken out twice in recent decades (1990 and 2010) in the South. The Kyrgyz themselves are sharply divided into “northerners” and “southerners” who have traded political dominance throughout the post-Soviet era. Political affiliation and coalition-building both in democratic and autocratic periods tend to revolve around the North-South split.

Kyrgyzstan’s regional context makes it highly dependent on the good will of its more powerful neighbors, who are in turn very wary of its democratic experiment and concerned about its stability. Thus far Uzbekistan, with a substantial military and economic advantage over Kyrgyzstan, has avoided intervention in the troubles of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan, but has a clear ability to intervene should its policies change. Kazakhstan has alternated between constructive engagement and attempted isolation of Kyrgyzstan. Russia plays a major role in both arbitrating Kyrgyz politics and in allowing the northward flow of migrant workers. Russia also maintains significant control over Kyrgyzstan’s energy sector, as the Russian energy firm Gazprom owns the entire Kyrgyzstan gas sector and is involved in the construction of hydroelectric power plants in the country. In the past five years, the role of China in the internal politics of Kyrgyzstan has grown dramatically, as Beijing’s loans to the Kyrgyz government have bolstered construction of infrastructure. Although such loans have brought benefits, the lack of oversight associated with these funds has fueled corruption among Kyrgyzstani government officials. As one example, the former Prime Minister and Minister of Transportation and Communications have both been accused of embezzling funds intended for infrastructure projects.

The first “surprise” breakthrough in the political history of independent Kyrgyzstan came quite early. Kyrgyzstan’s first President, Askar Akayev (1991-2005), was the only founding president in Central Asia not to come out of the Communist Party elite and indeed from its Politburo. Akayev was an academic and a star of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev’s Congress of People’s Deputies and a member of the “democratic” opposition led by Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Sakharov in the late 1980s. After interethnic riots in the southern capital of Osh in 1990, the Kyrgyz Communist Party leader Absamat Masaliyev failed to gain the support of the republic’s elite. Akayev was elected to lead the republic’s new Supreme Soviet, much like Boris Yeltsin in Russia. Upon the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), this position morphed into the office of President.

Under President Akayev’s early leadership, Kyrgyzstan developed one of the more progressive political systems and the most open civic environment in the former USSR. The media and Parliament, while not always professional, were free and independent of the executive branch. Efforts to privatize land and the state economy were ahead of the other republics. Parliamentary elections in 1995 and 2000 were competitive and returned a multitude of opposition and independent parties. Yet maintaining balance within the political system was always a difficult juggle. Eventually, Akayev came to rely more and more on unofficial networks led by his immediate family and on increasing repression as his political coalition

became thinner and thinner. Unconstructive relations with Parliament led Akayev to attempt to reorganize it and limit its powers. Independent media increasingly came under pressure from the legal system. Political opponents were eventually jailed in attempts to sideline them. In 2002, protests in Jalalabad and Bishkek were violently repressed. While Akayev attempted to be politically inclusive of Uzbeks and southerners, his period in power was largely seen as the domination of the North over the South.

By the time Parliamentary elections came around again in 2005, Akayev sought to manage the election results, including placing many of his family members and political cronies into a new unicameral Parliament with less ability to oppose presidential rule. Protests erupted in the southern cities of Jalalabad and Osh and led to the very rapid downfall of the Akayev regime in a “Tulip Revolution,” which was to be the last of the famous “color revolutions” of the middle of the decade.

Akayev’s successor, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev (2005-2010), faced a similar dilemma when he came to power after the Tulip Revolution. Although he enjoyed more support in the restive South of the country than Akayev did, he faced the same essential political economic math. The loose coalition of political, economic, and geographic interests that brought Bakiyev to power did not hold together for long. After the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev systematically consolidated his power, marginalized his opponents, rid himself of opposition media and most parties, and generally moved Kyrgyzstan closer to the model of a Central Asian “Presidential Republic.” By 2010 he too had come to rely heavily on his brothers and his son as the core of his political patronage network and represented the “southern” dominance in the political life of Kyrgyzstan.

In April 2010, forces representing some parts of the political elite of Kyrgyzstan and some parts of the population, mostly from the North of the country, combined to overthrow President Bakiyev. The violence took the lives of 88 people and injured many others. Bakiyev fled to his native South, where other local forces in the elite (including the local ethnic Uzbek elite) combined in new, and now violent, ways to eventually force him into exile in Belarus. These changes upset the existing balance of power in the South between the Kyrgyz majority and the Uzbek minority and opened the door to political entrepreneurs who attempted to exploit existing ethnic tensions. In June 2010, a series of targeted attacks in key southern cities provoked ethnic tensions across the region, wrought large-scale violence and destruction, and led to over 400 deaths in Osh, Jalal-Abad, Bazar Kurgon and other cities and highlighted the inability of the Provisional Government in the northern capital of Bishkek to control the country.

Despite this shock, the post-Bakiyev Provisional Government led by Transitional President Roza Otunbayeva (2010-2011) carried out a national referendum on a new Constitution in the same month. National parliamentary (October 2010) and presidential elections (October 2011) were held. President Almazbek Atambayev (2011-2017), long time opposition leader, former Prime Minister and member of the Provisional Government, was sworn in in December 2011. The new constitutional system did manage to take political competition off the streets and bring it into the parliament. Coalition governments fell and were replaced in good order. Reform initiatives were announced, sputtered, and often were forgotten. Atambayev often surrounded himself with loyalists in important positions (a former driver, a bodyguard, etc.). His administration and governments during his presidency were occasionally reformist and occasionally corrupt. Old structures (such as the Presidential Administration) reasserted themselves alongside the new constitutional institutions. Atambayev moved foreign policy

much closer to Russia and turned away from the West, entering the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which increased Kyrgyzstan's access to labor remittances. He oversaw the amending of the Constitution in 2017 to create a slightly stronger Prime Minister, which violated both the spirit of the 2010 Revolution and the letter of the law that adopted the Constitution, which prohibited amendment before 2020. Atambayev occasionally misused his power to attack political opponents (primarily his former 2010 allies) and the media. In the end, however, his primary political legacy was leaving office at the end of his term rather than trying to hold on to power or continue his leadership as a newly empowered Prime Minister. While an important precedent, it also underscores the degree to which the regular transition of executive power in Kyrgyzstan is still dependent on the character of the incumbent president (and how he or she treats the previous incumbent). As of the writing of this report, both Otunbayeva and Atambayev are in the country and not under prosecution or persecution. This is an amazing achievement for Central Asia. It is, however notable and disturbing that even though two former presidents are alive, free, and in the country, the losers of both the parliamentary and presidential elections have been largely driven into exile or sent to prison, including many of the 2010 revolutionaries themselves.

One of the bright spots is the upswing in the economic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Steady access to remittances sent home by labor migrants from Russia has substantially added to Kyrgyzstan's economic well-being. It has also put substantial resources in the hands of citizens that they have been able to use to address personal and community needs. There is palpable decrease in economic insecurity and its manifestation as political instability. Participation in the Russia-led EEU has paid off in increased access to Russian and Kazakh labor markets. On the down side, mass migration of adults from Kyrgyzstan in their prime (both male and female) has created a generation of "social orphans" who are not adequately supervised or nurtured.

The last eight years has also seen a rise of Islam and customary tradition in society as alternative ideologies. Such ideologies are typically separate from the state, as there is a strict prohibition against political parties that have a religious or ethnic affiliation. Russian efforts to maintain cultural and political influence have also increased and become more targeted. Collectively, these changes in context have created a much more competitive organizational life outside the realm of the state. They can also present a threat to stability, in so much as these ideologies can compete for control of the state.<sup>8</sup>

Until recently, political life in Kyrgyzstan was centered around those groups, such as political parties, who sought to control the state and both the policies and spoils that came from such domination. The inability of parties and Western-oriented civil society groups to delivery on the promise of democracy means that citizens are now turning elsewhere to find solutions. This means that competition for power is also taking place in a dynamic market place of ideas in spheres outside the state.

## **FIVE KEY ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE**

Step one outlines the country context, the regime type, and the political direction of the country that, in turn, helps identify the core DRG opportunities and challenges. To this end, this section focuses on the five key elements of the political system that are judged to have impact on achieving democracy, human

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<sup>8</sup> ICG, "Kyrgyzstan - State Fragility and Radicalisation" (Osh/Bishkek/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2016).



rights, and good governance goals: consensus, inclusion, competition and political accountability, rule of law and human rights, and government responsiveness and effectiveness.

## CONSENSUS

**There is little consensus about the rules of the political game.** Political stability, peace, and economic prosperity have eluded Kyrgyzstan since independence. The political and social upheavals of 2005 and 2010 were symptomatic of a failure of political institutions, both democratic and authoritarian, to peacefully channel political competition over resources and identity. Both authoritarian consolidators and democratic revolutionaries have consistently resorted to opportunistically altering the rules of the game or using violence to achieve political goals. Since the overthrow of Bakiyev in 2010, two rounds of parliamentary (2010 and 2015) and presidential (2011 and 2017) elections have taken place. While imperfect, they were highly contested, peaceful and provided significant choice as well as two changes in executive presidential power. Yet the most disturbing development since 2010 is that consensus about the rules of the game regarding how politics would work going forward, and the precedents set over the last eight years, show a breakdown. Most notably, the 2017 referendum on amending the Constitution violated the letter and spirit of the law on the adoption of the Constitution, which put a moratorium on amendment until 2020.

**The cost of losing an election is very high.** While political competition has been contained within the rules of the Constitution for the most part since 2010, the cost of losing an election or losing an important position, like Prime Minister or Speaker of the Parliament, is now very high. Losers are routinely indicted and prosecuted or forced to flee the country. Two former presidents are in exile, facing prosecution if they were to return. The opposition figure who challenged current President Jeenbekov in the 2017 presidential election, Omurbek Babanov, left the country after authorities launched an investigation into charges of inciting ethnic hatred during the presidential campaign. Babanov alleged that the vote was not free and fair.<sup>9</sup>

**Rules on paper differ from formal rules of law. Growing gap between these two elements is fomenting discontent.** Efforts to support legislation in Kyrgyzstan over the past twenty-five years have generated impressive results. During this period, Kyrgyzstan has been a leader in Central Asia adopting many progressive laws and legal frameworks that support both human rights and women's rights. The adoption of high-profile laws guaranteeing political and civil liberties made Kyrgyzstan stand apart from its neighbors. There appears to be an increasing gap between the rules adopted and the implementation of those rules. This was a consistent theme with key informants across the country. It means that Parliament can pass laws, but often pays little attention to their implementation. This gap between de jure and de facto laws is witnessed in the belief by citizens that corruption is a major problem in the country. This is true for both citizens who increasingly believe corruption is a problem in their lives<sup>10</sup> as well as for government officials whom we interviewed. For example, leaders of all Aiy!

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<sup>9</sup> RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, "Fugitive Former Kyrgyz Presidential Candidate Babanov Faces New Charges," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, March 29, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> TSIOM, "Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey)," 101.

Okmotus we spoke with for this assessment described how they are often subject to investigation and even audits by other government agencies when they become too active in doing their jobs.<sup>11</sup>

The resentment of this growing gap is reflected in the lack of faith in judicial organizations, who are tasked to ensure implementation of laws. In the past five years, the country's leaders have stressed that judicial reform is among the top priorities of the country. While leaders stress their role in leading reforms in this area, the government has pursued prosecution against opposition figures and even some media outlets. Recent public opinion data show that the courts are the least trusted public institution in the country.<sup>12</sup>

**No consensus on scope and role of government in society.** A common thread uniting citizen of many former Soviet republics was that they continued to look to the state as the primary provider of public goods and services. This was because the Soviet state played such a large role in the production of social welfare and provided a kind of safety net to citizens. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, politics rarely had a sustained debate about what role the state should play in society as societal expectations of a significant welfare state persisted, especially among the older generation. In recent years, however, there appears to be a shift in social attitudes about the centrality of the state in providing public goods.

The Soviet legacy has left a bloated four-layer government in Kyrgyzstan that follows the Soviet model of unitary, top-down hierarchical control by officials who have mostly been appointed from above. The government has a meager budget. Some rationalization and decentralization were carried out in previous administrations, but it has now ground to a halt as different political actors pursue isolated and contradictory conceptions of reform. To this has been added the game changer of local elections, which now make municipal and rural officials answerable to their population, regardless of whether they have the authority and means to solve their problems or not.

**There is no consensus on national identity, as ethnic minorities face discrimination. Regionalism also plays an important role in national politics.** Wounds from the 2010 ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan have not been resolved. They appear to have been swept under the carpet, as discussing the issue of ethnicity remains extremely sensitive. The ethnic Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan argues that it is subject to high levels of arbitrary arrest and detention compared to other groups in the country. Similarly, journalists who report on such discrimination are censored in the media, making understanding these dynamics difficult.<sup>13</sup> In 2017, 46 percent of respondents in a nationally representative survey said that certain groups in society do not feel comfortable expressing their political views.<sup>14</sup>

Regionalism threatens to undermine consensus on what constitutes the state. While the international community would, as has been done here, relate recent Kyrgyzstan history as alternating between

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<sup>11</sup> Interviews from Aiyl Okmotus leaders across two regions in Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>12</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan" (Bishkek: International Republican Institute, 2018), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Kyrgyzstan," Human Rights Watch, January 4, 2018,

<sup>14</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan," 14.

“democracy” and “autocracy,” clearly many Kyrgyz see alternations of a southerner (Masaliyev), northerner (Akayev), southerner (Bakiyev), northerner (Atambayev), and now a southerner (Jeenbekov) as perhaps a more relevant distinction. This alternation of north-south presidents seems to have become an informal rule of the political game in the country, stressing to citizens the importance of regional identity in the country’s politics.

## RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Kyrgyzstan suffers from a broad range of rule of law problems, and it is not an exaggeration to say that addressing them will make or break not only its democratic experiment but also its viability as an independent state. The fragility of the justice sector is one of the most significant problems facing the country today. As noted in the previous section, past presidents have all called for judicial reform to heal the wounds caused by corruption. Yet the seeming unwillingness of the government to tackle this question in a sustained manner undermines the foundation of the state. The courts, police, and especially the security forces are used to suppress political opponents, allowed to apply the rule of law unevenly with respect to minorities and women, or are used for personal gain or commercial advantage. There is some level of criminal capture of the state on all levels. This is an acute cause of increasing alienation from the state.

**Many laws are well written, but they are not well enforced.** The increasing gap between the laws on paper and the laws in practice further undermines confidence in the state. Political scientists writing on Kyrgyzstan argue that no issue has received more attention in Kyrgyzstan than governance and combatting corruption. Over the past two decades, the government has passed almost every law recommended by the international donor community to improve governance outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Although there has been genuine desire among some politicians to follow the letter of these new laws, respondents with whom the assessment team spoke frequently contended that the government will pass laws to gain acceptance—and potentially resources—from international patrons. For most of the past 20 years, Western donors were the primary audience for these policy reforms. After Kyrgyzstan acceded to the EEU, Russia has become an important partner to please. As a result, Parliament is introducing more legislation influenced—and even drafted—by Russia.

**Rule of law bodies are used politically or for personal gain.** Kyrgyzstan, like the other post-Soviet republics, inherited a bloated police-state superstructure. Since independence criminal interests have often hijacked the elaborate security service infrastructure. The worst offenders are the militia, traffic police, the courts, prosecutors and the customs service. Attempts to establish new “rule of law” instruments out of whole cloth have often gone astray, as in the case of the financial police, designed to combat corruption but largely becoming a chief agent of it. Wages in the security services and judicial system are implausibly low, implying that they are only the “official” side of a civil servant’s income. The state’s tools for delivering justice represent a malignant and largely uncontrollable parasite on society that only very superficially have provided much justice, law and order—or even traffic safety.

**Pervasive corruption weakens the state at all levels.** The Constitution has had a “positive effect on informal politics as the kind of family rule over the state and national economy that characterized the

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<sup>15</sup> Johan Engvall, “Kyrgyzstan and the Trials of Independence,” in *Kyrgyzstan beyond “Democracy Island” and “Failing State”: Social and Political Changes in a Post-Soviet Society* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 1–20.

country was not revived under Atambayev.”<sup>16</sup> Although this grand scale corruption has decreased, there is still extensive corruption throughout government. Breaking up large scale corrupt oligopolies simply enhanced political competition among elites by opening the market for who could compete for what jobs at different levels of government.<sup>17</sup> Even Ministry of Interior officials acknowledge that there has been rise in government corruption in recent years, as organized crime networks and drug traffickers have infiltrated the security services.<sup>18</sup> The result is that independent Kyrgyzstan produced a network of officials that have been complicit in criminal networks. Those affiliated with criminal networks have even been elected to local government positions.<sup>19</sup> This practice of opening government positions to the highest bidder has “weakened the legitimacy of the central government, rendered local governance ineffective, and supported conflicts between residents of various regions and their administrations as trustees of different parties.”<sup>20</sup>

The notion of a public good is “misrepresentative in the context of the Kyrgyzstani state because these, in reality, qualify as private goods: access to them requires informal monetary payments... [and] citizens have access to them as long as they are willing to pay illicit and nontransparent private payments.”<sup>21</sup> It has also generated bureaucratic and petty corruption that survey data, as well as our interviews and focus groups, consistently identify as very high on the list of things the people of Kyrgyzstan would like to change about their country. The constant shuffling of government officials that takes place after the frequent change in prime minister has led to markets for government positions across the government at both the national and subnational levels. Much of the welfare state, which still promises subsidized and universal access to medical care and education, stands on top of health and education systems that are in fact based on bribery and unofficial payments. This delivers neither equal access to health care nor merit-based educational outcomes. In a 2017 public opinion poll, 74 percent said that corruption is a very big problem in Kyrgyzstan today.<sup>22</sup> After unemployment, corruption is the most important problem mentioned by citizens.

This pervasive corruption means that citizens’ experiences with the state to conduct even the most mundane tasks—from obtaining a passport to getting a marriage license—are spoiled by corruption. It is this pervasive corruption that shapes citizen attitudes towards the state. It has made citizens warier of interacting with the state and has thus turned them towards their communities and other affinity groups for meaning and support.

**Access to justice is a problem for all members of society as there is low public trust in courts and law enforcement agencies.** Even though the formal legal structure of the country, including the Constitution, represents a major effort to set Kyrgyzstan’s political system on a law-based

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<sup>16</sup> Engvall, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Engvall, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Chyngyz Kambarov, “Organized Criminal Groups in Kyrgyzstan and the Role of Law Enforcement” (Central Asia Program: George Washington University, 2015), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Kambarov, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Engvall, “Kyrgyzstan and the Trials of Independence,” 14.

<sup>21</sup> Johan Engvall, “Why Are Public Offices Sold in Kyrgyzstan?,” in *Kyrgyzstan beyond “Democracy Island” and “Failing State”: Social and Political Changes in a Post-Soviet Society* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 52.

<sup>22</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan,” 21.

foundation and to respect human rights, polling indicates that this potential has not been achieved. In the International Republican Institute's annual nationally representative public opinion survey, courts in Kyrgyzstan are the least trusted of all public institutions in the country, with only 41 percent of those surveyed having a positive view of them. Similarly, just 53 percent of the population expressed trust in the police.<sup>23</sup> This means that citizens have very low expectations that when they encounter legal institutions they will have a fair chance of receiving impartial justice. Other survey data indicated that close to 30 percent of the population believe there is no right to a fair trial in the country. Twenty-six percent believe there are unjust detentions.<sup>24</sup>

**Low trust in courts and law enforcement is likely to be experienced more acutely by minority populations.** There is little systematic data on access to justice by ethnic groups, and in our interviews and focus group discussions with minority populations the issue of ethnicity was a taboo issue. According to official statistics, ethnic minorities such as Uzbeks are a small proportion of the police, comprising just four percent of the police force, despite being 14 percent of the total population.<sup>25</sup> Public opinion data indicate that Uzbeks are far less likely to believe that they are safe to express their opinions on social issues.<sup>26</sup>

**Access to justice among women is inadequate.** Gender-based discrimination is in part reflective of a lack of respect for the international legal and human rights conventions of which Kyrgyzstan is a signatory. While trafficking in persons for sex and labor often occurs, reporting is minimal because the traffickers are either relatives or community members. Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, and yet the official number of rape cases is increasing, although it is unclear if this is due primarily to increased reporting of attacks. Bride-kidnapping, largely suppressed in the Soviet era, is no longer as taboo as it once was. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stated that it was “deeply concerned that bride kidnapping appears to be socially legitimized and surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity and that cases of bride kidnapping remain underreported.”<sup>27</sup> Generally, while Kyrgyzstan is a signatory to multiple international conventions and treaties related to human and civil rights, there is a severe deficit of enforcement, protection, and promotion of human rights regulations.

**Suppression of religious groups has decreased.** An important change over the past few years is the increasing tolerance, and even slight embrace, of religion by government authorities. In previous years, Islamic groups were overtly targeted by the government. According to expert surveys, however, repression of religious organizations has decreased significantly since the height of fears of Islamist terrorism that swept Central Asia in the years after September 11, 2001.<sup>28</sup> Public figures have noted the growth of Islam in the country. During the election campaign President Jeenbekov openly embraced elements of Islam more than any other previous leader.

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<sup>23</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, 8.

<sup>24</sup> TSIOM, “Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey),” 92.

<sup>25</sup> Official communications from Ministry of Internal Affairs, July 2017.

<sup>26</sup> TSIOM, “Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey),” 66.

<sup>27</sup> Valeria Cardì, “When Women Rule: Kyrgyzstan’s Youngest Female MP Puts Bride...,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> V-Dem, Kyrgyzstan. Measure of variable “religious organization repression.”

## COMPETITION AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Lack of clear consensus on the rules of the game since Kyrgyzstan's independence have translated into the alternating pathologies of mobilized political violence against autocracy and the no less subtle use of creeping autocratic coercion against democracy. In both cases, leaders have been willing to go beyond the formal rules of the system to pursue political agendas. In addition to political assassination and violent revolution, leaders have abused the electoral system, Parliament, media and courts in ways largely perceived as illegitimate.

In the past eight years, the country has successfully held two presidential elections, two parliamentary elections, as well as two constitutional referenda that have taken it from a Provisional Government with only the thinnest of claims to legitimacy to a now complete constitutional system. Elections are held according to timetables prescribed in the Constitution. They are hotly contested by parties providing meaningful choice. Finally, the outcome of these elections is not only hotly contested, but often unpredictable. As will be discussed in Step Two, the administration of elections is far from perfect, but they are free and have shown significant improvements.

Kyrgyzstan is currently swinging back towards centralizing political power in the executive, however. This consolidation of authority is reflected in both formal and informal rules. In terms of formal rules, the December 2016 constitutional referendum weakened the parliament, weakened judicial independence, limited applications of international human rights laws, limited the role of the Constitutional Chamber, and strengthened the powers of the prime minister.

**There are fewer meaningful choices in parties, parties stand for less, and they are used primarily as election vehicles.** The political party system in Kyrgyzstan has failed to really develop, according to interviews the assessment team conducted. In most cities and regions there is a high correlation between support for a top national political party and a specific location, often the home base of the party leader. This suggests not so much national-level parties that vie for support based on ideologically differentiated platforms as much as geographic patronage networks or regions that compete with one another for predominance.

As discussed below, members of parliament rarely challenge the executive and vote with the president more than ninety percent of the time. Even opposition parties vote overwhelmingly to support legislation offered by the executive.

**The one-district, party-list electoral system has stalled party development and accountability,** since deputies only informally represent geographic or group "constituencies." Because there are no constituencies, and it is not clear who members of parliament represent (aside from the entire country), parties and politicians face few incentives to cultivate meaningful relationships with citizens. To the extent that politicians represent constituents, they represent narrow community interests in the communities where they were born or currently reside. Political party representatives interviewed for this study hinted that there may be some electoral reform in the future to correct this issue, but this is far from certain.

**Voting is often transactional, in the most direct sense.** Although elections are technically well administered, citizens routinely report being offered payment for their votes. Many voters are paid a



one-time fee for voting for a party that can deliver the highest price on election day, according to many of the team's interviews.

**Formal checks and balances exist, but reconsolidation of executive power is possible and depends largely on the intentions of President Jeenbekov and those around him.** The president's control of the security services means that the individual who is in power can use these tools with little oversight from civilian bodies. Civil society activists who had once hoped to play a more important role in overseeing security forces are no longer willing to participate in public oversight councils because they are simply rubber stamps.<sup>29</sup> This factor, among others, has enabled the recentralization of government power around the president. The instability in the prime minister's office, with prime ministers rotating so frequently, has led to the de facto strengthening of the president vis-à-vis the prime minister. The Presidential Administration also serves as something of a parallel cabinet, with offices covering the same issue areas in the prime minister's portfolio.

**Public television has better and more diverse content but is politically controlled.** The country's largest television broadcaster, KTRK, was created after 2010 from state television as a public television station. It has taken advantage of the digitization of television and expanded from a single television station to a digital broadcaster that simultaneously runs multiple different stations providing news, sports and entertainment. The quality of KTRK broadcasts remains among the highest in the country. It features some political debate, with debate programs and talk shows featuring lively discussions, but remains under the specter of state control. Even the director of KTRK admitted that he is under pressure from the government to present government views. The largest public broadcaster in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Yntymak, remains the country's most important source of Uzbek-language news. Yntymak has a substantial radio and internet broadcasting presence as well.

**Internet provides much more diversity and some public oversight.** Access to non-traditional sources of media, especially among young people, is opening new channels for participation and for investigative journalism. With smartphones and an internet connection, any citizen can report human rights abuses or cases of corruption. Growth of internet access is correlated with perceptions that there is increased access to objective information.<sup>30</sup> However, internet media sources remain in their nascent stage, and are not yet a strong check on state authority at the national level.

## INCLUSION

**Issues of inclusion remain a serious problem in Kyrgyzstan. The situation has gotten worse in recent years.** This is particularly the case for ethnic minorities and women, although the situation has improved for most practicing Muslims. According to the interviews conducted for this assessment and outside observers, ethnic minorities and women are often excluded from participation in politics, access to justice, and the ability to participate equally in economic life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Interview, civil society activist, Bishkek.

<sup>30</sup> TSIOM, "Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey)," 82.

<sup>31</sup> Equal Rights Trust, "Looking for Harmony: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Kyrgyzstan" (London: Equal Rights Trust, 2016).

One area where inclusion has improved is in the attitudes towards most strands of Sunni Islamic practice. Islam is undergoing a revival throughout Kyrgyzstan, and there is growing acceptance of Islam in public life. Under previous governments, particularly that of Bakiyev, any expression of politicized Islam was harshly treated, to the point of potentially radicalizing essentially non-political Muslims. Now there is a competitive marketplace of religious ideas, many of which come from overseas. Foreign funding of religious organizations does not seem to be strongly controlled by the government. Politicians in 2018 are no longer afraid, but in fact are eager, to be seen with religious leaders and demonstrate their piety in public (see section on religious life in Section Three). The role of Islam in Kyrgyzstan's society and particularly in its politics is likely to become an increasingly relevant question over time. This is likely to intersect with the mistreatment of the generally more devout Uzbek minority and the portrayal of them as religious extremists.

**Women's participation in political life has stalled.** Since the country's independence twenty-six years ago, there has been a continual de-evolution of the value system that guaranteed women a substantive role in society. On the one hand, there are several positive signs indicating that Kyrgyzstan is moving in the right direction. The Constitution declares men and women to be equal and prohibits discrimination. Key "power" positions have been occupied by women: the former Transitional President, the Prosecutor-General, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Deputy Speakers of the Parliament, for example. Many other high-profile Government of Kyrgyzstan (GOK) officials and civil society leaders are women. At the same time, women continue to be exposed to discrimination and violence.

Although women have had a more prominent role in politics and public office than in other countries in Central Asia, there are signs that progress on this front has stalled or even backslid. In 2007, approximately one-quarter of Parliament were women. By 2010 this dropped to 23 percent. By 2015 it dropped to 19.7 percent. This is despite the requirement that parties ensure that at least 30 percent of their candidates are female. It is not uncommon for women to be elected to Parliament (often through a quota reserved for female parliamentarians), only to resign their seat to a man once they are elected. In this way, the Parliament does not preserve quotas reserved for women.

The issue of gender discrimination reveals a common pattern in Kyrgyzstani politics. There appears to be a strong legal and policy framework in place to protect women. Arguably, the rules in place to protect women are stronger than for any other group in society. Yet the maintenance of practices such as bride-kidnapping or the swapping out of women parliamentarians for men after election reflects "poor implementation of protective laws and policies."<sup>32</sup>

**Ethnic minorities, particularly Uzbeks, remain marginalized.** The situation of Uzbek minorities remains precarious, as some human rights groups have argued that "ethnic Uzbeks have remained a scapegoat for authorities' claims that ethnic Kyrgyz were unfairly blamed for the violence in 2010."<sup>33</sup> According to a recent study, there are no ethnic Uzbeks who lead a province, district, or city internal affairs department. There are no Uzbeks in leadership positions at prosecutor's offices, and very few Uzbeks work in the court system. This is one reason why there appears to be a "lack of objectivity during the investigation of criminal cases against Uzbeks and prosecutorial bias during the review of

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<sup>32</sup> Equal Rights Trust, "Looking for Harmony: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Kyrgyzstan," 177.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Whitman, "Ethnic Uzbek Rights under Attack in Kyrgyzstan," *Human Rights Brief* (blog), April 14, 2015.

those court cases.”<sup>34</sup> There are very few Uzbek-language media outlets, and the number of Uzbek-owned businesses appears to have sharply diminished.

The situation facing ethnic Uzbeks has worsened since ethnic violence broke out in Southern Kyrgyzstan eight years ago. Human rights organizations have concluded that there is systematic discrimination against Uzbek communities by police and that they are targeted in larger numbers by police.<sup>35</sup> They are also subject to torture and ill-treatment as well as denied due process, such as the ability to choose their own lawyers.<sup>36</sup> The government has also targeted Uzbek-advocacy groups in the country. Human rights advocates are worried that state security agents, who maintain that most Kyrgyzstani citizens who fought with ISIS were ethnic Uzbeks, use such concerns as a pretext to shake down members of the Uzbek minority.<sup>37</sup> In 2015, the option to take university entrance exams in the Uzbek language was cancelled. Human rights activists have argued that state intervention that limits educational opportunities in Uzbek violates international human rights norms that allows members of ethnic minorities to use their own language.<sup>38</sup> Although government officials have maintained that the closure of Uzbek secondary schools and subsequent cancellation of entrance exams reflect preferences of Uzbek families to study in Kyrgyz or Russian (which is desirable because many Uzbeks are seeking migration to Russia), Uzbek families contend that they were never consulted before the government made this choice.<sup>39</sup>

Constitutional amendments, which passed in a national referendum in 2016, solidified the role of ethnic Kyrgyz vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. Language in the preamble was changed to focus on protecting the unity of the people and developing “its language and culture,” with an emphasis on the singular rather than on a multi-cultured understanding of society.<sup>40</sup>

On the role of minorities, contrary to the rights postulated in the 2010 Constitution, there is a rising nationalist discourse and a hardening consensus among the ethnic Kyrgyz that Kyrgyzstan should be primarily a state for them. A clear, dynamic Kyrgyz identity is emerging, and it is not one that is inclusive. A multiethnic concept of citizenship and narrative of peace and reconciliation have not been championed sufficiently by leading politicians, who instead have allowed dangerous nationalistic and discriminatory discourse to take over public space. As a result, Kyrgyzstan is increasingly turning into a majority-dominated state.

The exclusion of minorities on an ethnic or religious basis is a serious problem for Kyrgyzstan’s obligations under its international commitments as well as potentially destabilizing internally, as some segments of the minority population might be pushed towards other alternatives. It is also potentially destabilizing to the relationships between Kyrgyzstan and its neighbors, especially Uzbekistan and Russia.

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<sup>34</sup> Memorial and Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan, “On the Kyrgyz Republic’s Compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” (Anti-Discrimination Center, n.d.), 10, accessed August 16, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Equal Rights Trust, “Looking for Harmony: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Kyrgyzstan,” 139.

<sup>37</sup> Chris Rickleton, “Kyrgyzstan’s Security Agents Intimidating Uzbek Minority, Activists Say,” *Eurasianet.Org*, April 2, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Whitman, “Ethnic Uzbek Rights Under Attack in Kyrgyzstan.”

<sup>39</sup> Eurasia.net, “Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek-Language Schools Disappearing,” March 2, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Pannier, “What’s In Kyrgyzstan’s Constitutional Referendum?,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 8, 2016.

The response on the part of ethnic minorities inside Kyrgyzstan has thus far been limited to emigration, assimilation or avoidance, however.

## GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The government continues to struggle to provide public goods and services to citizens. The prolonged inability of the government to deliver services effectively in many sectors has led many citizens to turn away from the state and either provide such goods on their own in their communities or turn to other, third-party providers, such as religious or other communal organizations.

**Things are better because government's role in life decreased, not because government has become more effective in producing collective goods and services.** Public opinion indicates that citizens are more satisfied with their life now than at any time in recent history. Individuals increasingly believe that the country is moving in the right direction: in November 2017, 66 percent said the country expressed this belief. That compares to 47 percent in February 2015 and only 28 percent in May 2010.<sup>41</sup> This dramatic change appears to be driven largely by improvements in the economic situation, which in turn is driven largely by increases in remittances. The growth in remittances and opportunities for young people abroad has improved prospects for wide segments of the population and has led to increased investments in the country. It does not appear to be the product of improvements in government performance, as satisfaction with the government, on average, has remained largely stable for the past five years.<sup>42</sup>

A significant illustration of government failures is the education sector. According to the most recent Program for International Student Assessment study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, an important measure of public sector education, Kyrgyzstan placed at the absolute bottom in the ranking in 2009.<sup>43</sup> Although this analysis was carried out several years ago, it was repeated many times during key informant interviews as emblematic of the government's inability to provide basic services without corruption.

**People are looking for other solutions than government.** The disillusionment with government means that individuals are increasingly turning to sources outside the state to solve problems and provide collective goods. This was a recurring theme in the clear majority of the assessment's key informant interviews. Even young people with whom the team spoke in focus group discussions said the only reason for their optimism for the future was that they had more choices about where they could

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<sup>41</sup> TSIOM, "Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey)," 4.

<sup>42</sup> TSIOM, 29. For example, in November 2017, 53 percent of those surveyed said the economic situation in the country improved a lot or somewhat. This compares to just 22 percent who held the same belief in February 2013 and 36 percent in February 2015. Similarly, in November 2017, 46 percent said the financial situation of their household had improved a lot or somewhat, compared to 31 percent who shared this belief in February 2013 and 36 percent in February 2015. Conversely, in November 2017 only eight percent of survey respondents believed that election results affected their financial situation, down significantly from March 2016 when 18 percent of those surveyed believed this to be the case. In other words, individuals do not associate government performance with economic performance.

<sup>43</sup> Jessica Shepherd, "World Education Rankings: Which Country Does Best at Reading, Maths and Science?," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2010.

migrate to. When individuals seek to protect their own interests, they overwhelmingly turn to friends, neighbors or colleagues over government officials or courts.<sup>44</sup>

**Public councils have a mixed record but are mostly ineffective.** The creation of public councils, which were rolled out in 2010, was to give citizen groups increased oversight of government bodies. Unfortunately, these councils have not lived up to their promise because they remain largely dominated by the government (see section on public councils below). The law governing public councils stated that each council shall have 15 members: five appointed by the president, five appointed by Parliament, and five appointed by civil society. The quiescence of Parliament to the executive means that the president effectively dominates appointments to these councils, leaving civil society squarely outnumbered and thus severely weakening the ability of these bodies to oversee government activity.

**Under-resourced, under-paid civil servants create systemic incentives for corruption and capture. Government serves the public good, but only when it does not get in the way rent-seeking.** While twenty-six years of post-Soviet privatization and erosion of state capacity have taken their toll, the bureaucracy in Kyrgyzstan is still highly centralized, bloated, inefficient, under-resourced and often hijacked by rent-seekers. The government is failing to deliver on its overly ambitious welfare-state mandates and unable to bring expectations and mandates in line with the new realities of budget constraints that it faces. The state is facing a debt crisis and, as a result, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have encouraged the government to postpone or cancel some infrastructure investments and curtail public sector spending.<sup>45</sup>

**Chronic turnover and instability in government makes those who try ineffective and those who steal in a hurry.** The short time horizon of prime ministers, who are responsible for overseeing most ministries involved in the delivery of public goods and services, leads to high levels of staff turnover at both the national and subnational level as each new minister appoints key personnel at all levels. The civil service is supposed to stabilize this situation, but low salaries create perverse incentives as discussed above.

There have been various attempts at government restructuring over the years that have largely stalled or have been reversed when regimes collapse, or governments fall. At the core of any such reorganization there needs to be a reform of the civil service system and the basic conditions of hiring, assessment, compensation and accountability of central and municipal civil servants and a consolidation and rationalization of central state functions. The rationalization of the relationship between the central government and sub-national government is also critical in “delivering the goods” in an accountable way.

**Local self-governing units (*aiyl okmotu*) provide for participation and feedback but have a limited mandate and are often punished for taking initiative.** Many services of critical importance to the population (public safety, education, health care, land records, licenses and other documents) are technically beyond the jurisdiction of now democratically-elected local officials and are managed by appointed (and largely unaccountable) representatives of central ministries and agencies. There is a potential collision now between the accountability of elected local leaders and the unaccountability of the representatives of central ministries who are technically responsible for service

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<sup>44</sup> TSIOM, “Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey),” 62.

<sup>45</sup> 24.kg, “What IMF Thinks of State Debt, Inflation and GDP in Kyrgyzstan,” 24.kg, September 29, 2016.

delivery. The assessment team’s conversations with local elected officials suggested that they are often punished for taking the initiative or showing creativity in trying to address their constituencies’ problems.

### **SUMMARY: THE MAIN DRG PROBLEM (OPPORTUNITY) STATEMENT**

Taking this all into consideration, this assessment concludes that the primary problem (or opportunity) of democracy, human rights and governance in Kyrgyzstan today is that **ineffective, unaccountable and often predatory government and rule of law institutions fail to deliver public goods or to protect the rights of all citizens. This prolonged inability to “deliver” has encouraged new forms of association outside the government sphere to fill in the gaps or address grievances, as new orientations and organizational forms compete to provide meaning and prosperity for the people.**

The following section examines how actors and institutions are (or are not) poised to address this problem (or, to take advantage of this opportunity).

## **STEP TWO: ANALYZING KEY ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS**

This section examines the role of key actors and the institutions in which they operate. The actors, together with the institutions that structure their incentives, determine the pace, nature and extent of political change. The following political economy analysis of key stakeholders—both domestic and global—is intended to help understand the context in which USAID DRG programming operates and the feasibility of promoting certain aspects of democratic governance. It is also intended to illuminate whether the institutional arenas are open to reform.<sup>46</sup>

### **THE EXECUTIVE**

The executive branch is the most important—and most powerful—branch of government in Kyrgyzstan. It dominates all other branches in terms of its lawmaking power and its ability to execute the will of the government. The executive branch in Kyrgyzstan consists of the president, the prime minister, and the government ministries and agencies that are responsible for implementing state laws and regulations. Although the prime minister is technically responsible to the parliament, the office of the prime minister has become de facto subordinate to the president’s office.

The President has emerged as a strong leader over both the parliament and the ministries for several reasons. The first is institutional. According to the Constitution, control over the power ministries (police, military, intelligence) remained under the control of the president and not the prime minister. Thus, the security services serve the interests of the president. Presidents can most willfully illustrate their power by going after those who ran against them in previous elections. Presidents have demonstrated their ability to use power ministries, including the General Prosecutor’s Office, to pursue their political opponents. In addition to controlling the power ministries, the President faces other incentives to consolidate resources around him.

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<sup>46</sup> USAID, “Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategic Assessment Framework,” 2014, 26.



The Constitution restricts presidents to a single six-year term. This means that the time horizon of the president—as well as those working for him—are rather short and that they become lame-ducks from the moment they are sworn into office. This institutional arrangement incentivizes leaders to worry about their long-term personal legacy or “exit strategy” rather more than they might if they had to face reelection. The second reason is historical. The change to a parliamentary system without substantially weakening the authority of the president led to a kind of institutional path dependence whereby citizens and lawmakers continue to look to the president for policy guidance and enforcement.<sup>47</sup> According to most of the people the assessment team asked, democracy in Kyrgyzstan depends more on the character of the incumbent president than on any real constitutional restrictions, checks or balances.

President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, a former Prime Minister who was supported by outgoing President Almazbek Atambayev, won the October 2017 election with well over half the votes, beating his main opponent Omurbek Babanov. Babanov, a businessman from the city of Talas, received approximately a third of the votes and represented a real alternative to the Atambayev political machine. During the election campaign, it seemed that Jeenbekov was a weak candidate who was simply hand-picked by Atambayev to preserve his legacy. At the beginning of 2017, he was hardly known by the Kyrgyz public. Since coming to power, Jeenbekov has surprised many observers by targeting the closest allies of Atambayev. Former Prime Minister Sapar Isakov and former Bishkek mayor Kubanychbek Kulmatov, both allies of Atambayev—have been placed under arrest after being charged with corruption. Weeks later, the Bishkek city council voted to dismiss Bishkek mayor Albek Ibraimov, seemingly because he was a close ally of President Atambayev. Since coming to power, Jeenbekov has moved to dismiss the General Prosecutor as well as the head of the State Committee for National Security (GKNB)—all appointees of Atambayev. Observers argue that “Jeenbekov’s team has made a public show of being engaged in the fight against corruption” but that such charges are “readily used in Kyrgyzstan for what look to all intents and purposes like politicized ends.”<sup>48</sup> On the positive side, by all accounts President Jeenbekov seems more disciplined and less ad hoc than his predecessor. He has worked quickly and methodically to clean house of those loyal to his predecessor and put his own people in place. He has also moved to get the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), which was previously the party of Atambayev, fully under his own control in a matter of just a few months. He has met with prominent members of civil society, including some who have been very critical of him.<sup>49</sup>

There is a zero-sum relationship between the power of the president and that of the prime minister. The consolidation of authority behind the president has led to a continued weakening of the prime minister’s authority. While the president has remained strong and there has been an orderly transfer of power between presidents after elections, the prime minister’s office has been embroiled in turmoil. Key informants during our interviews spoke of the country’s “Italian problem” as it has had more than 30 prime ministers since independence. The high number of prime ministers has effectively weakened the office vis-à-vis the office of the president and allowed the president to be a force of stability when there is inaction or instability in the prime minister’s office. The rotation of so many prime ministers has had enormous impact on the government’s ability to get things done, which in turn has eroded

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *The American Political Science Review* 94, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 251–67; William Brian Arthur, *Path Dependence* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Eurasia.net, “Kyrgyzstan: Prominent Opposition Leader Moved from Prison for Health Reasons,” August 1, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

confidence in the state. This is because so many government ministers are appointed by the prime minister and, in theory, reform agendas should depend on the actions of the prime minister. When a new prime minister comes to power, this individual can appoint new ministers, who in turn appoint authorities at the subnational level to implement government policy. Thus, the prime minister is responsible for managing, at least in principle, vast parts of the government bureaucracy, especially ministries responsible for service delivery.

The current Prime Minister Mukhammedkaly Abylgazyev has headed the cabinet since April 20, 2018. He came to power following the fall of his predecessor Sapar Isakov, who was dismissed from office following a no-confidence vote from Parliament after he was accused of mismanaging the collapse of the Bishkek Thermal Power Plant. All of those interviewed as part of this assessment suggested that there would be stability in the government of Kyrgyzstan because the current prime minister was handpicked by—and is thus subordinate to—President Jeenbekov.

## PARLIAMENT

One of the most significant achievements of the 2010 Constitution was the creation of an independent legislature, the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Kyrgyzstan was to become a parliamentary republic, with the legislative branch and strong political parties driving policy and politics with the power to appoint and dismiss prime ministers and the cabinet. There were early signs that Parliament would act as an independent body, and there was a fluid relationship between the president and Parliament. Over time, however, the independence of the body has eroded, and the institution has effectively become dominated by the executive branch rather than an important check on its authority. Although there are some legislators willing to challenge executive authority on some issues, the empirical analysis below of voting trends confirms this dependence.

There are no longer active struggles between the executive and the legislative branch. Instead, there is broad quiescence by the parliament, making the notion of a parliament that provides a check on the president a fiction. Opposition figures are few. The ruling SDPK partly largely complies with the president. Rather than serve as an important source of lawmaking, Parliament has emerged as a chamber of commerce composed of private sector interests. Key informants in the team's interviews, as well as political scientists speaking to the press, argue that many parliamentarians seek to promote business interests and protect private gains, rather than look out for the public good.<sup>50</sup> Although Members of Parliament (MPs) are no longer legally immune from criminal prosecution, many serve so that they can gain the patronage to be had from the executive branch. Of course, some MPs are interested in serving the interests of citizens, but this often is a second priority after defending private interests.

The disconnect between MPs and constituents is further exacerbated by the lack of constituencies for parliamentary elections (previously discussed). This electoral formula appears to exacerbate the problems with democracy in Kyrgyzstan: Citizens are told by politicians that their vote matters and that they should participate in electoral systems, yet the electoral design does not give voters MPs that

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

represent their districts. Effectively, citizens do not know who in parliament represents their interests.<sup>51</sup> They are then forced to turn to cues such as ethnicity, clan, region or even gender as a surrogate for representation.

Weak parliamentary independence is evidenced in a recent analysis of parliamentary votes. According to analysis by Kloop.kg, which conducted a study of 1,200 laws and protocols, Kyrgyz parliamentarians often miss meetings and vote favorably on 98 percent of the bills with which they are presented, rejecting only 30 of 1,183 bills. The analysis found that there is very little debate in parliament. Most disputes are settled in committees, resulting in very little debate in the general assembly. The analysis shows that party/faction affiliation does matter: SPDK members voted yes 93 percent of the time, while Ata Meken had the highest percentage of negative votes (6 percent), followed by Onuguu (4 percent), Republic-Ata Jurt (4 percent) and those not affiliated (4 percent). Non-SDPK parties had lower overall percentages of affirmative votes because they did not vote on many bills. For example, although Ata Meken voted against 6 percent of bills, they supported 77 of those bills that came to a vote and missed 17 percent of other votes.<sup>52</sup>

Legislation is often poorly written, in contradiction with previously-existing legislation or under-resourced. The team interviewed a lawyer who said that the Criminal Code had been modified more than 500 times since independence and that no “honest” lawyer say with certainty exactly what the law is today. The result is that the executive branch, which is charged with implementing government policy and laws, is often hamstrung by internal regulatory and legislative confusion.<sup>53</sup>

## CIVIL SERVICE

The Kyrgyz career civil service – comprising both the state (national) service and the municipal (local) service – is the backbone of the executive branch. It suffers from difficulty recruiting qualified personnel and maintaining them in key positions. A lack of competitive remuneration and adequate in-service training opportunities depresses the quality of recruits on the front end of the system, encourages rent-seeking and corruption among those already in the service, and contributes to low morale.

Since the 1990s, the state administrative system has been a site of patronage. The dynamics that affect corruption noted above are also manifest in the civil service where bribery and rent-seeking are the defining rules of the game. The civil service has become a place where “public officials buy offices to secure not just a single service or favor, as would be the case with a simple bribe, but to obtain access to a stream of income with an office.”<sup>54</sup> Private interests seek to control the state through the civil service to be able to influence policy design and implementation, and supervise how protection,

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<sup>51</sup> This tension is not unique to Kyrgyzstan as the design of parliamentary systems often weakens perceptions of accountability of politicians. See Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Редакция, “Депутаты всегда соглашаются и часто прогуливают. Рассказываем о невероятном единодушии кыргызского парламента,” *KLOOP.KG - Новости Кыргызстана*, June 19, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Interview, member of advocatura, Bishkek.

<sup>54</sup> Johan Engvall, “Why Are Public Offices Sold in Kyrgyzstan?,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 67–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2013.818785>.

privileges and other goods are sold.<sup>55</sup> According to this view, simply increasing salaries of civil servants will have little effect on corruption unless the rule of law—whereby civil servants cannot simply charge fees for inspections or other rent seeking activities—is bolstered.

Efforts to build a professional, meritocratic, and politically neutral civil service have fallen short. Although the government has committed to substantial civil service reform efforts to bolster local governance over the past two decades, these reforms have not had their intended effect because there has simply not been the will among government officials to implement these practices. The 2004 Law on Public Service was the most advanced in Central Asia, with a sophisticated system of competitive recruitment and selection of civil servants. Yet, as with many other pieces of reformist legislation, this law is rarely applied, and corruption remains a tremendous challenge for the public administration.<sup>56</sup> As in other sectors, it appears that officials tackled superficial bureaucratic reforms to please international donors rather than to promote systemic domestic reform.<sup>57</sup>

Although President Jeenbekov has launched some highly-publicized anti-corruption audits targeting the entire civil service to weed out malfeasance, as well as the introduction of a new conflict-of-interest law,<sup>58</sup> there has been little sustained movement on civil service reform.<sup>59</sup> The 2013 USAID DRG assessment noted the inability of the government to provide competitive salaries that discourage both internal migration and drift within service delivery ministries, as employees seek out rent-seeking opportunities or follow a patron from one institution to another. This has an extremely destabilizing effect on local service delivery mechanisms. During field visits to subnational government offices, team members noted that most government officials serving in local offices had only been in place for a short period of time, something that should not happen in a country that has experienced meaningful civil service reform.

There is a thirty percent quota for women in the executive branch, including the civil service. The most recent data available on this issue show that the government has exceeded this target, as women are almost 40 percent of the civil service in the country (they make up a high percentage of teachers and health care professionals).<sup>60</sup> Yet these data also show that very few women are able to break through glass ceilings and join the senior ranks of the civil service. As in so many other areas of the public sector, the UNDP notes that there is a “gap between policy and practice” regarding gender equality in the public sector. Policy frameworks are “generally supportive of gender equality in the public administration,” but there remains a “high level of politicization of the public administration [which leads to] high staff turnover: when the politically appointed head of a public agency changes, as a rule there

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<sup>55</sup> Engvall, 73.

<sup>56</sup> Saltanat Liebert, “Challenges of Reforming the Civil Service in the Post-Soviet Era: The Case of Kyrgyzstan,” *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 34, no. 4 (2014): 403–20.

<sup>57</sup> Liebert.

<sup>58</sup> Kabar.kg, “Agreed Version of Law ‘On Conflict of Interest’ Signed in Kyrgyzstan,” Информационное Агентство Кабар, January 23, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Caravanserai, “Kyrgyzstan Audits Civil Servants for Corruption,” Caravanserai, July 2, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> UNDP, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Public Administration: Kyrgyzstan Case Study” (Bishkek: United Nations Development Program, 2013).

are also accompanying dismissals of existing civil servants and recruitment of new ‘loyal’ personnel.”<sup>61</sup> The UNDP also noted that sexual harassment remains a problem in the workplace, often deterring women from joining the civil service.<sup>62</sup>

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Kyrgyz Republic inherited the centralized state model common across the Soviet Union. Both the Soviet legacy and authoritarian tendencies have been countervailing forces to decentralization, with centralized ministries dominating decision-making in many critical areas of service delivery (education, health, energy, police, etc.), regardless of who is elected in local councils or as mayor of a municipality. Over the past twenty years the government has embarked on bouts of decentralization leading to great expectations of reform but ultimately delivering little meaningful change and causing confusion among citizens. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan, in both theory and practice, has pushed decentralization further than any other Central Asian country, with political power, representation and even fiscal authority devolved to local governments. While Kyrgyzstan remains largely centralized, there are promising aspects of local governance and decentralization that allow citizens to have meaningful involvement in civic life and a say in the performance and role of their local government.

In 1996, a presidential decree reorganized rural villages and what remained of the collective farm system into about 450 *Ayl Okmotu*—rural administrative districts—better to achieve an effective and efficient scale of operation. This move effectively consolidated village governing units into larger structures to allow government to take advantage of economies of scale in the production and delivery of many public services. These reforms slowed under President Bakiyev, who delayed their implementation and even tried to reverse several of them. Local elections were replaced by appointment by the Presidential Administration, recreating a vertical power structure. Kyrgyzstan thus remains a unitary state that maintains the pre-existing delineation of power between the “state” (meaning central government and the locally-based representatives of the central government line ministries) and “local self-governance” (meaning municipal and local rural level officials). This conforms to President Akayev’s two-level budget at the republic and local level, by-passing the regional and district levels (as these became effectively representatives of the central executive government without independent budget functions). The system limits local governance to matters of local significance; mandates direct local election of local councils and of local executives (which means either by the council, as is done now, or directly as may be established by law later); forbids the interference of central government authorities in local matters; and allows central government powers to be delegated by agreement to local self-governing bodies.

Intergovernmental issues remain murky in Kyrgyzstan. Among the most pressing issues is lack of clarity about the equalization formula that redistributes funds from the national budget to municipalities. Across the board, those the team interviewed expressed that this formula was not transparent and appeared to be ad hoc. It is not clear why some municipalities get more transfers than others, as resource redistribution does not appear to be based on poverty or other objective measures. Instead,

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<sup>61</sup> UNDP, 33.

<sup>62</sup> UNDP, 24.

individuals the team spoke with believe that the transfer rate was the product of corruption rather than a cohesive, rational formula.

The mandate of local governance in Kyrgyzstan is simply not enough for it to achieve all the things, especially in-service delivery, that the population needs. *Aiyl okmotu* representatives the team met with complained of harassment by district and provincial officials when they simply tried to do their jobs or show creativity or initiative. When they became more active, they became subject to increased audits and inspection. This serves as a strong signal to these locally-elected authorities that the central government does not want them to act independently. It also creates a contradiction that muddles citizen expectations of the state: although a mandate for local self-governance exists and citizens are aware of this, central government authorities still do not feel comfortable with the complete independence of these elected local governance officials.

On the other hand, it is at the municipal level where politicians can express their initiative. Municipal officials the team spoke with are interested in more autonomy. They are also interested in avoiding predation from the central government. It is at local levels where citizens can easily—and without fear of rebuke—approach government officials. There is a real opportunity to foster citizen engagement at the local level. This engagement can illustrate to citizens that their voices matter in determining local priorities and that their role in oversight can help deter corruption.

In addition to the laws that create meaningful local self-governing bodies, the central government and the state apparatus in Bishkek (meaning the line ministries) have also changed the way they deliver services. This means there is variation in the degree to which different ministries have decentralized service provision. For example, the education ministry is far more decentralized than the health system, as decisions about the mandate of hospitals and even the number of hospital beds are made by officials in Bishkek rather than by those closer to the ground.<sup>63</sup>

Since coming to power, President Jeenbekov has declared regional development to be a national priority. Despite this, there is no clear sense of how he will define his priorities in this area (there was a previous program, *Kyrk Kadam*, under President Atambayev that focused on development in the 20 largest communities in the country). Historically, when the government speaks of regional development, it means government investment in infrastructure or the encouragement of public-private partnerships rather than institutional reform such as decentralization, which could create meaningful competition among regions for investment.

## **THE JUDICIARY, PROSECUTOR, AND LEGAL PROFESSION**

Every government in Kyrgyzstan since 1993 has declared that it would strengthen the independence of the judiciary and the effectiveness and professionalism of law enforcement agencies to reassure the public as well as foreign investors that the rule of law would prevail in Kyrgyzstan. Yet after decades of judicial reforms, the goals of having an independent and professional judiciary and efficient administration of justice remain elusive. As discussed earlier, public confidence in the judiciary remains low despite some positive steps that have been taken since the early 1990s to reform these organizations. The

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<sup>63</sup> Interview, USG official, Bishkek.



Council of Judges, consisting of twenty-one judges, was created as a self-governing judicial organ responsible for considering the judicial system's budget, and the training and disciplining of judges. Despite such changes and real, though intermittent, political will to implement them, the political and economic interests of the ruling families and their clients have conspired to keep the system of justice weak, controllable and inefficient.

Former Prosecutor General Aida Salyanova attempted to reform the Prosecutor General's office during her tenures from 2011-15 but made little progress. She sought to use her position to target high-profile politicians accused of corruption, including the former mayor of Bishkek. She came into office with great expectations, but her tenure was tarnished by frustrated reform and the lingering problems of unequal prosecution of ethnic minorities, especially Uzbeks, in the South. After her dismissal in 2015, the tables were turned against her and in 2017 she was prosecuted and convicted on politically-motivated charges. The Prosecutor General's office remains unreformed and has shown little resistance to being used as a tool of the executive branch against its enemies. In a recent interview Salyanova has stated that Kyrgyzstan has a "paradoxical situation whereby the laws of the country establish the highest standards of independence for judges, but the latter continue to fear the president and the executive."<sup>64</sup>

The 2016 amendments to the Constitution, which former President Atambayev said were to strengthen parliamentary authority over the president, weakened judicial independence by strengthening presidential control over the judiciary. The executive continues to control the Prosecutor General's office, which appoints prosecutors with the consent of Parliament. The amendments retain the president's ability to appoint and dismiss police chiefs, officials in the prosecutor's office, and officials in other law enforcement bodies. With weakened immunity for members of parliament, these changes "create favorable settings for the exploitation of these 'power agencies' as an instrument of political power."<sup>65</sup>

The constitutional amendment introduced some positive changes, such as a new Disciplinary Commission with authority over judicial appointments and dismissals, with one-third of the members each proposed by Parliament, the president and the Council of Judges. Furthermore, the amendments state that at least half of Parliament must approve dismissal of the general prosecutor, whereas previously only one-third of Parliament was required for this.

But judicial independence was weakened by these amendments with the removal of the requirement of government to implement judicial decisions made by international organizations related to human rights. This was a political reaction to a ruling by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (OHCHR) regarding Azimjon Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek journalist whom Kyrgyz judges found guilty in 2010 of inciting ethnic hatred and unrest and the murder of a police officer during the ethnic conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan. OHCHR ruled that Askarov's detention was unlawful and called on the GOK to release him

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<sup>64</sup> Franco Galdini, "An Interview with Aida Salyanova, Kyrgyzstan's Former Prosecutor General," *The Diplomat*, December 27, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Almaz Esengeldiev, "Strengthening the Vertical: Kyrgyzstan's 2016 Constitutional Referendum," Nations in Transit Brief (Freedom House, April 2017), 4.

immediately. President Atambayev argued that the constitutional change was necessary to protect Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty.<sup>66</sup>

As with the executive branch, capacity and resources severely limit the ability of the judiciary to manage the regular administration of justice. Article 98 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic states that "...the state provides funding and proper conditions for the functioning of the courts and judges. The budget of the judicial system shall be formed by the judicial system independently and, after coordination with executive and legislative branches of government, it shall be included in the state budget." In practice, however, the process is inverted and fails to comply with the law.

Given the level of corruption in the country, the low salaries for the judges and court personnel, insufficient and inadequate court buildings, the lack of court staff and lack of technical capabilities, it is evident that the court system is under resourced. The government has introduced a benchmark stating that two-percent of the budget should go to the judiciary. Instead of focusing on this arbitrary benchmark, the government would be better served by ensuring that the judiciary and other rule of law organizations have adequate funding to cover basic needs, such as competitive salaries for court personnel, which they currently lack under the current allocation system.

There is a large demand for greater transparency in the judicial sector. It remains a source of tremendous alienation with the state. Citizens and some citizen groups have come together to compile a "black list" of judges they believe to be biased or corrupt.<sup>67</sup> One important reform over the past several years that can help improve transparency is the posting of court decisions online. This means that citizens have access to the ruling of individual judges to see if their rulings are consistent over time.

Along with the judiciary and law enforcement, the legal profession and defense bar are critical components of the legal system. The idea of creating a unified and self-regulating bar, which will be reflected in new legislation, has been one important achievement of the post-2010 era. The long-awaited Law of Advocates created a unified defense bar which has responsibility for administering the bar exam, licensing new lawyers, disciplining its membership and providing for continuing education of the profession through an Advocates Training Center.

## **POLITICAL PARTIES**

Unfortunately, political parties have not been weaker than at any point since the Kyrgyz Republic became a democracy. Most parties continue to be tied to the personality of a leader and rise and fall with the leader's fate. Parties led by politicians who have lost, come under criminal prosecution or have been forced into exile flounder or merge with more viable parties. At present the SDPK holds a majority in the parliament. Most interviewees for this assessment felt that the party is being reconfigured by President Jeenbekov and that ultimately a "presidential" party will emerge that dominates and holds power and answers to him. Other parties will be weak opposition parties. Much of this is already playing out.

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<sup>66</sup> Esengeldiev, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Kurbaychbek Zholdoshev and Farangis Najibullah, "Kyrgyz Activists Name and Shame 'Corrupt' Judges," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, March 8, 2018.

Parties have poorly articulated policy positions, a scant sense of their constituencies, and have a hard time distinguishing themselves from one another. As noted earlier, there are institutional constraints on political parties as they face few incentives to build constituencies because of the existing electoral system which does not have single member constituencies or constituencies based on geographic districts.

In 2017, just five percent of the population reported being members of a political party. This is down from 15 percent in 2015. Of those that are members of political parties, just seven percent say they participate in political party activities very often. This is also down significantly from 2015 when 38 percent of party members said they were active. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed said they do not participate because they have no desire or interest. Despite the lack of interest in parties, citizens overwhelmingly believe it is healthy for Kyrgyzstan's democracy to have multiple parties in power.<sup>68</sup>

As challenging as it has been for political parties to coordinate effectively at the national level, it has been even more challenging at the local government level where political parties have weak constituencies and constructive coalition building has proven to be difficult. For example, in 2017 local elections were held to fill 41 local councils across the country, including 20 early elections that were held because elected councils could not come to a consensus to select a local major or council chair. This occurred because parties were unable to form majority coalitions, which allowed minority factions to block the work of the council. Decisions such as selecting the chair of a local council require a two-thirds vote, so minority groups could block decisions simply by not attending meetings. In Jalal-Abad, for example, five parties earned seats in the 2016 local elections. Local party factions have formed coalitions to block the work of the council, which has led to repeated cycles of local council elections. The ability of parties to behave as veto players slows the work of the government, ultimately undermining individual confidence in both political parties and local councils.<sup>69</sup>

President Jeenbekov has created a commission to investigate reforming the electoral formula to reestablish geographic mandates or create a hybrid system of party lists and geographic constituencies. This effort is worth following, because it could change the incentive structure for both political parties and members of the legislative branch.

## **NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS**

The Kyrgyz Republic has made more outward strides towards the reform of human rights institutions than any country in Central Asia. Although the country has passed significant laws and signed important human rights treaties, in general, these laws are not universally respected by government authorities. As stated in Step One, it is this prolonged discrepancy between the laws on paper and the laws as they are practiced that contributes to significant grievances in society.

The country has experienced several setbacks on human rights issues in the past year. As mentioned earlier, the life sentence handed down to Azimjon Askarov was upheld in a court. A national private television station, NTS, which was owned by Babanov (Jeenbekov's opponent in the last Presidential

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<sup>68</sup> Catherine Putz, "Kyrgyz Soundly Pass Constitutional Changes in Referendum," *The Diplomat*, December 13, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Freedom House, "Nations in Transit 2018: Kyrgyzstan Country Report," April 11, 2018, 10–11, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/kyrgyzstan>.

election), had its assets frozen. Russian human rights defender Vitaly Ponomarev was denied entry at the border and banned from the country. The Supreme Court has upheld rulings that limit freedom of expression.<sup>70</sup>

As noted in other sections of this report, the situation for women in Kyrgyzstan has become increasingly dire in recent years. The situation for ethnic minorities, especially Uzbeks, remains challenging. There was no subject that made respondents more uncomfortable during assessment team interviews than issues related to the Uzbek minority in the country. It is an elephant in the room that few are willing to discuss openly, as there is fear that by doing so one may open old wounds from the 2010 ethnic violence in Osh. There is no discussion of transitional justice or a full and open investigation into the causes of the 2010 violence. The inability to speak about the causes of violence, compounded by the apprehension among Uzbeks to speak openly about issues of language and identity, means that issues related to ethnic minorities remain a sensitive landmine that has the possibility of reemerging as a violent fissure in the future.

Human rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community suffered a devastating blow in 2016 after members of Parliament proposed an anti-LGBT bill that was almost a copy of a similar law passed by the Russian Duma in 2013. The law proposed jail terms of up to one year for those who promote “homosexual relations” through the media or among children and also proposed a fine for the distribution of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations.”<sup>71</sup> Debate over the law spurred anti-LGBT protests by nationalist groups. Although the law did not pass, members of the LGBT community say that the situation in the country has become significantly more difficult for them because they are now targeting of nationalist and other groups.<sup>72</sup> Many members of the community say that violent attacks against them have increased dramatically since the Russian-style legislation was introduced.<sup>73</sup>

The government has established several human rights institutions to improve the human rights situation in the country, but none of these been particularly effective in promoting human rights. First among these are the national Ombudsman and the Center for the Prevention of Torture. The Ombudsman has no ability to enforce decisions and can only report issues that arise. In field visits, the assessment team found provincial representatives of the Ombudsman to be weak in resources and capacity. They reported seeing very few cases, which the assessment concludes is a symptom of the weakness of the office. If individuals cannot use the Ombudsman to effectively redress a grievance, it makes little sense to turn to this office in time of need. A National Center for the Prevention of Torture was established in

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<sup>70</sup> Mihra Rittman, “Another Blow to Media Freedom in Kyrgyzstan,” Human Rights Watch, December 20, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/20/another-blow-media-freedom-kyrgyzstan>.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Lelik, “Kyrgyzstan: Anti-LGBT Bill Hits the Buffers,” *EurasiaNet*, accessed July 16, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/s/kyrgyzstan-anti-lgbt-bill-hits-the-buffers>.

<sup>72</sup> Kate Arnold, “Curtain Falls on Bishkek’s Lone LGBT Club amid Worsening Atmosphere,” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-lgbt-club-closing-gay-rights-homophobia/28561339.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Steven Snyder, “Russian-Style Anti-Gay Legislation Has Inspired Homophobic Attacks in Kyrgyzstan,” *Public Radio International*, accessed July 16, 2018, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-05-11/russian-style-anti-gay-legislation-has-inspired-homophobic-attacks-kyrgyzstan>.

2012 to investigate and report on ill treatment in places of detention, but it is also limited to responding to complaints that reach them and reporting their findings.

## ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

Post-revolution elections in Kyrgyzstan are the most free, fair, and contested in Central Asia by far. High turnout shows a keen interest on the part of citizens to participate, although that has been steadily declining over years: 72 percent voted in the constitutional referendum in 2010, 61.3 percent in the 2011 presidential election, and 56.3 percent in the 2017 presidential election. Just 42 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in 2016 in the referendum to change the Constitution (with just 28.4 percent participating in Osh city).<sup>74</sup> Although the elections have been administered well, there have been serious allegations of vote-buying. In fact, 17 percent of those surveyed admitted that during the presidential election campaign they had been offered money, gifts or some other incentive in exchange for votes. Twenty-four percent of those surveyed said they had witnessed the offer of a gift, money or incentive in exchange for a vote.<sup>75</sup>

Elections are characterized by a high level of competition involving meaningful choice, and they proceed in a calm, peaceful atmosphere. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty said the recent presidential elections were the most free and fair in the history of Central Asia.<sup>76</sup> The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said that the 2017 presidential elections in the country were competitive and that voters had a wide choice of candidates. The candidates could campaign freely. It noted that “technical aspects of the election were well-administered, by the adjudication of election disputes by the CEC [Central Commission for Elections and Referenda] was, at times, biased.”<sup>77</sup> The report noted that there was at times misuse of public resources, pressures on voters and vote-buying, but in general the technical administration of the election was done well, and voting was orderly. In other words, Kyrgyzstan has the technical capability to hold free and fair elections, but it does not currently have candidates and government officials who are universally willing to limit their interference in the electoral process.

Historically, the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CEC) was accused of corruption and manipulation. In fact, the CEC has displayed remarkable efficiency in managing a rapid succession of national elections despite being short-staffed. International observers generally praise the CEC for being transparent and independent from government and partisan interests, and for making the effort to replicate these standards in lower-level election administration. The State Registration Service coordinated with CEC to oversee biometric data collection and electronic voting for the 2015 Parliamentary election, which generally improved the ability of voters to participate despite frequent internal migration. In the 2017 presidential election, a significant number of citizens—most of whom

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<sup>74</sup> Putz, “Kyrgyz Soundly Pass Constitutional Changes in Referendum.”

<sup>75</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan,” 42.

<sup>76</sup> Najibullah, Farangis, “Sooronbai Jeenbekov, Longtime Atambaev Ally with A Southern Touch, Poised For Kyrgyz Presidency,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, October 16, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Kyrgyz Republic Presidential Election: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report” (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, March 2018), 1.

reside overseas—did not participate in biometric registration. This left them disenfranchised. Despite this, the OSCE noted that biometric registration contributed to transparency of elections.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the many areas that could be improved, from legislation to election administration to polling day operations, overall the CEC has proven its ability to independently organize elections that are competitive, free and arguably fair and offer meaningful choice to the voting public.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society (or, perhaps, “civil societies”) in Kyrgyzstan is vibrant but it is not the kind of civil society USAID or other Western donors envisioned when they embarked on DRG efforts in Kyrgyzstan almost a quarter century ago. The term “civil society” did not exist in the Kyrgyz Republic or throughout much of the post-Soviet space before the arrival of international donor assistance. This does not mean that activity that outsiders would understand as civil society did not exist, just that the term itself was not in use. The term civil society has become associated almost exclusively with Western-funded, donor-oriented organizations that are urban-based with a small membership base. At the same time, the growing verticalization and consolidation of power in the executive has led to a shrinking space for civil society in the country, thus reducing incentives of citizens to participate in formal, organized civic organizations.<sup>79</sup>

There is thus a paradox of civil society in Kyrgyzstan: citizens appear to be quite engaged in their communities and willing to speak up about problems facing their communities, but are not active in the formal, organized civil society or non-profit sector established by USAID and other donors in Kyrgyzstan. Individuals turn less to non-profits that have a strong organizational structure than to more organic, community-based, even “spontaneously” organized, groups. Citizens are engaged, but they do not appear to be as engaged with donor-supported groups.

Prominent civil society activists in Bishkek acknowledged during a focus group discussion that the Western, donor-supported vision of civil society that they had embodied and promoted in their work for the past two decades had not lived up to its promise. They admitted that they had not been able to attract young people to their cause, create membership-based organizations, or generate sustained mobilization around issues that resonate with constituencies. This bears out in survey data, as just three percent of the population said that they are members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), down from almost five percent five years ago. In 2017, just 19 percent said they had engaged at all with a civil society organization in the past year.<sup>80</sup>

Russian efforts to create friendly civil society organizations are described in the section on Russia below. In some ways these organizations look like Soviet-era mass organizations. In other ways they mimic Western-funded nongovernmental organizations. However, they promote a value system that is mostly,

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<sup>78</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, 2.

<sup>79</sup> IPHR, “Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Pre-Election Kyrgyzstan,” International Partnership for Human Rights, May 4, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> TSIOM, “Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Results of the Fifth Sociological Survey),” 59.

although not always, at odds with Western definitions of human rights. But they do represent an alternative, competing “civil society.”

Conversations with leaders of USAID-supported women’s NGOs did not yield optimism. Many of these leaders discussed how they had worked tirelessly for two decades to improve the plight of women in the country, but in their view outcomes for women had nevertheless deteriorated. They noted how their work had improved the legal framework for women and that they were able to encourage Parliament to pass legislation and government to sign international treaties that supported women’s equality, but that support of legal frameworks did not translate into success in the real lives of women. The country had seen backsliding on gender issues and their organizations did not command broad popular support.<sup>81</sup>

Another illustration is the creation of public councils, which were established in 2010 and legalized in 2014 as a mechanism of civil society participation in and oversight of government institutions. According to the 2014 law, public councils were to assist state agencies to develop and adopt high quality decisions of public importance and increase transparency and efficiency in the use of resources and grants by the state with an eye to improving the quality of public services delivered to the population. Public councils were to participate in the development of draft legislation, organize public hearings, inform the public on the performance of state agencies, assist state agencies in their coordination with the public, help agencies attract funding, and participate as observers in ministry meetings and working groups as well as in tender and procurement processes. Councils were to consist of 15 people – ten from civil society and five representing the government. These councils, according to those the team spoke with, have been coopted by the institutions with which they work or have failed to provide meaningful input on the work of the government.

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

The role of religion in public life is changing. Public opinion surveys suggest that a religious revival is underway in the country, and this finding is supported by perceptions among key informants for this assessment. According to two waves of a nationally representative public opinion survey (samples taken in 2007 and 2012), Muslims in Kyrgyzstan who self-identify as practicing religion increased from 80 percent to close to 100 percent over the five-year period. During this period, weekly attendance of religious services doubled (a 112 percent increase) and those engaged in daily prayer grew by 62 percent.<sup>82</sup> This increase in religious practice appears to be specific to Kyrgyzstan, as surveys conducted simultaneously in Kazakhstan indicated the opposite trend there, with religious practice decreasing. Most notably, analysis of these data did not find that increased participation in religious life was tied to a single individual characteristic, such as poverty, gender or ethnicity; these demographic traits had no significant effect.

Individual attitudes towards religion in political life also appear to be shifting, with more Kyrgyzstanis stating that *sharia* should play a role in politics. According to a 2015 survey conducted by UNFPA, 74

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<sup>81</sup> Focus group discussion, women’s civil society activists, Bishkek.

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Junisbai, Azamat Junisbai, and Baurzhan Zhussupov, “Two Countries, Five Years: Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the Lens of Public Opinion Surveys,” *Central Asian Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1–25.

percent of the population believed that religion should be a private affair and have no influence on state policy; 19 percent said that Islamic principles should be part of state policy; and 3 percent believed that state policy should be fully formed around Islamic principles. Notably, there was little difference between men and woman in responses to these questions about the role of religion in public life.<sup>83</sup> Sentiment that religion should be part of state policy is highest in southern parts of the country.<sup>84</sup> In Jalalabad province, 47 percent of respondents shared this belief.<sup>85</sup> These figures represent an increase over earlier survey data, which show that in 2012 just ten percent of Kyrgyzstanis believed that Islamic law was important. In 2007, 17 percent of Kyrgyzstan's Muslims believed that sharia was completely unimportant to good governance. By 2012, this figured declined to 10 percent.<sup>86</sup>

The increase in religious observance and belief that religion should play a role in politics has effectively ended the post-Soviet model of state-religious relations where the state heavily controls religious organizations. Increasingly, the government and politicians are adapting to changes in religious communities rather than seeking to control them. This has been especially true in the years since 2010 and is evident in how politicians campaign for political office. Previously, political figures sought to distance themselves from religious leaders, referring to such leaders as part of “traditional” society. In the years since, politicians have sought to demonstrate their religiosity to legitimize their claims to power. For example, when in 2016 the party Uлуу Kyrgyzstan ran for municipal elections in Kadamzahi, their banners read, “Support from God; let the creator support ‘Uлуу Kyrgyzstan.’ Do not sell your vote; people come to your senses!”

There has also been a rise in the number and popularity of religious broadcasts, especially on social media where several notable religious figures have risen to prominence. For example, Ayan TV, which began broadcasting in 2010, but has gained popularity in recent years, has a religious orientation. The internet hosts a new generation of Islamic broadcasters such as Chubak Haji Jalilov (through his internet channel Nasaat Media) and TV studio Marva TV, founded by Ozubek Haji Chotonova. Islamic leaders such as Abdishukr Narmatov, Kadir Malikov, Myktykbek Arstanbek, Zhamal Frontbek kizi, who regularly appear on commercial media stations such as NTS, Maral, and Aprel', have also gained public popularity in recent years.

According to the State Committee of Religious Affairs, there were 2,600 religious associations and organizations registered in the country, of which 85 percent are Islamic.<sup>87</sup> What stood out in the assessment team's meetings was the growth in Islamic-oriented civil society, which seems to see itself as an answer to the corruption and incompetence of the state.<sup>88</sup> At the grassroots level, Islamic movements and communities are increasingly compensating for the inability of the state to provide collective goods. They serve as a substitute for the state, in many instances. Religious organizations increasingly provide a social support network, for low-income and large families, give access to free

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<sup>83</sup> UNFPA, 87.

<sup>84</sup> Junisbai, Junisbai, and Zhussupov, “Two Countries, Five Years,” 22.

<sup>85</sup> UNFPA, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Junisbai, Junisbai, and Zhussupov, “Two Countries, Five Years,” 20.

<sup>87</sup> UNFPA, “Gender in Society Perception Study,” 15.

<sup>88</sup> ICG, “Kyrgyzstan - State Fragility and Radicalisation,” 1.



religious education, and reach out to families to resolve conflicts. It is difficult to assess with any certainty the scope or amount of funding for these kinds of grassroots organizations, but key informants we spoke with describe infusions of funds from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. They also spoke of the rise of domestic donations to Islamic charitable organizations through networks of labor migrants and businesses. Western-oriented civil society groups complained that these new Islamic groups represent an “Islamification” of civil society and that they are very effective at creating support, advocating for issues and generating their own resources from within the community (in other words, everything “civil society” is supposed to do). One interesting example is the women’s group Mutakalim, which is internet savvy and well-organized and boasts of its success in combating under-age marriage and getting the state to allow women to take their passport photos with head coverings.

At the local government level, religious communities have taken an increasingly prominent role in public decision making. In Uzgen, for example, the local administration canceled the January 1 New Year’s celebration at city hall as a secular holiday. Numerous communities throughout the country have banned the sale of alcohol. As Islamic religious observance and attitudes towards religion in the public sphere shift, conflicts between secular law and religious obligations are an increasing focus of public discourse. In Parliament, for example, MPs raised the issue of making changes to the labor code to extend the lunch break on Fridays so that Muslims can attend Friday prayer.

Although the rise of Islamic forms of social organization have helped fill gaps in service provision, some observers have raised concerns about ideological aspects of some Islamist groups. The International Crisis Group warns that while some groups are tolerant, others are less so. Not all groups are politically active. They note that what Kyrgyzstan is witnessing is not the rise of a single form of political Islam, but that “different parts of the population are associating faith with identity in ways that can fuel political polarization or looking to it for answers when state institutions fail them...this can lead to increasingly radical forms of Islam and in some cases violent extremism.”<sup>89</sup> Some have also argued that the growth in anti-LGBT sentiment, such as the recent constitutional amendment which changed the language in the Constitution so that marriage could only be defined as being between a man and a woman, is the result of growing Islamic conservatism in the country.<sup>90</sup>

## **MEDIA**

The media landscape in Kyrgyzstan remains robust, but the guardrails on its ability to operate freely have contracted in recent years. Kyrgyzstan remains the only country in the region where individuals can openly criticize the president and parliament in both print and electronic media, and given the overall weakness of the government and the growth of the internet as an important source of information, it remains in question whether the government could police on-line information flows—especially news or rumors that emerge from anonymous sources or attempts to influence opinion through disinformation.

According to a survey by media.kg, 94.5 percent of all Kyrgyz households have a television, 68 percent have smartphones, 41 percent have simple phones, and 24 percent own computers. Television is the

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<sup>89</sup> ICG, I.

<sup>90</sup> Putz, “Kyrgyz Soundly Pass Constitutional Changes in Referendum.”

most important source of news and information in the country, as 96 percent of those surveyed in 2017 said they get political information from conventional television broadcasts. Approximately 75 percent watch television every day. Rates are highest among older populations (90 percent of those over 52 report watching TV daily). Eighty-eight percent of those who watch TV watch news of Kyrgyzstan and 58 percent watch international news. Seventy-eight percent watch news in Kyrgyz and 20 percent watch news in Russian, while just 3 percent watch news in Uzbek (although 5 percent said they would prefer to watch news in Uzbek).

Seventy-two percent of respondents have access to the internet. Sixty-nine percent of those who access the internet report using it most frequently on their mobile phone.<sup>91</sup> While internet access has risen considerably in recent years, only 29 percent get political news regularly from online sources,<sup>92</sup> and just 18 percent of the population report accessing the internet every day (although sixty-seven percent use a smartphone daily, and among those 16-18 years old 83 percent use smartphones every day).<sup>93</sup> Of those who watch programs on the internet, 47 percent watch news of Kyrgyzstan on their smartphones, while 33 percent watch international news on their phones. Use of social media is very high as well, with 70 percent of the population reporting that they access social networking sites (such as WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, Messenger, etc.). Just 6 percent of respondents reported reading newspapers each day and 21 percent said they read papers a few times per week.

According to recent public opinion data, the media is the most trusted public organization in Kyrgyzstan as 75 percent of those surveyed said they have a positive attitude towards it.<sup>94</sup> Despite the freedom that the press enjoys in Kyrgyzstan, especially compared to other countries in the region, it is surprising that media consumers do not have more trust in media outlets in the country. Survey data indicate that individuals in Kazakhstan, which has a more robustly controlled media environment, trust their media far more than those in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>95</sup> This is a surprising outcome given the press freedoms and greater associational freedoms individuals enjoy in Kyrgyzstan. The authors of the study argued that this was because the elite—who are engaged in often fierce rivalries—use the media as a tool to sway public opinion.<sup>96</sup>

There are diverse media in Kyrgyzstan, but the diversity of voices willing to speak openly seems to be on the decline. As noted above, television remains the most popular source of information. Russian-language coverage remains dominated by the Russian ORT (Channel One), which provides a powerful voice outside government control and dominates coverage of international affairs. The country's two largest public television networks are KTRK (national) and Yntymak (based in Osh). KTRK has been struggling to successfully transform itself from state-controlled television to a truly national public television broadcaster. Although it does show some signs of independence, it has not succeeded in

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<sup>91</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, 80.

<sup>92</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, 78.

<sup>93</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, 79.

<sup>94</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan," 20.

<sup>95</sup> Barbara Junisbai, Azamat Junisbai, and Nicola Ying Fry, "Mass Media Consumption in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: The View from Below," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 23, no. 3 (2015): 233–56.

<sup>96</sup> Junisbai, Junisbai, and Fry, 255.

breaking free of government influence. Journalists working for the station with whom the team met openly discussed the pressure they receive from the government. KRTK features high quality programs, including some investigative reporting and talk shows that are quite popular. During the 2017 presidential election, the OSCE criticized KTRK's election coverage as highly imbalanced and in favor of Jeenbekov.<sup>97</sup> The director of the station reported that its ratings had surpassed that of Russian ORT (which historically has been the most popular television station in the country). On the other hand, Yntymak has a bit more leeway in its operation. It is the largest Uzbek-language broadcaster in the country. It began as a small community radio station that, with support from USAID, grew into a media conglomerate that features a radio station and an active online media presence.

Online media is increasingly important. Citizens increasingly get their news from social media networks, but also from important local content providers such as 24kg, Kloop, Kaktus Media and Akipress. These online networks have all grown in popularity and importance in recent years. Also popular is Azzatyk, which has a large online news and television presence.

A primary challenge in the television and radio sector is access to information about the nature of the media market. Without more detailed information about the market it is difficult for businesses to target stations for advertising. USAID has supported the collection of information about the media market through a survey implemented by M-vector. Television stations have asked for support of “people meters,” the kind commonly used by agencies such as Nielsen that can provide more accurate information about the nature of television usage in the country. A better understanding of the media market by ownership would provide a more sustainable media market. Unlike television stations, internet agencies can instantaneously understand the number of people who access their sites and for what purpose.

Although Kyrgyzstan is the most democratic country in the region, journalists work under conditions of intimidation. They are “under pressure from lawsuits, restrictions to information including exclusion from major news conferences and/or refusal to provide information; certain journalists are banned entry to Parliament for several years...some are harassed and physically attacked...others are simply blacklisted.”<sup>98</sup> The government has used the Prosecutor General's office to target the media under the “False Accusations Law” over the past year, causing a decline in press freedom overall as measured by Freedom House's Nations in Transit survey. The situation with the media became extremely tense in the run up to the 2017 presidential election as several defamation lawsuits were used to protect the “dignity” of President Atambayev and presidential candidate Jeenbekov. TV stations affiliated with opposition candidates were closed by authorities or had their assets frozen for periods of time.

## **SECURITY SERVICES**

As noted earlier, presidential control over the power ministries allows the president to play an oversized role in politics. Recent changes to the Constitution did not include reforms in this regard as the president remains the chair of the Security Council. He has the power to name heads and deputies

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<sup>97</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Kyrgyz Republic Presidential Election: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report.”

<sup>98</sup> Bahtiyar Kurambayev, “Journalism and Democracy in Kyrgyzstan: The Impact of Victimizations of the Media Practitioners,” *Media Asia* 43, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 106.

of all bodies responsible for defense and national security, which has reinforced the politicization and militarization of law enforcement and state security services. The lack of “meaningful parliamentary or civic control over these bodies permits the executive branch to manipulate their resources for political purposes [and these methods were seen] during the presidential administration’s campaign to pass the [constitutional] amendments through Parliament in the fall of 2016.”<sup>99</sup> The ability of the president to use these ministries as instruments of executive authority allows executives to wield influence over the judiciary. Without citizen control over the security services, they will continue to be used to threaten opposition and others who might challenge the government.

Internal security services in Kyrgyzstan have more power and authority than the military. Because they are instruments of maintaining government control, they have access to substantial financial resources from the budget. They also have access to almost limitless sources of informal revenues through rent-seeking.<sup>100</sup> This is because ruling governments are less concerned with external threats than they are with internal challenges to their own authority.<sup>101</sup> The security services routinely get involved in areas outside their “proper area of responsibility—tackling general crime—to pressure political opposition and maintain [the] pro-ruling status quo in the country.”<sup>102</sup>

The problems of corruption and torture in Kyrgyzstan’s police force have been recognized by successive governments, and police reform efforts date back to 2001. Successive prime ministers adopted plans for reform, but none of them significantly changed the core institutions of the Ministry of Interior and police. As a result, police are perceived as one of the most corrupt public organizations in the country, with 43 percent of the population viewing them as very corrupt in 2017 (just behind the state automobile inspection agency and the courts). Just 53 percent of the population has a positive view of them, making them one of the most unpopular bodies in the country.<sup>103</sup> Finally, since the interethnic violence in June 2010, relations between the police and ethnic minorities represent a significant issue, as the minorities are often the subject of police brutality and remain under-represented in the police force. As noted earlier, women comprise 5.9 percent of uniformed police, while ethnic minorities represent only 4.3 percent.

As in most post-Soviet countries, the military and intelligence services, while sometimes deployed against internal opposition under autocratic leaders, are largely focused on external threats. The professional military, following the tradition of the Soviet Armed Forces, has largely stayed out of politics and internal political conflict. In general, the military has not played a significant role in the politics of Kyrgyzstan, either as a king-maker or a spoiler, or even as a bureaucratic constituency seeking a larger piece of the budgetary pie. The State Committee for National Security (GKNB), however, continues to be used for surveillance, intimidation and repression of opposition politicians, human rights

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<sup>99</sup> Esengeldiev, “Strengthening the Vertical: Kyrgyzstan’s 2016 Constitutional Referendum,” 3.

<sup>100</sup> Erica Marat, *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>101</sup> Kemel Toktomushev, *Kyrgyzstan - Regime Security and Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>102</sup> Toktomushev, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Center for Insights in Survey Research, “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Kyrgyzstan,” 16–17.

activists and media. Both the military and the GKNB remain under the direct control of the president, not the prime minister.

## PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector has emerged as an important force in the politics of Kyrgyzstan and is a potential bright spot for civic advocacy. The government has encouraged the development of new industries by exempting newly established enterprises from property, land, profit and sales taxes for at least five years.<sup>104</sup> The growth of this sector is one of the most promising developments in the past decade. According to the United Nation Development Program (UNDP), small- and medium-sized enterprises comprise about forty percent of GDP. The increased penetration of the internet to areas outside of Bishkek, even to rural communities, has had an important impact on the growth of small businesses.<sup>105</sup>

If current trajectories hold, the private sector will grow as an important source of both economic and political power in the country. As the number of groups in this sector diversifies, it can serve to balance other political interests in the country.

Just as individuals face challenges from the whims of state power in areas of criminal prosecution, so too do business leaders. According to some interviewees, this is what leads them into politics. According to a political analyst, the ability of businesses to operate has improved since the Bakiyev years when the government was often captured by close family, “clan” members, or individuals from the same region. With reduced government intervention in the economy, businesses are now better positioned to grow, which in turn generates growth in the economy. The analyst noted that informal analysis showed that bribes had gone down during the past several years, which has also made business more competitive.<sup>106</sup>

The Kyrgyz economy is relatively open, and this has facilitated economic growth as well as opportunities for malfeasance. The academic literature suggests that access to global financial markets is an important resource that can enhance the influence of the private sector on domestic political outcomes.<sup>107</sup> Easy access to global financial institutions and availability of offshore markets strengthened corrupt members of the regime’s hold on political and economic power, giving them a feeling of impunity. When the Akayev and Bakiyev regimes faced rising protests against corruption, both acted quickly to protect their wealth and transfer funds offshore.<sup>108</sup> It was the ability to transfer wealth to offshore sites that emboldened these leaders to repress internal dissent. The opportunities for offshore business deals lead to the “criminalization” of the Kyrgyz state.<sup>109</sup> In this way, Kyrgyzstan and its political and business

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<sup>104</sup> Maria Levina, “Kyrgyzstan to Focus on Private Sector Development,” *The Times of Central Asia*, May 26, 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Nyshka Chandran, “Belt and Road: Tech Entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan,” *CNBC*, January 29, 2018, sha.

<sup>106</sup> Interview, local political analyst, Bishkek.

<sup>107</sup> Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw, *Dictators Without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2017); Alexander Cooley and J. C. Sharman, “Blurring the Line between Licit and Illicit: Transnational Corruption Networks in Central Asia and Beyond,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 11–28; Brent B. Allred et al., “Anonymous Shell Companies: A Global Audit Study and Field Experiment in 176 Countries,” *Journal of International Business Studies* 48, no. 5 (2017): 596–619.

<sup>108</sup> Erica Marat, “Global Money Laundering and Its Domestic Political Consequences in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 46–56.

<sup>109</sup> Marat, 53.

leaders became major players in global markets, which in turn strengthened the relationship between patronage networks and control of the state.

## **RUSSIA**

Russia has enormous leverage over the Kyrgyz economy through remittances as well as the presence of a Russian military base in Kant. Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 has only increased this influence. This means that external pressure from Russia, which promotes personalities that are sympathetic to Moscow, will generally be more influential than Western efforts to promote democracy. If democracy is seen as something that is supported by the West as a means of influencing Kyrgyz politics rather than to solve problems facing society, it will face external challenges from Russia as well as internal concerns from a polity that realizes its fate is tied more closely to Russia than any other country.

Much of the recent economic growth witnessed in the country is the result of the Kyrgyz Republic's August 2015 accession to the EEU, which increased trade and investment with Russia. Joining the Union had two important impacts on domestic political considerations within the country. First, it dramatically increased Kyrgyz labor migration to member states—most notably Russia. After 2015 it became much easier for Kyrgyz citizens to work and live in Russia—far easier than for migrants from other Central Asian republics. Second, the country has begun to harmonize its laws and regulations to conform to EEU standards.

Kyrgyzstan's economy is deeply reliant upon Russia. In 2017 Kyrgyzstan received the largest amount of remittances of any EEU country: \$2.21 billion was sent to Kyrgyzstan from Russia, which is a 27 percent annual increase and slightly more than the \$2.1 billion record set four years ago.<sup>110</sup> In 2017, Kyrgyz GDP totaled \$7.2 billion, which means that a little over 30 percent of the economy is dependent upon remittances from Russia,<sup>111</sup> giving Russia enormous leverage over Kyrgyzstan.

President Atambayev went out of his way to show his fealty to Russian preeminence in Central Asia and argued for a “special relationship” with Russia. In October 2017, Russia wrote off Kyrgyzstan's \$240 million debt. Earlier Russia wrote off \$500 million in debt in exchange for a 15-year extension of the lease of the Russian military base in Kant. This all points to two things. First, political change in Kyrgyzstan is something Russia can seemingly facilitate or prevent. Second, Russia seems now to have accepted the new order of things despite an ideological distaste for Kyrgyzstan's democratic experiments.

Russia put enormous pressure on Kyrgyzstan to evict the United States from the Manas Transit Center. It has emerged as an important security partner for the country, promising not only writing off debt, but providing military assistance in four security installations in the country. Russia has also provided weapons and other military equipment worth at least \$1 billion to Kyrgyzstan as part of a bilateral

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<sup>110</sup> Eurasia.net, “Remittances to Central Asia Surge But Fall Short of Historic Highs,” March 22, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

armed forces assistance program, leading some analysts to believe that Russia has more influence in Kyrgyzstan than other Central Asian states.<sup>112</sup>

There is a sizeable Russian minority living in Kyrgyzstan, although they are now approximately six percent of the population, down from nearly one-quarter of the population when the Soviet Union collapsed. There were once worries that the Russian population could be a potential fifth-column in Kyrgyzstan but given the sizable Kyrgyz population now living in Russia, Russia's true leverage is through the Kyrgyz population there.

Beyond its economic and historical-cultural role in Kyrgyzstan, Russia has started to deploy its own "development" footprint to contest Western influence, oppose Kyrgyz nationalist revision of the historical record and support ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan. Russia has set up and supports civil society organizations that in many ways parallel those set up with Western support. The Russian state has its own international development agency, *Rossotrudnichestvo* ("Russian Cooperation"). The original mandate of the agency was mostly cultural exchange, but it now supports "international development." Sixty-seven registered NGOs that it supports make up a "Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Kyrgyzstan." It opposes ethnic nationalism and contests attempts to "re-write" the history of the Soviet Union, especially of the Russian Civil War and World War II. It provides legal assistance to ethnic Russians and supports Victory Day parades and youth leadership programs. Russia provides support to the parliament through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, including templates for laws based on Russian legislation. It supports election observation through the CIS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In addition to the general access Kyrgyz have to Russia's main TV channels, the Russian international media arm "Russia Today" supports a radio station called "Sputnik Kyrgyzstan" in the Kyrgyz and Russian languages that is something of a competitor with the U.S.-sponsored RFE-RL (Radio Azattyk).

## CHINA

Although Russia plays an important and even at times direct role in the politics of Kyrgyzstan, the growing economic influence of China<sup>113</sup> has somewhat tempered the influence of Russia on domestic politics. The regional influence of China in Central Asia cannot be understated. Chinese economic investments are particularly important for Kyrgyzstan. Under President Atambayev, China became the largest trading partner of the Kyrgyz Republic.

China's diverse interests in Kyrgyzstan include transportation, energy and technology, as well as security and intelligence cooperation. Chinese interests in Kyrgyzstan seem focused on improving transportation linkages, particularly railways and roads that help connect China to its neighbors in Central Asia. China is also investing heavily in efforts by the Kyrgyz government to develop its technological and telecommunications infrastructure and become a digital hub for China's Belt Road Initiative as part of former Prime Minister Isakov's "Tazakoom" initiative. Chinese firms are working with the government to help convert Bishkek and Osh into "smart" cities, which would allow government officials to better

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<sup>112</sup> Stephanie Ott, "Russia Tightens Control over Kyrgyzstan," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2014, sec. World news.

<sup>113</sup> Chris Rickleton, "Kyrgyzstan: Jeenbekov Goes to Beijing with China the Talk of Bishkek," *EurasiaNet*, June 6, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/s/kyrgyzstan-jeenbekov-goes-to-beijing-with-china-the-talk-of-bishkek>.

monitor service delivery and resources. Such cooperation may also enhance surveillance. Along with this effort, China and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to share intelligence and cooperate on security issues, especially those related to Kyrgyzstan's border with Xinjiang.<sup>114</sup>

This cooperation with China has led to some infrastructure improvements, with promises of more on the way, but has also left the country heavily indebted to China, as the country now accounts for around half of Kyrgyzstan's \$4 billion in foreign debt, which is quite significant given that annual GDP is only around \$7 billion.<sup>115</sup> Nor are relations with China without tension. Former Prime Ministers Sapar Isakov and Jantoro Satybaldiyev, along with ex-Bishkek mayor Kubanychbek Kulmatov, who were allies of Atambayev—were placed under arrest related to corruption investigations. These officials were investigated for a business deal that allowed a Chinese firm, TBEA, to provide \$386 million of credit for the modernization of Bishkek's main electrical power plant. In spring 2018, the Bishkek city council rejected an agreement of the President that would allow the Embassy of China to expand the amount of land it could lease in Bishkek free of charge (although under political pressure the city council later reversed this vote). This heavy indebtedness—and links with recent corruption scandals—may be leading some politicians to rethink the increasingly close ties with China.

Citizen perceptions of China and Chinese investment are usually not positive. For example, in the town of Toguz-Toro in the southern province of Jalal-Abad, residents burned buildings at a gold processing plant that was part of a Chinese joint venture. Residents in the South have protested other Chinese investments in the area. Social media, academics and even local Chinese linguists have openly worried about what many perceive to be the rapid growth of Chinese “cultural and humanitarian influence...and systematic promotion of Chinese ‘soft power’ which promotes Chinese interests and projects.”<sup>116</sup>

## KAZAKHSTAN

Although Russia and China have the most prominent roles in Kyrgyzstan's domestic politics, due to their economic leverage, in recent years Kazakhstan has also played an important role. The Kyrgyz Republic's much larger and wealthier neighbor looms large over domestic politics in the smaller country. For most of the past 26 years, relations between the two countries have been healthy. But the 2017 presidential campaign featured deep conflicts over the role of Kazakhstan in domestic politics and even charges of interference. These came not long after Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with presidential candidate Babanov in Astana in September 2017 shortly before Kyrgyzstan's elections, signaling that Babanov was the Kazakhstan government's choice for president.<sup>117</sup> In early October, just a week before the elections, Atambayev accused the government of Kazakhstan of meddling in

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<sup>114</sup> Danny Anderson, “Risky Business: A Case Study of PRC Investment in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,” Jamestown, August 10, 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Altynai Mambetova and James Kilner, “Kyrgyzstan Grows Wary of China amid Corruption Probe,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, July 4, 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Altynai Mambetova and James Kilner, “Kyrgyzstan Grows Wary of China amid Corruption Probe,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, July 4, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Andrew Witthoef, “Kazakhstan's Border Spat with Kyrgyzstan: More Than Just a Speed Bump,” *The Diplomat*, December 13, 2017.



Kyrgyzstan's internal affairs and of corruption and embezzlement.<sup>118</sup> Within three days the government of Kazakhstan tightened its borders with Kyrgyzstan.<sup>119</sup> Kyrgyzstan in turn filed complaints against Kazakhstan with both the EEU and World Trade Organization (WTO), accusing the country of imposing an economic blockade. The Atambayev government also suspended operations at a copper and gold mine run by a Kazakhstan-based firm.

Tensions between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan quickly eased after Jeenbekov was sworn into office. Jeenbekov withdrew the complaints before the WTO, saying all disputes had been resolved. His first trip overseas after being sworn in was to Astana where he visited President Nazarbayev and the leaders of the two republics promised stronger bilateral ties.<sup>120</sup>

The relatively peaceful relations between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan may have only temporarily fractured during late 2017, but it demonstrated the economic power that Kazakhstan has over its smaller neighbor. For now, relations appear to be stable as long as Nazarbayev remains in power in Kazakhstan. But at 78 years old, he is the longest serving leader in the region, and a political change in Kazakhstan could have a significant impact in Kyrgyzstan.

## LABOR MIGRANTS

According to official statistics, over 800,000 of Kyrgyzstan's 6.1 million citizens work abroad (unofficial statistics place the number much higher).<sup>121</sup> Such heavy dependence on migrant labor is both an opportunity and a challenge for the state.

On the one hand, migrant labor is the engine driving Kyrgyzstan's economic growth, as a third of the GDP is dependent upon remittances from Russia. Public opinion indicates that these remittance flows, and the economic growth they generate, are yielding increased citizen satisfaction in Kyrgyzstan which, as noted earlier, seems to be independent of the government's ability to "deliver" services. In addition, migration can serve as a safety valve for weak public services by significantly reducing the number of citizens the government must serve.

On the other, there is a worry among many that migration has accelerated the brain drain in the country as many of the young and talented move overseas to take advantage of economic opportunities. There is also a persistent concern that migrants from Central Asia living in Russia are ripe for radicalization. Previous research by USAID demonstrated that labor migrants were the primary source of recruits from Central Asia for violent extremist organizations, even though those represent a miniscule percentage of all labor migrants from Central Asia. Migration and the associated breaking of community bonds for migrants facilitate radicalization abroad. By contrast, this research found, pressure from elders and family serve to restrain younger members at home from engaging in political activity or

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<sup>118</sup> Bruce Pannier, "Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan Row: A Spat Between Friends Or A Parting Of Ways?," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, October 25, 2017,

<sup>119</sup> "Kyrgyz Leader Elected in Landmark Vote," *BBC News*, October 15, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> "Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Pledge to Improve Ties in Wake of Trade War," *Reuters*, December 25, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/kyrgyzstan-kazakhstan-trade-war/kyrgyzstan-kazakhstan-pledge-to-improve-ties-in-wake-of-trade-war-idUSKBN172001>

<sup>121</sup> Aygerim Akyubekova, "Дети Мигрантов - Сироты При Живых Родителях," *Радио Азаттык (Кыргызская Служба Радио Свободная Европа/Радио Свобода)*, July 2, 2018.

more politicized religious groups.<sup>122</sup> As the conflagration in Syria and Iraq has slowed and the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) has collapsed, there has been growing fear among authorities that Kyrgyz citizens who fought in this conflict may return back home and threaten domestic stability.

Unlike the neighboring countries of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, whose migrants are overwhelmingly men, women comprise more than 40 percent of labor migrants leaving Kyrgyzstan. This creates a challenging dynamic for families when parents leave their children behind. There is little doubt that migration and the absence of parents have had a deep psychological impact on hundreds of thousands of children who are left behind. Often, children are left with relatives, but often relatives face challenges caring for them. Reporting shows that children are often not well cared for by cash-strapped relatives or that they are taken care of elderly grandparents who do not have the energy to watch over them.<sup>123</sup> Some relatives have left children with orphanages or other state institutions.

## WOMEN

Democracy has produced mixed political and social outcomes for women in the Kyrgyz Republic. The government has adopted almost every consequential international convention on gender equality and the elimination of violence against women, yet the situation of women has become more challenging.

Women are active members of the civil service, consisting of more than 40 percent of the workforce. The distribution of women across sectors reflects gendered roles, however, with women making up 73 percent of employees in the Ministry of Labor and Society Development and 70 percent in the Ministry of Health. This contrasts with 26 percent in the General Prosecutor's office and 18 percent in the State Customs Service. Representation of women in the civil service at the local level is only around 33 percent, which is substantially lower than at the national level.<sup>124</sup> Representation in the public sector, both in the number of seats they hold in parliament and in the civil service, has declined steadily over the past several years, however.

Nearly one-third of women and girls age 15-49 have been victims of domestic violence.<sup>125</sup> Bride kidnapping and early marriage are the most common types of gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan. Child marriage is an issue that key informants said seemed to be increasing. According to women's activists in Bishkek, approximately 20-25 percent of marriages in the Kyrgyz Republic involve an illegal act, whether this is early marriage or bride-kidnapping. In 2016 a law was passed that banned religious child marriages, where girls were forced to wed in religious unions that were not registered. In such cases, marriages are blessed by a local religious leader, usually an imam. According to official data, the number of births among women aged 15-17 has grown from 4.4 per 1,000 births in 2006 to 7.4 in 2014. Similarly, the birthrate among women aged 18-19 increased from 62.7 per 1,000 births in 2006 to 92.4 in 2014. Both are strong indicators that child marriage is on the rise in the country. According to United

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<sup>122</sup> USAID, "Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses" (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Akylbekova.

<sup>124</sup> UNFPA, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Human Rights Watch, "'Call Me When He Tries to Kill You': State Response to Domestic Violence in Kyrgyzstan" (New York: Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2015).

Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) survey data, underage marriage is growing for number of reasons. In the nationally-representative survey, the most striking finding was that a plurality of respondents blamed girls themselves for the increase in early marriage: 23 percent said early marriage was on the rise due to the desire of girls to get married early; 18 percent said it was due to family poverty; 17 percent said it was due to early sexual activity among young people; 16 percent believe it is due to the growing influence of Islam; and 11 percent said it resulted from the increased abduction of girls for marriage.<sup>126</sup>

Bride kidnapping appears to be on the rise as well,<sup>127</sup> although some observers argue that the perceived increase is a function of underreporting in the past. Numbers of bride-kidnappings are difficult to attain due to shame of the victim or lack of willingness to report the issue. According to Freedom House, about 10,000 cases of bride abduction occur in the country each year. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there has been almost a fourfold increase in bride abductions each year.<sup>128</sup> According to the UNFPA survey, 81 percent of women and 78 percent of men are against bride kidnapping, but the highest proportion of those who support it are 21-30 years old.<sup>129</sup>

Lack of trust in judicial institutions is a major deterrent for women as they cope with issues such as domestic violence, divorce, custody battles and child marriage. Due to perceptions of corruption in the legal system, along with their more vulnerable position in society, women avoid courts.

Women have not fared well in terms of political participation. USAID implementing partners complained that the political party system has not been beneficial for women, even though there is a quota for women in the parliament. In 2005 no women were elected to Parliament. After this a gender quota was introduced, which brought the number of women in Parliament to 26 percent. This number has fallen steadily each year since 2010 to just over 20 percent in the 2015 Parliamentary elections. This falls below the 30 percent target set by the United Nations.<sup>130</sup> Even when women are elected to parliament under the quota system, once seated they often resign and are replaced by men. In fact, there is no legislation that prevents female MPs from being replaced by men. Social scientists the team spoke with also expressed concern that the women's forum in parliament is not as effective as it could be due to tensions within the group.<sup>131</sup>

Women are also less visible and active in the economic sphere, as nearly 40 percent of all women in the country are housewives; they rarely have household assets registered in their names (such as houses, cars, agricultural equipment); and they are likely to be employed in the informal sector of the economy.<sup>132</sup> Women who return from labor migration face challenges when they return home. During

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<sup>126</sup> UNFPA, "Gender in Society Perception Study" (Bishkek: United Nations Population Fund, 2016), 93,

<sup>127</sup> Lesia Nedoluzhko and Victor Agadjanian, "Between Tradition and Modernity: Marriage Dynamics in Kyrgyzstan," *Demography* 52, no. 3 (2015): 861–82.

<sup>128</sup> UNFPA, "Gender in Society Perception Study," 13.

<sup>129</sup> UNFPA, 94.

<sup>130</sup> UNFPA, "Gender in Society Perception Study," 12.

<sup>131</sup> Interview, social scientist, Bishkek.

<sup>132</sup> UNFPA, "Gender in Society Perception Study," 33.

migration women experience a kind of independence or liberation they may not have at home. When they return, they are sometimes subject to violence by nationalistic groups who form a kind of “moral police” to track women who they believe led an immoral lifestyle in Russia. According to the UNFPA survey, these groups are supported by about half of the population.<sup>133</sup>

Gender inequality follows generational lines as young Kyrgyz women who serve as daughters-in-law have less power in their own families than their mothers-in-law, for instance. Gender dynamics also have an extraordinary impact on men in households, as young men often seek to migrate so that they can earn bride prices.

As noted earlier, survey data indicate growing religiosity among all Muslims in Kyrgyzstan—including women. This is for several reasons. First, Islamic-based groups are increasingly providing social support to families that have been unable to find such support through government sources. These organizations provide women a sense of social solidarity and support that they are unable to find elsewhere. Furthermore, when women appear to be more pious by their dress, they are accorded more respect within their communities and perhaps even within the formal judicial system.<sup>134</sup> In this way, outward signs of religiosity can in some cases provide women with a slight buffer against malfeasance. Religiosity also allows women who are labor migrants to other countries to “cover up for perceived sins” while in abroad.<sup>135</sup>

During the past two decades, USAID has invested heavily in civil society organizations that promote women’s interests. In a focus group discussion, women civil society leaders who had received substantial support from USAID over the past decade painted a dire picture of their lack of impact on the overall situation in the country. Although they said they had had an impact on the drafting of laws and legislation, activists agreed that they had “lost the battle with Islam.”<sup>136</sup> In this context, these leaders meant that Islamic civil society organizations had been far more successful than the largely secular, urban-based organizations in gaining adherents and members. They said that the entire concept of gender in Kyrgyzstan had become associated with a Western or donor-imported concept, so discussion of this idea is viewed by many as a negative. They encouraged donors to work more with men and to stop using the term gender and instead focus on problems that needed to be solved.

## YOUTH

The Kyrgyz Republic is a young country. According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), over half of the population in Kyrgyzstan is under the age of 25, and almost one-third of the population is between 15 and 25 years old. Poverty affects over 40 percent of young people, and access to public

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<sup>133</sup> Asel Murzakulova, “Kyrgyzstan: Migrant Women Workers and a ‘lost Generation’ of Children,” *The Conversation*, October 24, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Interview, social scientist, Bishkek.

<sup>135</sup> Interview, social scientist, Bishkek.

<sup>136</sup> Focus group, women civil society, Bishkek.

services—especially education—is sporadic due in part to endemic corruption, and economic opportunities remain very limited.<sup>137</sup>

Youth represents an area—like so many others in the country—where the government has adopted sound policies but faces challenges in attaining effective outcomes. The country has passed many youth policies but few of these seem to improve youth outcomes as many of the laws are spontaneous responses to political events or are passed in response to international pressure. Once passed, most laws do not have effective implementation mechanisms that allow them to achieve their goals.<sup>138</sup> An exception may be the Constitution’s youth quota in parliament, which mandates that no less than 15 percent of candidates be younger than 36 years old. This did raise the number of young politicians in parliament.

Unlike other countries in the post-Soviet space that have been able to maintain acceptable educational standards despite relatively low per-capita GDP rates, education in the Kyrgyz Republic has languished. Even in Bishkek, informants lamented what they perceived to be the quickly deteriorating quality of education. Despite high levels of spending on education, outcomes are poor. In 2006 and 2009 Program for International Student Assessment rankings, the Kyrgyz Republic ranked last in math, science and reading among nations that participated in the survey.<sup>139</sup>

There appears to be growing disillusionment among Kyrgyz youth with the government. In a systematic series of focus group/life-exploration interviews, the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ) found that Kyrgyz youth “rely on themselves and the support of their family, not on government structures or support programs.”<sup>140</sup> The report also found that corruption was a major source of mistrust in government, as youth view corruption to be present in education, the economy, the labor market and even health care. The youth interviewed for the research believed it to be “omnipresent in public life,” undermining trust in all public institutions, especially the judiciary and legal authorities, and they named it as a major cause of inequality and an impediment to social advancement.<sup>141</sup> A focus group of university students conducted by the assessment team found that corruption was the primary concern of young people. They said they have scant hope for the future because almost everything is tainted by corruption, giving them few public organizations in which they can believe. The desire of most of these students was simply to leave the country rather than try to grapple with the complex challenges of domestic political life.<sup>142</sup> According to research by Mercy Corps, young members the Uzbek minority in southern Kyrgyzstan are especially deeply alienated by the government and their exclusion from higher education and government positions since they do not speak Kyrgyz.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/adolescents-youth>

<sup>138</sup> Chinara Esengul, Baglan Mamaev, and Natalia Yefimova-Trilling, “Youth and Public Policy in Kyrgyzstan” (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2012),

<sup>139</sup> Dingyong Hou, “Education Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Europe and Central Asia Knowledge Brief* 40 (April 2011): 4.

<sup>140</sup> GIZ, “Youth in Kyrgyzstan: Bridging Tradition and Modernity” (Bishkek: GIZ, 2015), 10,

<sup>141</sup> GIZ, 13.

<sup>142</sup> Focus Group Discussion, university students, Bishkek.

<sup>143</sup> Timothy Harris, “Vulnerable to Manipulation” (Bishkek: Mercy Corps, 2016), 3-4.

As noted earlier, labor migration has had a significant impact on children in Kyrgyzstan. According to a social scientist the team interviewed, children are traumatized when their parents are away, and schools tend to put children of migrants on special lists, classifying them almost as orphans. Although this policy may be intended to protect children, it has the opposite effect of stigmatizing them. Early research on this topic shows that most children left behind tend to have more behavioral and educational challenges than peers living with parents. Specifically, these children had higher levels of anxiety and were more introverted. Among older children parental absence made them more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, skip school, and fight. These problems are exacerbated in rural areas.<sup>144</sup>

The government and the international community are concerned that the young people are vulnerable to exploitation by extremist recruiters, both in country and in countries to which youth migrate. The government has responded to extremist recruitment by stepping up campaigns against “pseudo-Islamic movements” by holding anti-extremist rallies among high school students and holding competitions in schools to select drawings and posters that best depict a disdain for extremism.<sup>145</sup>

## **STEP THREE: USAID INTERESTS AND USG PRIORITIES**

### **U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND BROADER USAID DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS**

Kyrgyzstan’s role for the United States in realizing its foreign policy goals in the South and Central Asian region goes beyond its affinity as one of the few functioning fellow democracies in the neighborhood. From the initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, Kyrgyzstan supported U.S. and coalition military operations in Afghanistan as a critical and reliable ally. From December 2001 Kyrgyzstan – under Akayev, Bakiyev and then the new democratic government – offered the use of Bishkek’s airport as first a U.S. Airbase and then as the Manas Transit Center, a critical facility in moving men and materiel in and out of Afghanistan.

Relations between the United States and Kyrgyzstan soured under President Atambayev. Atambayev announced that he would close the Center soon after his election when the lease ran out and kept to his word. The Manas Transit Center was closed June 2014. In July 2015 Atambayev renounced the 1993 bilateral agreement with USAID in response to the U.S. State Department awarding jailed ethnic Uzbek journalist and activist Azimjon Askarev the human rights prize. This action, while not substantially impacting the ability to implement programs in Kyrgyzstan, did lead to curtailing most USAID programs that worked with the government of Kyrgyzstan, in particular the Good Governance and Public Administration Support (GGPAS) program, and to a hold on developing new programs that supported the GOK and Parliament. This represented a strategic shift away from the U.S. and towards Russia, although not a renunciation of democracy.

With the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, some 500 foreign fighters, mostly recruited among labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan, were radicalized and joined the extremist groups in that conflict. The ongoing human rights and inter-ethnic problems described above in Kyrgyzstan undermine democratic

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<sup>144</sup> Amy Duke, “Well-Being of ‘left behind’ Children in Kyrgyzstan Focus of Study,” Phys.org, August 8, 2018.

<sup>145</sup> Sanzhar Sharipov, “Kyrgyzstan Steps up Efforts to Protect Youth from Extremist Recruiters,” *Caravanserai*, January 20, 2017,

reform but may also serve as “push” factors for some segments of the population to seek alternatives to waiting for the situation to change. The U.S. is investing in programming to address the recruitment problem both among labor migrants and within Kyrgyzstan itself. These programs clearly overlap with the problem set described in this assessment and are managed by the same DRG office.

The U.S. Government’s National Security Strategy and the USAID/State Department Joint Strategic Plan are now actively seeking to counter Russian and Chinese influence in Central Asia when that influence works against U.S. interests or has a detrimental impact on the development of democracy in the region. To date, this has largely meant an increase in media sector funding to provide diverse sources of information for the region, but also places an emphasis on countering disinformation.

The USG also tracks Kyrgyzstan’s capacity to interdict trafficking in persons, narcotics, nuclear materials and other threats. Kyrgyzstan faces problems in monitoring its borders because of its mountainous terrain. The U.S. Department of Justice and State Department provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior, State Customs Service and Border Guards on these issues. These interventions provide a potential entry point for work on professionalization, reform and anticorruption in these institutions which could very easily complement the ability of the USG to address the main DRG problem described above.

Finally, USAID globally hopes to move countries over time away from development assistance and towards a “Path to Self-Reliance.” In the context of Kyrgyzstan, with reduced top-line levels of assistance overall and for DRG, this suggests emphasizing programs that are focused more on organic and sustainable citizen engagement rather than on relatively expensive government reform or on-budget support.

## **USAID’S DRG PROGRAMS**

USAID has invested heavily over the past twenty-six years in democracy programs in Kyrgyzstan across a broad spectrum of sub-sectors. Since 2010 DRG programming has been active across nearly all DRG sectors. The table in Annex 5 illustrates the development of these programs and where they are on the program cycle.

## **USAID’S RESOURCES**

During the period of Kyrgyzstan’s political transition, USAID’s presence in the country underwent a transition from a satellite representative office of the USAID/Central Asian Republics (CAR) Mission based in Almaty with a mid-level representative into an independent USAID Mission with a senior-level mission director. Funding for DRG programming in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Mission’s top line budget, are decreasing steadily from the high-water mark after 2010. This suggests that some parts of the current portfolio may need to be reconsidered going forward.

## **DONOR COORDINATION**

The international donor community is very active in Kyrgyzstan. Coordination is conducted through the Donor Partners Coordination Council (DPCC), whose members are donor agency heads, and many thematic working groups that report to the DPCC. The USAID DRG Team participates in four working groups, covering rule of law and human rights, governance, elections, and e-governance and information

communication technologies. These bodies are largely a tool for information sharing and coordinating joint responses to GOK requests for feedback. In the past, USAID has partnered with other donors to implement activities. For instance, USAID funded a UNDP budget transparency program in 2012-14, and DFID has programmed its democracy and governance money through USAID to support legislative strengthening and civil society, areas in which USAID has a proven track record.

## **PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE RECIPIENT SIDE**

Many if not all the organizations with which USAID works (parliament, the Supreme Court, the CEC, the bar, line ministries, local government, etc.) are critically underfunded and understaffed. This often means that, in areas of high priority, international donors may in fact be better equipped with more and better paid staff than the GOK. Government institutions, as noted in Step Two, are also subject to frequent changes of personnel and leadership, which creates difficulty in gaining momentum for USAID programs supporting reform. It has also been common for GOK and civil society organization staff that receive extensive training or opportunities to travel through donor support to have their qualifications improved beyond what the public sector can afford, and they wind up working in international institutions or in the private sector or emigrating. These factors will continue to be constraints on USAID's ability to find partners in government who can sustain momentum for reform over an extended period of time.

## **STEP FOUR: OUTLINING THE PROPOSED STRATEGY**

The existing DRG strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic focuses heavily on supporting national level political institutions in the wake of the opportunities and political will that followed the 2010 Revolution. There appeared to be strong political will to create an independent parliament, promote human rights, strengthen political parties and reform the judiciary. Today, the government does not seem to have high levels of political will to pursue a specific set of national reforms in most of these areas. Although the current government has spoken about judicial reform, it is unclear whether it has the political will to carry out these difficult reforms. The government may announce new policy priorities but does not provide a clear signal that it will follow through on grand reorganization plans or implement laws (if they are passed) in order for meaningful change to emerge.

As this report has noted, citizens are turning to sources other than the state for political, economic and social meaning. It is outside the state where collective action also has its greatest impact. This shift away from a state-centric polity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for USAID as it considers how to strengthen democracy, rights and governance outcomes in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The inability of the government to move forward with promised reforms at the national level, along with this general citizen shift away from government institutions, suggests that USAID consider shifting how it envisions DRG programming in the Kyrgyz Republic. Rather than focusing primarily on institutional reforms at the national level, programs should target where opportunities are the greatest—and that is at the level of citizens and citizen engagement.

**Our most important recommendation is that, going forward, the DRG strategy should seek to engage the dynamic, contradictory and vibrant forces in civil society in Kyrgyzstan and focus on promoting citizen resilience and local self-governance, especially in those areas where government performance remains weak yet where action is important to**



**citizens.** Secondly, USAID should continue to support advocacy and citizen engagement with government officials to promote policy change from the bottom-up where political will exists. This means that USAID should continue to engage in policy areas where there seem to be opportunities for reform and engagement, but rather than exclusively working with state organizations at the national level, engagement should be at the local level where opportunities for both implementation and impact on citizen lives are the greatest. Future USAID DRG work in the Kyrgyz Republic should harness the active non-state sector in the country and build citizen ability to address problems and, where possible, promote government reform, by focusing on problem solving and public goods provision at the local level, and on bringing citizens together with the government to improve accountability and performance in specific areas.

Two critical issues potentially cut across the three programming areas discussed in more detail below:

- **Integrity and Anti-Corruption:** Corruption is the most important issue facing the people of the Kyrgyz Republic. Given the broad concerns across almost all segments of society with corruption, USAID should consider amplifying its anti-corruption programming. This can be done two ways: First, it can be embraced systematically as a fundamental cross-cutting issue that can be messaged by each individual program in the DRG portfolio and modeled in the work of each implementing partner. Second, USAID could consider a stand-alone anti-corruption program that focuses on access to justice at the local level. There are many ways such a program could be implemented, and it is beyond the scope of this report to say what the best method could be for such a program. At the local level, a cross-sectoral program focused on testing and scaling social accountability initiatives could be an important place to start.
- **Gender:** Just as corruption remains a pervasive issue, so are changing gender dynamics in the country. Most women (and many men) we spoke to for this assessment expressed concern about the changing gender dynamics in Kyrgyzstan. USAID may consider a stand-alone gender program to address the changing environment in the country. It may also wish to focus efforts on civic engagement or anti-corruption around women's groups or issues that affect women (see below). Such a program must also engage men.

## ENGAGE NEW FORMS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

There appears to be a sea change in local politics in Kyrgyzstan that is driving attitudes towards the legitimacy of the central government. Citizens are no longer looking to the state as the only entity that can solve problems or provide collective goods. This means that citizens are increasingly turning to one another to solve challenging problems. This is evident in the resurgence of customary and religious forms of civic organization that provide increasing meaning and support in community and individual life.<sup>146</sup>

Future activities should engage with citizens in the way that they organize in their communities, real-world, on-line and both. The focus should be on generating advocacy and mobilization around issues of collective concern that reflect local needs and support local initiatives. Future activities should aim not to create new organizations but to support groups where there is a common cause, whether this is

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<sup>146</sup> Judith Beyer, *The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

fighting official corruption in local or national government or supporting communities to provide a public good that the state has been unwilling or unable to provide to citizens.

The current USAID DRG strategy in Kyrgyzstan emphasizes collaboration between citizens and government. In fact, the current civil society program is named the “Collaborative Governance Program” to make just this point. Going forward, the assessment team recommends that programming not only be collaborative but also encourage citizens to speak up about violations of human rights and corruption and provide support for such activities in the form of advice on legal issues and training in such topics as safe internet use, effective communications strategies and on-line outreach. Possible program engagements might include the following:

- USAID should explore how to **work with community-based organizations and new organizational forms** where we find common cause, including with traditional and religiously-oriented groups. USAID could support efforts focused on specific issues, such as gender issues, property rights, bottom-up court monitoring and human rights, exposing official corruption, or other specific “pressure point” issues that are important to citizens in their communities. Designing such a program would take great time and effort and would be a significant departure from how USAID has supported civil society in the past. Rather than focus on organizational strengthening, this program would work with existing groups for purposes they have determined to be important. This would require more investigation than this assessment allows, and the design of a flexible programming approach.
- Programs that support issue-based **investigative journalism**—especially for internet-based journalists who are working in communities throughout the country in concert with activists—to help citizens redress grievances as they seek to fight corruption.
- The entire **on-line media** environment is an emerging opportunity (and threat) that USAID should monitor for programmatic opportunities. The power of local activism combined with on-line outreach is something worth exploring. On the other hand, vulnerability to on-line manipulation and disinformation may also be worth examining for programmatic opportunities.
- **Voter and Civic Education:** The buying and selling of votes involves both bad parties and bad voters. Civic and voter education is the most important line of effort for political competition, barring some breakthrough in electoral reform.
- Opportunities to support **local level activism that addresses the erosion of the position of women** (increasing bride-kidnapping, gender-based violence, and under-age marriage) was an area of activism by Muslim-oriented women’s community groups that the assessment team heard about repeatedly and could be an opportunity to engage these groups on issues of common interest.

## **HELP GOVERNMENT DELIVER ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**

USAID efforts to bolster dynamic civic associations at the local level should be accompanied by work with officials at the local level who can channel demands of civic organizations into better government policy, where possible. This engagement should happen in local self-governing units as well as in government ministries that serve subnational units.

- USAID/Kyrgyz Republic currently supports the **Community and Municipal Governance Initiative (CAMI) program**, which provides support to *Aiyl Okmotus* across the country. This work is particularly important given the fact that citizens find local government to be more effective than the national government and it should be continued.
- In addition, USAID should support better point-of-delivery mechanisms for government services. The **GGPAS Program** focused on improving the delivery of centrally-controlled services both on the national level and through the deconcentrated district (*raion*) offices that are responsible for critical services such as public safety, education, health care and records management. It is the assessment team’s understanding that this effort was interrupted by the government’s abnegation of the bi-lateral agreement with the United States, but that the GGPAS program was making significant progress on these issues. If this work becomes possible again, it is a natural complement to bottom-up local governance programs like CAMI.

### **OPPORTUNISTICALLY ENGAGE IN SYSTEMIC NATIONAL-LEVEL REFORM**

The strategy of supporting institutional reform at the national level in 2013-2018 made sense in the aftermath of the 2010 Revolution but was always contingent on the momentum for change those events brought. The momentum has stalled, and the “cement is dry” on the 2010 Revolution. Nonetheless, where there is an opportunity to engage and reasonable chance for success, USAID should be ready to provide support.

The following reform areas are potentially high impact. Political will to move forward is currently lacking or unclear, but USAID should be ready to respond should the new president initiate meaningful reforms in these areas:

- **Civil service reform:** At the subnational level, key informants spoke about the need to find ways to incentivize civil servants to remain in place despite the many rotations of power in ministries in Bishkek that cascade down to the subnational level. Issues of corruption cannot be dealt with effectively without a more stable and well-paid civil service. Civil service reform is a vast undertaking and to be successful requires cooperation and political will from leaders in the central government. Embarking on a serious overhaul of the civil service without the desire of the government to implement the reforms will only worsen existing conditions.
- **Judicial, prosecutorial and police reforms:** Most reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic depend heavily on the rule of law. These ministries remain under the heavy influence of the president and the power ministries he controls. Judicial reform has been a priority of several presidents, yet due to heavy interference by the executive in this sector, investments in this area have yielded very little return. In fact, continued investments in this sector without adequate political will may undermine USAID efforts in the country.
- **Electoral reform:** Should President Jeenbekov’s initiative to reform the electoral formula for Parliament move forward, USAID should be prepared to support these changes with the CEC. It is unclear at this time what kinds of programs in this sector would be necessary, as this would be dependent upon the nature of reforms. If a move to a more constituent-based system does, at some point, move ahead this would have significant implications not only for electoral reform but also for political parties, representation and policy-making.

## AREAS OF LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS

Over the past five years, USAID has worked on building national level institutions that would consolidate political reforms established by the 2010 Constitution. Almost a decade later, it appears that efforts to support national institutions may have reached their logical end point, either because those institutions have reached a sustainable outcome or because further progress is unlikely. While more work could be done in any of these areas, in our estimation these engagements should be low priority in a limited budget scenario:

- **Political party strengthening:** The current institutional landscape does not create a conducive environment for strong political parties. Political parties themselves have not exhibited a high level of interest in party training, building policy platforms or engaging with constituents. In many ways, political parties are weaker than they have been in years—and they have received substantial assistance from USAID and other donors. As noted earlier, without a constituent-based system, party members have little incentive to build strong bases of power in communities. They have very little reason to establish constituency offices and meet regularly with voters. If there were a change in the electoral formula, it would be worth examining assistance to political parties.
- **Public broadcasting:** USAID has invested heavily in public broadcasting in the Kyrgyz Republic. Support for KRTK has shown promising results in content and independence compared to 2010. There is value in continuing support for Yntymak, which has become a vital source for local news, especially in the country’s southern oblasts. However, this support should be contingent on Yntymak’s progress towards financial viability and the strengthening of its financial and editorial independence as a public broadcaster.
- **Electoral administration:** The CEC has shown itself quite capable of administering elections over the past twenty-five years. During the most recent presidential election, the government was able to successfully deploy biometric voting and other sophisticated means of safeguarding elections. Strong government capacity in this area means that future assistance to electoral administration is not a high priority. If Parliament were to adopt significant electoral reform that altered the voting system in a substantial way, USAID should revisit assistance in this area.
- **Defense Bar:** The establishment of the *Advokatura* as a legally-mandated bar association with oversight of the profession is a long-term success for USAID programming. This organization has received generous support over the years and appears ready to move forward without further assistance. Further support for the profession should be linked to overall reform of the rule of law sector.
- **Parliamentary support:** The analysis in Step Two suggests that Parliament, short of a reform of the electoral formula, is unlikely to assert independent law-making initiative or substantially improve its ability to reach out to and represent its “constituency.” To the extent that there is opportunity to support the third function of a legislature – oversight of the executive – USAID should be willing to engage.

## CONCLUSION: RETHINKING IMPLEMENTATION

After 25 years of development assistance to Kyrgyzstan, there seems to be a level of fatigue with current approaches. This was not only evident in interviews with recipients, but also came across from conversations with implementing partners, and is widely demonstrated in the scholarly and secondary

literature on donor assistance in the country.<sup>147</sup> The assessment team offers the following suggestions for how to approach promoting democracy, human rights and good governance in Kyrgyzstan across the portfolio in terms of implementation:

- **Implement adaptive management models:** Chronic instability in government due to swirling changes in ministry officials and policy priorities creates enormous challenges for achieving desired program outcomes. Implementers arrive with high hopes of fostering important change only to be frustrated by the lack of stability in the government. To address these problems in implementation, USAID/Kyrgyz Republic should consider implementation of adaptive management techniques<sup>148</sup> USAID defines adaptive management in ADS 201.6 as “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments to new information and changes in context.”<sup>149</sup> According to USAID, this approach is not about “changing goals during implementation, it is about changing the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes.”<sup>150</sup>

Adaptive management is to complexity awareness, whereby—rather than assuming linear theories of changes—close monitoring of both context and outcomes feeds back into program design on a frequent basis.<sup>151</sup> Although adaptive models are often used in conflict-affected areas, the instability in governance in Kyrgyzstan should also warrant use of this tool set.<sup>152</sup> The approach rests on four core principles that respond well to the dynamic situation in Kyrgyzstan: local solutions for local problems; pushing problem driven positive deviance; try, learn, iterate, and adapt; and scale through diffusion.<sup>153</sup> The GGPAS program came close to implementing an adaptive model because it allowed for goals to be set as opportunities for engagement. Currently, USAID/Central Asia’s Power the Future activity, a \$24 million single-award IDIQ contract designed to facilitate adaptive management through task orders driven by context and opportunity, may be a model to build on in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>154</sup>

- **Re-imagine programs and use new techniques:** USAID should consider adopting new, sector specific approaches to project implementation across the DRG sector. In interviews with

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<sup>147</sup> For example, see Elena Kim et al., “Making the ‘Empowered Woman’: Exploring Contradictions in Gender and Development Programming in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 228–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1450222>; Asel Doolot and John Heathershaw, “State as Resource, Mediator and Performer: Understanding the Local and Global Politics of Gold Mining in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2015.1010853>; Nick Megoran et al., “Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Projects in Southern Kyrgyzstan” (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014); Babken Babajanian, “Promoting Empowerment? The World Bank’s Village Investment Project in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 499–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2015.1095967>; Zukhra Iakubbayev, “Minorities in Kyrgyzstan: Changed by Revolution,” *OpenDemocracy*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/zukhra-iakubbaeva/minorities-in-kyrgyzstan>.

<sup>148</sup> Matt Andrews, *The Limits of Institutional Reform in Development*, 1 edition (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>149</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-adaptive-management-0>

<sup>150</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-adaptive-management-0>

<sup>151</sup> Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, “Escaping Capability Traps through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),” *World Development* 51 (2013): 234–244.

<sup>152</sup> For an example in the judicial sector, see: Matt Andrews, “Doing Complex Reform Through PDIA: Judicial Sector Change in Mozambique,” *Public Administration and Development* 35, no. 4 (October 1, 2015): 288–300, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1740>.

<sup>153</sup> USAID LEARN, “Program Driven Iterative Adaptation,” Text, USAID Learning Lab, July 9, 2018, <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/program-driven-iterative-adaptation>.

<sup>154</sup> See [https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/usaid\\_cen\\_asia\\_power\\_fut\\_act\\_2-pgr\\_final\\_5-16-18\\_508.pdf](https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/usaid_cen_asia_power_fut_act_2-pgr_final_5-16-18_508.pdf)

implementers, recipients and USAID staff, it became clear that some of the models of grants, trainings, efforts to build organizational capacity, and partnerships with certain programs have been used for 15 years or more. This is also evident in some of the scholarly literature on donor assistance to Kyrgyzstan. As a result, some civil society programs have become a “tarnished brand in the eyes of many Kyrgyzstanis.”<sup>155</sup> Others observed that, in gender empowerment programming, donor projects may actually marginalize religiously observant women by focusing on secular civil society and women’s groups.<sup>156</sup> The new five year strategy is an excellent opportunity to examine whether new, sector-specific implementation tools can be rolled out across the portfolio. Without such a reexamination, USAID runs the risk of having the most important recipients tune out programming because the tools used by such programs do not resonate as deeply with citizens as they once did. It is beyond the scope of this assessment to discuss what kind of approaches should be employed, however.

- **Shed old terms that have lost their meaning or have become politically charged:** Civil society, human rights and gender are just a few such terms that came up in the team’s interviews. Even the term “democracy” is now associated with a Western rather than a local message. USAID should consider how outcomes associated with these concepts are important rather than elevating the concepts themselves.
- **Reach out to other USAID missions with a similar problem set:** While it has always been obvious that Kyrgyzstan shares a common past with other Central Asian countries and other post-Soviet countries, the further away Kyrgyzstan gets from the Soviet Union, the more it looks like its Asian cousins. South and Southeast Asian countries have long histories of engaging and working with Islamic civil society and traditional social movements and in managing mass labor migration. The USAID missions in these countries (Indonesia and Bangladesh, for instance) could be useful partners for the Mission.

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<sup>155</sup> Megoran et al., “Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Projects in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” ii.

<sup>156</sup> Elmira Satybaldieva, “A Mob for Hire? Unpacking Older Women’s Political Activism in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 247–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1424114>.

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# ANNEX 3: DASHBOARD OF KEY FINDINGS

## I. Core DRG Challenges – 5

### Consensus

- There is little consensus about the rules of the political game
- The cost of losing an election is high as losers face prosecution
- Rules on paper differ from formal rules; this growing gap is fomenting discontent
- No consensus on scope and role of government in society
- No consensus on national identity, as ethnic minorities face discrimination

### Competition & Political Accountability

- Fewer meaningful choices in political parties; parties stand for less and are used primarily as election vehicles without strong party platforms
- The one district, party-list electoral system has stalled party development and accountability
- Voters often are paid to support candidates
- Dynamic internet journalism; state influence over public TV

### Rule of Law & Human Rights

- Many laws are well written, but not enforced or implemented
- Rule of law bodies are used for political gains
- Corruption weakens the state at all levels, but there has been progress on grand scale corruption
- Access to justice is a problem; low public trust in courts and law enforcement agencies
- Discrimination by law enforcement experienced acutely by minority populations
- Women face challenges accessing justice, and these challenges appear to be increasing

### Inclusion

- Issues of inclusion have worsened in recent years, especially for minority Uzbek population and women
- Sunni Islami is more accepted and even embraced by politicians
- Gender discrimination is common in Kyrgyzstani politics
- Few women or minorities serving in law enforcement agencies

### Government Responsiveness & Effectiveness

- Economy has improved because of remittances
- Life satisfaction increased but not because government has been more effective in producing collective goods and services
- Increasingly people looking for solutions outside government
- Public councils have mixed record, but mostly ineffective
- Under-resourced civil servants are easily corrupted
- Chronic govt turnover creates incentives for corruption

Problem Statement: Ineffective, unaccountable and often predatory government and rule of law institutions fail to deliver public goods or to protect the rights of all citizens. This prolonged inability to “deliver” has encouraged new forms of association outside the government sphere to fill in the gaps or address grievances, as new orientations and organizational forms compete to provide meaning and prosperity for the people.

## 4. Strategic & Illustrative Program Recommendations

### Citizen Collaboration

- Work with CBOs and new org. forms
- Support investigative journalism
- Local level initiatives that support women
- Voter and civic education

### Support Government Delivery at Local Level

- Support to Aiyi Okmotus, incl. through improved legal framework
- Improve service delivery mechanisms through national ministries

### Engage in Reform if Political will emerges

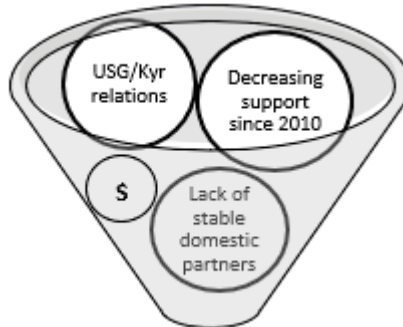
- Civil service reform
- Judicial, prosecutorial and police reforms
- Electoral reform

### Areas of Limited Effectiveness

- Political party strengthening
- Public broadcasting
- Electoral administration

**Design Considerations:** design flexibility & adaptive management; shedding terms such as “civil society” and even “gender,” which are considered Western imports; reach out to other USAID missions with similar problem set

## 3. USAID Constraints



### Critical Uncertainties

- Changes to electoral system
- Strengthening of executive power
- Quiescence of minority population
- Whether Islamic associations will remain out of politics
- Stability of migrant remittances

## 2. Key Actors & Institutional Arenas

### Executive Bodies

- Recentralization of government
- Reform agenda unclear
- Constantly shifting prime ministerships
- + Judicial reform may be priority
- + Anti-corruption message

### Legislature

- Parliament almost always votes to support executive
- + Elections well administered
- + Ability to pass quality laws

### Judiciary & Legal Sector

- + Judicial reform has been priority of current and past president
- Rhetoric on reform not matched by action
- + Advocatura institutionalized

### Security Sector

- President controls power ministries
- Deteriorating civilian oversight
- Lack of minorities in police
- + Armed forces stay out of politics

### Civil Society

- Influence of Western-supported civil society waning
- + Citizens active in communities but not in formal organizations
- Civil society organizations have limited membership

### Electoral Institutions

- + Govt has ability to administer elections in free and fair manner
- Corruption and vote buying pervasive
- + Biometric voting successfully implemented

### Media

- Freedom of media decreasing
- Intimidation of journalists
- Public TV under govt influence
- + Dynamic independent media
- + Internet media growing

### Private Sector

- + Growth of private sector
- + Increased influence of business associations in political life
- Business leaders join parliament to have political influence and steer corruption

### Religious Life

- +/- Islamic religious revival under way
- +/- Rise in popularity of Islamically-oriented media
- + Islamic organizations providing collective goods in communities

### Local Government

- Remains centralized
- + Aiyi Okmotus have been effective in their limited sphere
- /+ Variation in levels of centralization/decentralization of service delivery systems

### Civil Service

- Lack of competitive salaries incentivizes corruption
- Politicized cadres
- High turnover
- Low motivation

### Political Parties

- Parties have weak platforms and very small constituencies
- Parties only mobilize around elections
- Number of competitive parties decreased

### Human Rights Institutions

- + Civic organizations and independent media active in monitoring issues
- Govt pressure on journalists increased
- Ombudsman weak

### International Actors

- Russia drives remittances but undermines human rights
- +/- Chinese investment developing infrastructure but adding debt and opportunities for corruption

## ANNEX 4: DONOR MAPPING MATRIX

IMPLEMENTER	DONOR	PROJECT TITLE	DESCRIPTION	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	CONTACT
UNDP	Government of Denmark, SDC- Swiss Agency for Development	Kyrgyz Election Support Project II	Financed by UNDP and the Governments of Switzerland and Denmark, UNDP has been implementing electoral project named Kyrgyz Election Support Project - "KESP-II." Through KESP-II which is implemented in partnership with the CEC and SRS, UNDP has provided technical assistance in terms of introduction of ICT into electoral processes, contributed the improvements of the election administration bodies' capacities and consequently led to better managed and more credible elections.	2015-2018	\$2.3 million	Erkina Urazbaeva (head, peacebuilding) Programme Officer erkina.urazbaeva@undp.org
UNDP	JICA (Japan)	Project for Supporting the Unified State Population Registry to Establish the E-Government System	Following the successfully implemented joint initiative of the Government of Japan, UNDP in the Kyrgyz Republic and the State Registry Service (SRS) in the area of electoral assistance during 2015-2016, UNDP has developed this project in response to an explicit request from SRS to provide technical support, aiming at advancement of a fully functioning the Unified State Population Registry (USPR) in the Kyrgyz Republic, which will serve as a basis of an E-Government system in the Kyrgyz Republic.	2017-2018	\$5.5 million	Erkina Urazbaeva (head, peacebuilding) Programme Officer erkina.urazbaeva@undp.org
DFID	UK	Governance in Action	To strengthen the Kyrgyz political system by improving the responsiveness of Parliament and political parties to citizens' expectations and needs and supporting civil society to work more effectively with government. This will be achieved by building the institutional capacity of parliament and political parties to deliver more accountable and responsive governance and supporting MPs and civil society organizations to take action to stop corrupt behaviors through activities such as public information campaigns, influencing new legislation, and promoting improved working practices in the public sector. Implemented by National Democratic Institute (NDI).	2016-2020	8 million pounds	Aida Akmatbaeva, Head of DFID Programmes Tel: +996 (0) 312 303643 E-mail: a-tashirova@dfid.gov.uk

IMPLEMENTER	DONOR	PROJECT TITLE	DESCRIPTION	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	CONTACT
DFID	UK	Kyrgyz Republic Public Sector Reform Program	The Kyrgyz Republic Public Sector Reform program (PSR) works with the Government Apparatus (also referred to as the Prime Minister's Office), the National Statistic Commission (NSC) and other Government of Kyrgyzstan (GoK) stakeholders responsible for policy coordination in the country. The project aims to improve delivery of key government priorities that result in better outcomes for citizens and businesses through several components.	2016-2020	3.5 million pounds	Aida Akmatolieva, Head of DFID Programmes Tel: +996 (0) 312 303643 E-mail: a-tashirova@dfid.gov.uk
DFID	UK	National School of Government International (NSGI) support to country programs in sustainable center of government reforms	To deliver high quality strategic advice and support on center of government and cross-cutting institutional reform. To improve governance thorough delivery of short and long term programmatic interventions framing and solving problems identified by counterparts.	2018-2021	730k pounds	Aida Akmatolieva, Head of DFID Programmes Tel: +996 (0) 312 303643 E-mail: a-tashirova@dfid.gov.uk
Council of Europe	European Union, Council of Europe	Strengthen Prevention and Combating of Corruption in Kyrgyz Republic	The Project "Strengthen Prevention and Combating of Corruption in Kyrgyz Republic" (SPCC-KY) aims at supporting Kyrgyz authorities in this effort by strengthening domestic capacities to prevent and fight corruption, thereby contributing to the development of democracy and the rule of law in the country.	2016-2018	555k Euros	Mr. Jenishbek ARZYMATOV Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan Phone: +99 6554861218
World Bank	WB Trust Fund	Capacity Building in Public Financial Management 2	Project seeks to improve budget predictability, control, and transparency in the Kyrgyz Republic. It consists of the following elements: 1) strengthening budget planning and execution; 2) building capacity of the Ministry of Finance in Public Finance Management; 3) strengthening of Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations and Sub-national PFM; 4) project management	2017-2020	\$ 3 million	World Bank Country Office for the Kyrgyz Republic 214 Moskovskaya Street Bishkek, 720010, Kyrgyz Republic Tel.: +996 312 625-262 dakmatbekova@worldbank.org



IMPLEMENTER	DONOR	PROJECT TITLE	DESCRIPTION	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	CONTACT
Aga Khan Foundation	WB Trust	Community Engagement and Social Accountability Project	Project will work in parallel with and complement the CASA1000 Community Support Project (CSP) activities, focusing on communities living along the 450 km CASA1000 transmission line in the Fergana Valley area of the Kyrgyz Republic, traversing three oblasts (Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken) and an estimated 22 (inhabited) Ajyl Aimaks, with a total population of about 330,000. The Corridor of Impact (CoI) is defined as a 3 km-wide corridor centered on the final route of the transmission line. It is currently estimated that there are about 37 “corridor” villages (those within the CoI) with a combined population of 87,500.	2018-	\$ 1 million	S. Jalaluddin Shaw Aga Khan Foundation Jalaluddin.shah@akdn.org
World Bank	WB Trust/Loan	Governance and Competitiveness Development Policy Operation	The development objectives of Programmatic Governance and Competitiveness Development Policy Operation Project for Kyrgyz Republic are as follows: (i) improving public sector governance through reforms aimed at improving public sector integrity, increasing the quality of public services, and enhancing energy sector governance; and (ii) strengthening private sector competitiveness through measures to facilitate trade, improve the business environment, and promote greater connectivity. The World Bank’s development policy financing aims to help the countries achieve sustainable growth and poverty reduction through non-earmarked general budget support. This support typically is given to programs of policy and institutional actions and helps to achieve shared growth and poverty reduction.	2016-2018	\$13.2 million loan/ \$10.8 million grant	World Bank Country Office for the Kyrgyz Republic 214 Moskovskaya Street Bishkek, 720010, Kyrgyz Republic Tel.: +996 312 625-262 dakmatbekova@worldbank.org

## ANNEX 5: TIMELINE OF USAID PROJECTS

