

Parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan: consolidating the presidential system

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According to preliminary results from the snap parliamentary elections held in Kyrgyzstan on 30 November, candidates formally standing as independents but closely linked to President Sadyr Japarov are expected to secure over 80% of the 90 seats in the chamber. Voter turnout stood at just under 37%, and for the first time the elections were held under a majoritarian system. In each of the 30 constituencies, three candidates were elected, including at least one woman. The elections had originally been scheduled for late 2026 but were brought forward – officially due to a scheduling conflict with the presidential elections planned for early 2027. On 25 September, the outgoing parliament unanimously voted to dissolve itself.

The snap parliamentary elections marked a further step in the president's consolidation of full control over the state. Japarov, who emerged from the nationalist-leaning populist Patriotic Party, came to power in 2020 following a revolution triggered by fraudulent parliamentary elections, which led to the ousting of his predecessor, Sooronbay Jeenbekov. Since then, he has steadily consolidated his authority. This has resulted in a shrinking space for pluralism and human rights, accompanied by a wave of repression targeting government critics, opposition parties, and independent media. As a result, his political camp has effectively eliminated meaningful opposition.

Commentary

- **The parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan represent another step in the country's drift towards authoritarianism.** A key element of this process was the 2021 constitutional referendum, which approved the abolition of the parliamentary system which had been in place for over a decade and reinstated a presidential model with only a minimal role for the legislature. Power is currently exercised by a duumvirate comprising the president and his right-hand man, Kamchybek Tashiev, head of the State Committee for National Security. Both originate from the same political background and were involved in opposition activities before 2020. Tashiev is regarded as the chief strategist behind Japarov's political success. The previous parliament was already unable to act without the consent of these two figures. The new parliament, elected on 30 November, will not include any representatives of a genuine opposition, which has ceased to be a significant force following the banning of major opposition parties, notably the Social Democratic Party. In Kyrgyzstan – where power shifts have historically occurred more frequently than elsewhere in the region, and where civil society was once vibrant – public engagement in

political life has diminished. This is reflected in the low voter turnout and the near-total absence of visible campaigning in the public space.

- **No major violations were reported during the elections, but they cannot be regarded as free.** According to the OSCE observation mission, candidates deemed inconvenient to the authorities faced restrictions on their ability to stand. Leaders of the prominent opposition Social Democratic Party were arrested on charges of inciting unrest, plotting a coup, and committing financial offences. Traditional media failed to provide coverage of all candidates, preventing voters from making an informed choice. The country's largest independent media outlets, including the websites Kloop and Temirov Live, were banned in the weeks leading up to the vote, with their founders operating from abroad due to political persecution. The media and local authorities also reported incidents of vote-buying. Although, in theory, parties could nominate candidates, in practice the vast majority stood as nominal independents. As voters struggled to associate candidates with specific parties, name recognition became the decisive factor. Under such conditions, those closest to the president achieved the highest results.
- **The official government narrative maintains that stability and economic development are more important than democratic reforms – an argument that the Japarov administration presents as one of its key achievements.** A few days before the election, Deputy Prime Minister and senior state official Edil Baisalov declared that 'Western-style parliamentary democracy has not worked in Kyrgyzstan and will not work', suggesting that the country's economic difficulties and political instability stemmed from weak governance. The growth of the Kyrgyz economy – from a GDP of \$12.27 billion in 2022 to \$20.16 billion in 2025 – is, in fact, largely attributable to increased cooperation with Russia, which, since 2022, has used its customs union with Kyrgyzstan to circumvent Western sanctions. In 2023, 20% of Kyrgyz exports went to Russia. Japarov himself has announced that he expects to win over 90% of the vote in the upcoming presidential elections. Should he, as expected, secure another term, the country's authoritarian transformation is likely to deepen. A return to previous levels of democracy and pluralistic political life appears improbable in the coming years.