

# Kyrgyzstan

*Capital:* Bishkek  
*Population:* 6.08 million  
*GNI/capita, PPP:* \$3,410

Source: World Bank *World Development Indicators*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

|                                     | 2009        | 2010        | 2011        | 2012        | 2013        | 2014        | 2015        | 2016        | 2017        | 2018        |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| National Democratic Governance      | 6.50        | 6.75        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | <b>6.50</b> |
| Electoral Process                   | 6.00        | 6.25        | 6.00        | 5.50        | 5.50        | 5.50        | 5.50        | 5.25        | 5.50        | <b>5.75</b> |
| Civil Society                       | 4.75        | 5.00        | 4.75        | 4.75        | 4.75        | 4.50        | 4.75        | 4.75        | 5.00        | <b>5.00</b> |
| Independent Media                   | 6.25        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.00        | 6.00        | 6.00        | 6.00        | <b>6.25</b> |
| Local Democratic Governance         | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.50        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | <b>6.25</b> |
| Judicial Framework and Independence | 6.00        | 6.00        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.50        | <b>6.50</b> |
| Corruption                          | 6.25        | 6.50        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | 6.25        | <b>6.25</b> |
| <b>Democracy Score</b>              | <b>6.04</b> | <b>6.21</b> | <b>6.11</b> | <b>6.00</b> | <b>5.96</b> | <b>5.89</b> | <b>5.93</b> | <b>5.89</b> | <b>6.00</b> | <b>6.07</b> |

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. If consensus cannot be reached, Freedom House is responsible for the final ratings. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2017 was a controversial one for the prospect of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, the country witnessed a peaceful transfer of power, with former prime minister Sooronbai Jeenbekov elected as Kyrgyzstan's fifth president. The elections were contested and its outcome remained, at least until several weeks before voting day, unpredictable. On the other hand, the heavy use of state resources to stifle political competition and silence criticism cast major doubt on the readiness of political elites to allow elections to be genuinely free and fair. High-profile opponents of the president were jailed, and outspoken media outlets were handed onerous fines after dubious investigations and trials. The outgoing president propped up his successor Jeenbekov while also using explicitly denigrating language against his key opponent, Omurbek Babanov. The launch of criminal investigations against Babanov weeks after the elections, forcing him to flee the country, summed up the nature and implications of political competition.

Jeenbekov won the presidency with 54.7 percent of the vote against 33.7 percent for Babanov, another former prime minister and one of the wealthiest businessmen in the country (at least before election day). The campaign lacked policy discussions, let alone debates. The key distinction between the frontrunners was Jeenbekov's acknowledged status as "successor" to outgoing president Almazbek Atambayev, an advantage he enjoyed over Babanov.

The peaceful transition of power through elections could not disguise serious problems in the quality of political competition, and the presence of multiple parties in the parliament did not result in political pluralism. Despite holding about 30 percent of the parliament, the president's Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) has taken control of key political processes, evidenced by its use of state administrative powers during the presidential elections. The emergence of "silent" parties in the parliament, prosecution of outspoken political leaders, harsh attacks on freedom of expression, and the heavy administrative influence exerted to drag the president's designated successor across the finish line cast major doubt on the future of democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

Media freedoms and political pluralism suffered major damage in 2017. Six defamation lawsuits filed on behalf of President Atambayev and, later, presidential candidate Jeenbekov all resulted in "guilty" verdicts. Over the course of several months, the lawsuits were upheld in courts and resulted in about 50 million soms (about \$730,000) in fines imposed on a handful of journalists, lawyers, and news agencies. Another 20 million soms (over \$290,000) in lawsuits against the Kyrgyz service of Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) were filed but then dropped after RFE/RL president Thomas Kent personally met with President Atambayev.

Despite lavish political rhetoric about judicial reform, little improvement was seen in terms of rule of law. Courts continued to demonstrate disrespect for due process, particularly in cases widely seen as political. Omurbek Tekebayev, President Atambayev's ally in the past and a vocal critic in recent years, was unceremoniously arrested at the Manas airport upon arrival from an OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting. He was accused of engaging in a corrupt deal from 2010. In a trial featuring utter disregard for due process, Tekebayev and his ally Duishenkul Chotonov were each handed eight-year prison sentences. Another ally-turned-critic of President Atambayev, former prosecutor general Aida Salyanova, was given a postponed sentence of five years in prison (to be served once her daughter reaches 14 years of age) for approving the law license of an associate of the son of the former president, also back in 2010. Several more opposition-minded politicians, including Sadyr Japarov, Almambet Shykmamatov, and Kanat Isayev were either convicted or placed under investigation. Combined with President Atambayev's repeated claims that "there is enough space in the prisons," these prosecutions of critical politicians highlighted the decline of respect for political pluralism in the country.

Kyrgyzstan's relations with neighboring countries saw some dramatic changes. On the positive side, Uzbekistan's new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, followed up on his promise that Central Asia would be a priority in Uzbek foreign policy by moving Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations onto a more constructive footing than seen under his predecessor, Islam Karimov. The thaw in bilateral relations generated mutual visits by

the countries' presidents, the opening of Uzbekistan's checkpoints at the border with southern Kyrgyzstan, and a tentative agreement on border delimitation. Relations with Kazakhstan, by contrast, took an unexpected downturn. President Nursultan Nazarbayev's meeting with Kyrgyz opposition presidential candidate Omurbek Babanov in September triggered a war of words between the countries, culminating in an emotional and insulting rant by President Atambayev against Kazakhstani authorities and his counterpart Nazarbayev in particular. Kazakhstan responded in style, blocking the movement of goods from Kyrgyzstan through its territory. Though relations thawed after the elections, the incident underscored the dependence of interstate relations on domestic political processes and the personalization of foreign policy in the region.

### **Score Changes:**

- **Electoral Process rating declined from 5.50 to 5.75** due to the heavy use of administrative resources in favor of the outgoing president's designated successor, the imprisonment and persecution of the president's political opponents before the election, and the opening of criminal investigations against the losing candidate after the election.
- **Independent Media rating declined from 6.00 to 6.25** due to onerous fines levied against media that reported critically on the president, and the shuttering of an opposition-affiliated TV station.

**As a result, Kyrgyzstan's Democracy Score declined from 6.00 to 6.07.**

**Outlook for 2018:** With constitutional changes and the presidential elections now past, Kyrgyzstan's political situation is likely to be calmer in 2018. Both the government and the parliament are under the comfortable control of the SDPK. Any political tensions will thus likely arise from internal rivalry within the party's ranks. Newly elected President Jeenbekov will be reminded when necessary of his weak legitimacy and indebtedness to his predecessor. However, a weak and controlled president is an unknown phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan, and sustaining the status quo will be delicate. Jeenbekov may not be keen to enter a tug of war, but figures within his inner circle—including his younger brother, himself a former speaker of parliament—might find the influence of Atambayev and his allies too constraining. A key variable is the government's performance, with doubts high as to whether a relatively young prime minister will retain broad support in the parliament. Former president Atambayev is expected to formalize his leadership in the SDPK and work towards expanding the party's political influence. Pushing for the parliament's dissolution may become one of his points of leverage. The authorities may step back from their heavy-handed treatment of the opposition and media, but the return to vibrant political pluralism and competition is unlikely.

# MAIN REPORT

## National Democratic Governance

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50 | 6.75 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 |

- Politics in Kyrgyzstan in 2017 was dominated by the presidential elections held on 15 October, which produced a peaceful transfer of power from the incumbent Almazbek Atambayev to his longtime friend and ally, Sooronbai Jeenbekov. The political situation remained calm after the elections, lending legitimacy to the narrow victory (by Central Asian standards) of the incumbent’s handpicked successor. The elections, however, fell short of demonstrating the maturity of the country’s political institutions. While they were generally evaluated as competitive and well organized, independent assessments pointed to substantial use of administrative resources to benefit the “successor” candidate and damage his opponents (see “Electoral Process”).<sup>1</sup> The imprisonment of several high-profile opposition figures earlier in the year and the postelection persecution of Omurbek Babanov, Jeenbekov’s main challenger in the elections, warned of grave consequences for those who might dare to challenge incumbents in Kyrgyzstan.
- Out of the 50 individuals who declared plans to run for president, only 13 managed to register as candidates. Two of these withdrew before election day, leaving voters with 12 names to choose from, including “Against All.” The competition, however, had from the very beginning of the campaign turned into a two-horse race. Sooronbai Jeenbekov, who served as prime minister until August 2017, was the nominee of the president’s Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), while the main challenger was Omurbek Babanov, leader of the Respublika party and a member of parliament (MP). Babanov, also known as a wealthy businessman, had headed the government in 2011–12. The campaigning was fierce, though it hardly reflected a competition of ideas and visions for the country’s development. Differences in age and regional affiliation aside, the key distinction between the two frontrunners was that Jeenbekov was openly declared as Atambayev’s approved “successor” candidate, and Babanov was not.
- Babanov faced serious criminal charges less than three weeks after the elections. On 4 November, the Prosecutor General’s Office accused him of calling for forceful change of the constitutional order and instigating interethnic hostility during a campaign speech in southern Osh.<sup>2</sup> On 19 December, a district court ruled to freeze the assets of NTC TV, a company known to belong to Babanov, following a lawsuit by a Belize-based company, Grexton Capital.<sup>3</sup> On 30 December, Babanov announced his resignation from his MP seat and quitting politics altogether.<sup>4</sup> Observers argued that his departure from politics could be a deal with authorities in a bid to save the rest of his assets in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, given that Babanov was the only candidate that had politically threatened the “successor” candidate, his postelection fate will clearly have negative implications for the quality of political competition going forward.
- Newly elected President Sooronbai Jeenbekov, 59, is a longtime ally of outgoing president Almazbek Atambayev and is known to represent one of the influential political networks in the southern oblast Osh.<sup>6</sup> Jeenbekov’s brothers include the former parliament speaker and current MP Asylbek Jeenbekov, and Kyrgyzstan’s former ambassador to Gulf countries, Jusupbek Sharipov. The latter was approved as an ambassador to Ukraine a few weeks after the elections.<sup>7</sup> Prior to running for president, Sooronbai Jeenbekov served as prime minister and governor of Osh oblast.
- It remains unclear whether the president will develop into an independent center of political power or remain under the influence of his predecessor. Jeenbekov’s election campaign was led by Atambayev’s closest advisers, locally known as the “grey cardinals,” Farid Niyazov and Ikramzhan Ilmiyanov.<sup>8</sup> The former was appointed head of the president’s administration after the elections. On 20 November, at

his last press conference as president, Atambayev said he might run in the next parliamentary elections at the top of the SDPK list,<sup>9</sup> fueling rumors of his plans to return to high politics or at least to retain his influence in indirect ways.

- Following Jeenbekov’s resignation after registering as a presidential candidate, Sapar Isakov, the 40-year-old head of the president’s office, became the new head of the government. Isakov is known as an influential figure in the inner circle of Atambayev’s advisers, and at one point was even rumored to be a “successor” to the president.<sup>10</sup> Presenting himself to the parliament before a vote, Isakov vowed to improve government services, infrastructure, business, and the civil sector, and promised that his cabinet would create conditions conducive to free and fair elections.<sup>11</sup>
- Restoring political competition will take considerable effort after the damage done in 2017. In February, Omurbek Tekebayev, leader of the Ata Meken party, was arrested on accusations of receiving a bribe of \$1 million from a Russian businessman, Leonid Mayevsky. After what was widely called a politically motivated prosecution, in August, Tekebayev and his ally Duishenkul Chotonov were both sentenced to eight years in prison.<sup>12</sup> Tekebayev had turned into the most vocal critic of the president in the months leading up to his arrest, and in late 2016 had announced plans to start an impeachment process against the president. Perhaps more sensitive, he accused Atambayev of hiding unreported income<sup>13</sup> and of purchasing land from the mayor of Bishkek in a murky deal.<sup>14</sup> Two other close Tekebayev allies, former prosecutor general Aida Salyanova and former justice minister Almambet Shykmamatov, also faced criminal charges for alleged past wrongdoing (see “Judicial Framework and Independence”). Finally, Sentyabr, a TV company known to belong to Tekebayev or his relatives, was found guilty of airing extremist material and shut down in August 2017 (see “Independent Media”).
- Kyrgyzstan’s relations with neighboring Kazakhstan suffered major damage in the course of an election-related political spat between the countries’ leaders. On 25 September, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev had a brief face-to-face meeting with presidential candidate Omurbek Babanov. The meeting was televised, prompting a note of protest from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Kazakhstani side pointed to a similar meeting of Nazarbayev with Sooronbai Jeenbekov, who was prime minister then but had already been confirmed by SDPK to run for president. The issue resurfaced less than 10 days before the election, with President Atambayev boldly accusing his Kazakh counterpart and the Kazakhstani authorities of attempting to place their henchman in Kyrgyzstan’s presidency (see “Electoral Process”). Atambayev also denounced Kazakhstan’s nondemocratic political system and the not-so-young age of its president. A few days after Atambayev’s speech, Kazakhstan’s border control severely restricted the movement of people and goods from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan, causing hundreds of trucks to pile up at border checkpoints.<sup>15</sup> Kyrgyzstan threatened to raise the issue with the Eurasian Economic Union and the World Trade Organization. The situation improved only after the meeting of newly elected president Jeenbekov with his Kazakh counterpart on 30 November.<sup>16</sup>

## Electoral Process

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.00 | 6.25 | 6.00 | 5.50 | 5.50 | 5.50 | 5.50 | 5.25 | 5.50 | 5.75 |

- The key political event of the year was the presidential election held on 15 October 2017. This was only the second time in Kyrgyzstan’s history when an incumbent president was replaced by a popularly elected successor, the first being the elections in 2011 to replace interim president Roza Otunbayeva. The vote process saw improvements to prevent most old-fashioned manipulations, such as multiple voting and ballot stuffing. The electoral process, however, was marred by a denial of voting rights to over 800,000 citizens for the legally dubious biometric requirement, a massive use of administrative resources to benefit the incumbent’s candidate during the elections, and the blatant interference of the president in the election campaign. The Central Election Commission (CEC) turned into a politicized body, with a clear rift between a majority loyal to the president and a minority sympathizing with

particular opposition leaders. The CEC inserted itself into the center of the campaign by excluding some candidates from running and also claiming that the president's immunity prevented it from responding to Atambayev's open engagement in campaigning. Revelations of a privately owned website allegedly containing voters' private information raised concerns about possible abuse of the state voter database for the benefit of one candidate.

- On 31 May, the parliament adopted a range of amendments to the constitutional law on elections, including some to be applied to the October presidential elections.<sup>17</sup> The changes streamlined campaigning rules, voter registration procedures, and ensured consistency in the gender quota. At the same time, the amendments brought some important restrictions, especially targeting civil freedoms. Thus, the law limited election monitors to fielding no more than one observer at any polling station, and observers from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were denied the right to appeal electoral commission decisions. If in the past, NGOs had only to inform the electoral commission of fielding an observer, now they would be required to secure an accreditation in order to observe elections.<sup>18</sup> Dinara Oshurakhunova of the "For Fair Elections" consortium, in particular, claimed that the amendments restricted the rights of observers representing nonprofit organizations to conduct proper on-site monitoring of the election process at and across polling precincts and to appeal against the decisions and actions of election precinct commissions.<sup>19</sup> Lawmakers contended that observers from NGOs with vested interests might fail to maintain impartiality and potentially destabilize the election process.<sup>20</sup>
- Among the 12 choices (including "Against All"), Sooronbai Jeenbekov won the presidency with 54.7 percent of the vote in an election with 56-percent voter turnout. His main rival, Omurbek Babanov, received 33.7 percent of the vote. Former speaker of the parliament Adakhan Madumarov and former prime minister Temir Sariyev came next, with 6.5 and 2.5 percent, respectively, and all other candidates won less than 1 percent.<sup>21</sup> The results revealed regional distinctions in political preferences. Thus, Babanov won overwhelmingly in his home region of Talas (86 percent to 13 percent for Jeenbekov), and another northern oblast, Chuy (50 percent to 38 percent). Jeenbekov, in turn, claimed victory in all other oblasts, ranging from a thin majority in northern Issyk-Kul and Naryn, to landslides in southern oblasts, including 72 percent to 18 percent in his home region of Osh.<sup>22</sup>
- Local and international observers pointed to a massive use of state administrative power. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's representative raised complaints about the partisanship of the CEC and pressure on the media that led to self-imposed censorship.<sup>23</sup> Former president Otunbayeva described the massive use of administrative resources, the use of state-run TV channels to support one candidate and smear others, selective responses of the CEC and Prosecutor General's Office to violations, and open pressure on voters and journalists on election day.<sup>24</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR final report pointed to other irregularities as well, including violation of ballot secrecy, vote buying, and considerable problems with counting the vote.<sup>25</sup> Local sources also reported bussing of teachers, doctors, and students of military institutions.<sup>26</sup>
- In the weeks leading up to and during election day, President Atambayev personally engaged in campaigning for his handpicked candidate, at times resorting to denigrating language against the key challengers. He openly acknowledged Jeenbekov to be his endorsed successor and accused other key candidates of serving foreign interests. Babanov, Jeenbekov's main rival, received most of the attacks, as Atambayev accused him of being a "henchman" of Kazakhstani authorities and oligarchs. This accusation was repeated multiple times during the final days of campaigning, with Atambayev traveling to each oblast of the country. The president's openly biased rhetoric undermined his repeated promise to hold free and fair elections. Responding to accusations that the president was stepping over the law by campaigning for his favored candidate, the CEC argued the president had immunity from any prosecution.<sup>27</sup> The Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, a renowned local NGO, argued that the president's support for one candidate damaged the competitiveness of other candidates.<sup>28</sup>
- The authorities used nationalism instrumentally, not only with accusations that Babanov was dependent on Kazakhstan. A few days before the election, the Prosecutor General's Office declared that one of Babanov's campaign speeches, delivered in an Uzbek-populated village in southern Kyrgyzstan,

contained “incitement to interethnic violence,” hinting at a possible criminal case against the candidate. Babanov’s team responded that his words were taken out of context and the presented video recordings had been “edited” by unknown people.”<sup>29</sup> The follow-up came after the elections, when the Prosecutor General’s Office launched an official criminal investigation against Babanov on 4 November (see “National Democratic Governance”).

- The CEC grew increasingly politicized during the year, the roots of this division lying in the way the commission is composed. The 12 members are elected by the parliament, with the president, the parliamentary majority, and parliament minority each entitled to propose four members.<sup>30</sup> Current CEC members were elected in June 2016, with the former deputy head of the president’s office, Nurzhan Shaildabekova, becoming the commission’s chairperson.<sup>31</sup> As the election campaign advanced, CEC members representing opposition parties complained that the work of the CEC was opaque, even to them, with relevant documents not distributed to members in due time.<sup>32</sup> Later, they also openly called on the CEC to withstand the pressure of “administrative resource.”<sup>33</sup> On 8 December, the commission voted down opposition representative Atyr Abdrakhmatova as deputy chairperson for criticizing the CEC.<sup>34</sup> In turn, these CEC members were accused of lobbying on behalf of Babanov.<sup>35</sup> The preliminary postelection statement by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission noted that the CEC’s adjudication of disputes suffered from political bias as “CEC members favored certain candidates.”<sup>36</sup>
- The CEC controversially barred several candidates from running for president. The key obstacles to prospective candidates proved to be the requirements of submitting 30,000 supporter signatures, passing a Kyrgyz language examination, and paying 1 million Kyrgyz soms toward an electoral fund (over \$14,500).<sup>37</sup> On 17 August, the CEC decided the signatures submitted in support of opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev were invalid because they were collected *prior* to depositing the required electoral fund.<sup>38</sup> Tekebayev’s lawyers appealed, but the Supreme Court upheld the CEC decision.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the commission used the failure to meet technical aspects of signature submission—such as the requirement to fill in data personally and provide full personal information—as grounds to reject the registration of other candidates, including MPs Iskhak Masaliev and Kanat Isayev, founder of International University of Central Asia Camilla Sharshekeeva, human rights defender Rita Karasartova, and others.<sup>40</sup> The consensus among nonregistered candidates was that the CEC applied an excessively rigid approach to the signature-collection requirement and should provide more thorough and extended training in the future.
- A controversial law that denied the right to vote to citizens who had not submitted biometric data remained a major problem. Since the beginning of the year, the State Registration Agency had launched a renewed campaign to collect biometric data across the population required for the exercise of voting rights. However, according to agency officials, about 800,000 individuals, the majority of whom are migrant workers, have still not enrolled their biometric data and were therefore disenfranchised in the presidential election.<sup>41</sup> In the context of the above, and given the right to vote constitutionally granted to all citizens, calls were voiced for the government to find ways to ensure that the remaining people without biometric registration can exercise their voting rights.<sup>42</sup>
- Local media raised the issue of involvement of criminal groups in elections, particularly to organize pressure on voters. Two organized crime “*avtoritety*” (“bosses”), Kadyrbek Dosonov and Altynbek Ibrahimov, were acquitted and released from prison in July and August. The court decisions appeared suspicious, given that both cases had been ongoing since 2015 but were fast-tracked months before the elections.<sup>43</sup> There were several reported incidents where people in masks beat campaign activists supporting Babanov.<sup>44</sup> Separately, MP Kanat Isayev, who earlier had endorsed Babanov’s candidacy, was arrested on 30 September. He was accused of preparing mass violence based on a video clip where he reportedly distributed money to alleged members of criminal groups to organize disorder in case Babanov lost the elections.<sup>45</sup> Some politicians and civic activists argued that the case appeared to be a “setup” arranged by law-enforcement agencies together with criminals.<sup>46</sup>
- On 1 August, a district court in Bishkek approved a temporary ban on rallies around the premises of courts, government agencies, and the CEC effective until the end of the presidential election cycle.<sup>47</sup>

The decision was based upon a request by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and, allegedly, complaints from local residents over rally-related noise and sanitation issues. The Ombudsman, echoing the concerns of civil society activists, noted that the court decision restricts the fundamental rights of citizens to freedom of peaceful assembly.<sup>48</sup> Given that holding rallies during an electoral cycle forms an integral part of democratic processes, the ban undermined the legitimacy of an upcoming presidential election.

- Concerns about possible mass protests after the elections, partly fueled by the authorities, did not come to pass. Babanov acknowledged that the elections were competitive, but he stressed that use of state administrative powers had denied candidates a level playing field.<sup>49</sup> The only candidate who publicly dismissed the election results was opposition challenger Adakhan Madumarov. He claimed that massive violations of voter rights took place, including the denial of voter rights to labor migrants in Russia. Despite this, he dismissed the idea of filing lawsuits, claiming that judges were part of the same “system” he was fighting against.<sup>50</sup>
- On 26 October, 10 days after the elections, independent media portal Kloop.kg released information about a domain, samara.kg, that was suspiciously hosted on the servers of the State Registration Service.<sup>51</sup> The website reportedly contained the confidential data of about 2 million voters and was used to administer the Jeenbekov electoral campaign. Kloop.kg claimed that several Jeenbekov campaign activists had confirmed using the mentioned domain to count voters, and the authenticity of the domain being hosted in the state agency’s servers was confirmed by the Swedish foundation Qurium and its cyber forensics team.<sup>52</sup> While it is unclear how precisely the website could be used to keep track of voters, the existence of a private domain on a public server and its access to voter information points to a serious breach of private data. The State Registration Service called the accusations by Kloop “illusions” and threatened to file a lawsuit against the journalists.<sup>53</sup> On 20 November, outgoing president Atambayev promised that the State Committee for National Security (GKNB) would investigate the case, but boldly promised the investigation would find links not to Jeenbekov but to Kloop.kg itself.<sup>54</sup> On 15 December, the GKNB questioned Rinat Tukhvatshin, one of the authors of Kloop’s journalistic investigation, but there was no confirmation of a formal inquiry at year’s end.<sup>55</sup>

## Civil Society

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 4.75 | 5.00 | 4.75 | 4.75 | 4.75 | 4.5  | 4.75 | 4.75 | 5.00 | 5.00 |

- Kyrgyzstan has long been known for hosting the most vibrant civil society in Central Asia. However, because of the increasingly hostile rhetoric of top political leadership against NGOs in general and some vocal activists in 2015–16, civil activism has visibly shrunk. The authorities increasingly show a restrictive attitude towards public demonstrations, and in certain instances, follow them with short-term arrests for organizers or “invitations” to the State Committee of National Security (GKNB).
- On several occasions in 2016, top political leaders singled out renowned human rights defenders Aziza Abdurasulova and Tolekan Ismailova as people “working off” money received from abroad. That rhetoric did not subside in 2017. Illustrative was President Atambayev’s speech of 3 April, when he stressed the need to defend the country against people who “under the guise of human rights defenders, opposition, NGO representatives” are “working off foreign money and imposing foreign values.”<sup>56</sup>
- Kyrgyzstan has been known in Central Asia for its relative tolerance of public protest, but there were some signs in 2017 that this is changing. On 18 March, a group of young civic activists gathered in the capital Bishkek to hold a peaceful march in support of independent journalist Naryn Aiyp and various media outlets facing legal charges brought by President Atambayev (see “Independent Media”).<sup>57</sup> According to the activists, the mayor’s office initially granted full permission to march along their requested route, but as the rally unfolded the police ordered them to march on the pavement and end the march halfway to the agreed destination point.<sup>58</sup> A group of protesters continued the walk down

central Abdrakhmanov Street, but the police detained five activists along the way for violating public order while crossing the street.<sup>59</sup> The detained activists were given five-day sentences for “disorderly conduct,” a verdict that, according to a statement by Amnesty International, was reached through hasty and closed proceedings failing to uphold internationally recognized standards for a fair trial.<sup>60</sup>

- On 28 September, a district court in Bishkek ruled to prohibit a peaceful march “For Fair Elections” scheduled two days later, citing a threat of destabilization for the period before the presidential elections. As a result, the meeting was held in a different location, farther away from central Bishkek.<sup>61</sup>
- On 16 October, a day after the presidential elections, several hundred Babanov supporters held a meeting in Talas, calling the election results unfair. In the following days, President Atambayev likened the protesters to Abyke and Kobosh, two traitors in the traditional Kyrgyz poem “Epic of Manas.”<sup>62</sup> In line with Atambayev’s speeches in the preelection period, this implied that Babanov and his supporters were traitors and the henchmen of Kazakhs. This triggered more protests in Talas, now demanding that Atambayev apologize for offending the residents of the region. The authorities claimed the protests were organized by opposition candidate Babanov. In the days following, at least two activists in Talas received “invitations” to the office of the GKNB.<sup>63</sup> On 15 November, one of the organizers of protests in Talas was arrested, allegedly on charges of past embezzlement.<sup>64</sup>
- In February, the human rights organization Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan filed a defamation lawsuit against the GKNB, after the security service claimed that the lawyers of the organization obstructed justice during an arrest of an alleged member of the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir movement.<sup>65</sup> The human rights organization denied that its representatives were present during the arrest. On 30 October, a district court in Bishkek ruled in favor of the human rights organization, demanding the GKNB issue refutation of its own press release.<sup>66</sup> The GKNB had not done so by year’s end. The case underscores the challenges faced by civil society actors, particularly human rights organizations, that operate in the southern part of the country where issues of ethnic conflict and religious extremism remain highly sensitive and politicized.
- On 12 September, local journalist Zulpukar Sapanov was sentenced to four years in prison for “inciting religious hatred” (Article 299 of the Kyrgyz Criminal Code) in a book that explores Kyrgyz pagan traditions. The author challenged some foundational postulates in Islam, including questioning whether Allah was God or Satan, and also claimed that Islam was being imposed on the Kyrgyz people by religious clerics.<sup>67</sup> The court ruling came after religious leaders, including representatives of the quasi-state Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (DUMK), had accused Sapanov of denigrating Muslims and Islamic values.<sup>68</sup> Sapanov, in turn, claimed that he had merely expressed his own views and insisted that his conviction represented an infringement on the freedom of expression, an opinion shared by the Kyrgyz Ombudsman and several international organizations such as Reporters without Borders.<sup>69</sup> Based on an appeal, the Bishkek City Court changed his four-year prison sentence to two years’ probation/suspended sentence.<sup>70</sup>
- On 20 October, law enforcement officers arrested a 47-year-old man, accusing him of “instigating religious hatred.” The detained person was announced to be a founder and leader of the religious movement Yakyn Inkar.<sup>71</sup> Earlier, on 15 June, a district court in Bishkek had listed the movement as “extremist,” and thus banned it on the territory of the country. The main problem with this relatively small and recent movement was, in the words of representatives of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, that it does not acknowledge Kyrgyz laws, prohibits attending schools, and forbids receiving medical and other public services, including for children.<sup>72</sup> Others argue that the movement’s members are ordinary Muslims even if they do not obey the directives of imams.<sup>73</sup> A representative of the DUMK, Bilal azhy Saipiev, argued that ruling the movement “extremist” was excessive, as this was a group that simply split from the proselytizing movement Tablighi Jamaat to celebrate its rejection of modernity, by refusing state education, telephones, haircuts, and so on.<sup>74</sup>

## Independent Media

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.25 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.25 |

- Freedom of the media in Kyrgyzstan suffered a major setback in 2017 as a result of defamation lawsuits to protect the “dignity” of President Atambayev as well as candidate and now president Sooronbai Jeenbekov. The lawsuits targeted some of the country’s most vocal online media outlets along with individual journalists and commentators. Prosecutors demanded unusually large fines, ranging from 3 to 5 million Kyrgyz soms in each case (\$45,000 to \$75,000). The total amount of fines handed to media and commentators in 2017 reached 50 million soms (about \$730,000).<sup>75</sup> By year’s end, courts had upheld all prosecutor charges in these cases. Additionally, two foreign journalists were expelled from the country with no explanation.
- In March, the General Prosecutor’s Office filed a lawsuit against Zanoza and Azattyk media agencies, demanding compensation of 3 million soms (about \$44,000) and 10 million soms (over \$145,000), respectively, for distributing allegedly false claims involving President Atambayev.<sup>76</sup> The lawsuit concerned coverage of a press conference by the opposition party Ata Meken in which the media claimed that cargo on a plane that crashed near Bishkek in January had belonged to President Atambayev and his spouse.<sup>77</sup> Prosecutors singled out Azattyk and Zanoza even though other journalists and media also covered the same press conference.<sup>78</sup> A few days later, another lawsuit was filed against the same agencies with the same fines sought, in this case for covering Ata Meken leader Omurbek Tekebayev’s press conference about his trip to Cyprus. According to prosecutors, the press conference featured false information offending the dignity of the president.<sup>79</sup>
- In the following two months, March and April, the Prosecutor General’s Office initiated two more defamation lawsuits, targeting Zanoza and journalist Naryn Aiyp, for publishing and authoring, respectively, articles on the sources of a special presidential fund and establishment of a puppet regime in Kyrgyzstan as a metaphor for decreasing political sovereignty.<sup>80</sup> Another lawsuit was later filed targeting the same agency and Naryn Aiyp, but also Zanoza’s co-founder Dina Maslova and the prominent lawyer and NGO activist Cholpon Djakupova. The fine demanded was a familiar 3 million soms from each. In this instance, the president’s dignity was offended, according to the lawsuit, in Aiyp’s article where the journalist cited Djakupova’s public statement describing President Atambayev as a person with “a maniacal tendency.”<sup>81</sup> Arguments that Djakupova had expressed her personal views on recent human rights violations, and that Zanoza news agency simply reproduced publicly made statements, did not convince the judges.<sup>82</sup>
- Asked whether he would forgive the mass media and drop the defamation lawsuits, President Atambayev emotionally rejected such a possibility.<sup>83</sup> He called for distinguishing between honest journalists and slanderers, and made his claim, once again, that his mother and brother had died partly due to slanders against him in the media.<sup>84</sup> The only exception he made was for Azattyk, the Bishkek branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). On 30 March, Atambayev met with the head of RFE/RL, Thomas Kent. Shortly thereafter, the head of Azattyk’s Bishkek bureau resigned,<sup>85</sup> and President Atambayev announced the lawsuits against Azattyk could be dropped. Tellingly, the statement explained Atambayev’s decision by the fact that Azattyk had started reporting in a “more balanced way.”<sup>86</sup>
- In all cases against the Zanoza agency, Aiyp, and Djakupova, the courts in Bishkek ruled in favor of President Atambayev. The courts additionally issued orders to freeze the agency’s bank accounts and properties, and banned Aiyp, Djakupova, and Maslova from leaving the country. The travel ban, a novelty in lawsuits against activists and media, was challenged in the Supreme Court, unsuccessfully.<sup>87</sup> On 31 October, the editor of *Tribuna* newspaper was handed a restriction on leaving the country for failing to pay 200,000 soms (about \$2,900) to a former civil servant for compensation of the “moral damage” caused by an article. The court decision on the fine came in 2015, and since then, according to the editor, the Supreme Court had returned the case to the district court for further consideration.<sup>88</sup>

- While local journalists were barred from leaving the country, two foreign journalists were expelled. On 10 March, Grigoriy Mikhailov, a Russian citizen and the Bishkek-based chief editor of the Russian Regnum news agency, was detained in the capital and taken to the Kazakhstani side of the border.<sup>89</sup> Police cited Mikhailov’s violation of registration deadlines, although normally this would only lead to a fine of 10,000 soms (about \$150). Mikhailov was known for regular reporting on domestic politics. On 9 December, Chris Rickleton, a reporter of Agence France-Presse (AFP) was denied entry at the Manas airport as he returned from Dubai. The GKNB claimed that Rickleton had violated visa regulations but offered no details.<sup>90</sup> Rickleton, who had spent about eight years in Bishkek and is married to a Kyrgyz national, denied violating any rules.
- On 5 October, the district court in Bishkek upheld the lawsuit of presidential candidate Sooronbai Jeenbekov against 24.kg news agency and journalist Kabai Karabekov.<sup>91</sup> The latter had authored an article discussing Jeenbekov as the “successor” candidate, and pointed to rumors of alleged links of the Jeenbekov brothers to radical Arab organizations. Karabekov and 24.kg, the agency that posted the article, were handed fines of 5 million soms (\$72,000) each.
- In August 2017, a district court in Bishkek ruled to shut down Sentyabr TV for airing materials of allegedly extremist content.<sup>92</sup> The channel was one of the few media outlets openly critical of the authorities, and was known to belong to Omurbek Tekebayev, an opposition leader sentenced only days earlier to eight years in prison on corruption and fraud charges (see “National Democratic Governance”). The court hearing lasted for an hour and was conducted without the participation of lawyers for the defense. The charge was related to the airing of an interview in September 2016 with the former police chief of Osh oblast. The chief condemned the raising of the Uzbek national flag at a public event in Aravan rayon in southern Kyrgyzstan, and also criticized the court verdict against Kadyrzhan Batyrov, an ethnic Uzbek businessman who was found guilty of instigating the interethnic violence in June 2010.<sup>93</sup> The representatives of Sentyabr claimed the real reason for the closure was its accusations of embezzlement against the presidential candidate Sooronbai Jeenbekov and his brother, former parliament speaker Asylbek Jeenbekov, back in 2010.<sup>94</sup> Ombudsman Kubat Otorbayev said that the court decision against the channel was unduly harsh.<sup>95</sup> Former president Roza Otunbayeva pointed to the political nature of the verdict, and said she thought it was due to a personal decision of the president.<sup>96</sup>

### Local Democratic Governance

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 |

- No significant changes took place in 2017 in the quality of local democratic governance. The latest round of local council elections demonstrated that party competition has been taking root at the subnational level, although multiparty councils often failed to begin meaningful work due to sabotage by minority factions. During the presidential elections, multiple complaints pointed to local authorities obstructing the campaign events of candidates who opposed the president’s chosen “successor.”
- On 28 May, local elections were held to fill 41 city and village councils across the country. Of these, 20 were “early” elections scheduled due to the failure of recently elected councils to select a local executive (mayor) or council chairperson.<sup>97</sup> These problems were caused by the majority coalitions being too thin, or barely over 50 percent, which allowed minority factions to block the work of the council simply by not showing up. Some key decisions, such as electing the council chair or the mayor, require the presence of two-thirds of council members, so minority factions were often easily able to block voting by skipping meetings. Some civic activists argued that such situations often arise when the “party of power,” the president’s SDPK, pushes too hard with unpopular decisions, driving the opposition factions to resist through sabotaging the work of the council.<sup>98</sup>

- Such a case is illustrated in Jalal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan, the country’s third-largest city. In the 2016 local elections, five party factions won seats in the 31-member city council. Three factions—Onuguu, Respublika-Ata Jurt, and Ata Jurt—formed a coalition with a bare majority of 16. Two others, SDPK and Kyrgyzstan, refused to attend the council meetings. Later, the Respublika-Ata Jurt faction defected, leading to a new coalition with SDPK, which, in its turn, was sabotaged by Onuguu and Ata Jurt. The repeat elections on 28 May did not bring much change: Onuguu and Ata Jurt members, left outside the coalition, have again been blocking the work of the council.<sup>99</sup> The case of Jalal-Abad is reflective of a systemic problem associated with local coalition building, revealing both fierce competition amongst divergent interest groups and the novelty of party-based politics at the local council level.
- Bishkek’s mayor and city council faced a tough reaction from city residents on the issue of cutting down trees along the capital’s streets. On 2 June, residents of Toktonaliev Street (better known by its old name, Dushanbinskaya, or, informally, Dushanbinka) joined environmental and urban development activists in trying to physically block the cutting down of hundreds of trees. Ten protesters were detained for “disobeying the representative of the authorities,” and released later that same day. Protesters argued that the city authorities should have conducted public hearings before approving the removal of trees. The mayor argued that the street needed to be widened due to increased traffic, accusing the residents of wanting to “live in the center, but in the conditions of a park.”<sup>100</sup> Eventually the authorities went ahead with the project, though they declared that they would plant three times more young trees to replace those that were cut down.<sup>101</sup>
- Representatives of local authorities continued to play a part, if informally, in electoral campaigning for the incumbent’s candidate. Presidential candidates Omurbek Babanov, Temir Sariyev, and Bakyt Torobayev (who later withdrew his candidacy) complained about local authorities obstructing their public meetings with residents and putting pressure on local campaign offices.<sup>102</sup> Several days before the elections, local media circulated a video featuring the mayor of Osh presenting presidential candidate Jeenbekov with a fur coat at a reception-style event.<sup>103</sup> Other local authorities, including the Osh city council chairperson, were present as well. Local observers saw this as a routine phenomenon demonstrating how local authorities at the rayon and oblast levels work hard for the incumbent’s candidate during elections, even though the law clearly forbids it.

## Judicial Framework and Independence

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.50 | 6.50 |

- Despite repeated claims that judicial reform is ongoing, the increased number of politicized trials against opposition leaders and critical media in 2017 highlighted the continuing dependence of the judiciary on the executive and the weakness of rule of law in Kyrgyzstan.
- Leaders of the country have often said that reforming the judicial system is a top priority, both before and after the 2010 revolution. The latest round of judicial reform started in 2011 with the establishment of the Council for Selection of Judges, meant to make the appointment of judges more transparent and less dependent on the executive. In early February 2017, President Atambayev approved the revised versions of several legal codes, including the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural Code, as well as the Code on Offenses covering cases of lighter severity.<sup>104</sup> All new documents, except the Civil Procedure Code, will come into force in 2019.<sup>105</sup>
- In June, President Atambayev claimed that a national judicial system had been firmly established. He also hailed a fourfold increase in public funding for the judicial system in the past five years, as well as adoption of the new set of legal codes.<sup>106</sup> Independent assessments of the reforms thus far, however, are skeptical. The new Civil Procedure Code brought back the requirement of a “state fee” for any lawsuit, in order to reduce the number of “unsubstantiated lawsuits.” Lawyer Anatoliy Safonov argues

that this clause hits financially vulnerable groups, while the clause allowing judges to waive the fees presents clear opportunities for corruption.<sup>107</sup> The director of a law firm, Erkin Sadanbekov, reports that despite the new system of selection for cases, judges continue to fear the authorities, and, together with state prosecutors, still operate as a “single punitive state machine.”<sup>108</sup>

- Several high-profile prosecutions against independent media, lawyers, and politicians took place in 2017, casting a shadow over judicial independence. On 16 August, the district court in Bishkek sentenced both Omurbek Tekebayev, Ata Meken leader and of late a fierce critic of former president Atambayev, and his fellow party member and former minister of emergency Duishenkul Chotonov to eight years in prison on corruption charges.<sup>109</sup> The prosecution claimed that Tekebayev and Chotonov had received \$1 million from a Russian businessman in exchange for an unfulfilled promise to provide access to the management of Alfa Telecom Company in 2010, when Tekebayev was part of the interim government after the revolution. Both defendants denied the charge. The trial was carried out hastily, without properly identifying or scrutinizing evidence. As Deirdre Tynan of International Crisis Group put it, Tekebayev’s case conveyed a familiar pattern of “arrests of opposition figures, lack of due process, allegations of corruption on both sides, dubious documents purporting to prove wrongdoing, and the apparent use of criminal investigations to settle political scores.”<sup>110</sup> The case was built on a confession by Leonid Mayevsky, a Russian businessman, about paying a bribe to Tekebayev back in 2010. Mayevsky already had a history of being “implicated in numerous convoluted legal suits in Russia.”<sup>111</sup> Former president Roza Otunbayeva, who attended Tekebayev’s trial, accused the judge of staging a political show and said that judges and prosecutors who took illegal actions should be purged.<sup>112</sup>
- Tekebayev’s closest allies, former prosecutor general and MP Aida Salyanova and MP Almambet Shykmamatov, also faced charges. Salyanova was accused of approving a lawyer’s license for a confidant of Maxim Bakiyev, the notorious son of the former president, back in 2010.<sup>113</sup> Salyanova and her lawyers argued, unsuccessfully, that there was nothing illegal in her action. Salyanova’s trial abounded with instances of disregard for due process. On 7 July, her lawyer was simply not allowed to enter the courtroom.<sup>114</sup> On 22 September, the judge denied the defendant’s request for a restroom break until the Ombudsman, also attending the trial, seconded such a request.<sup>115</sup> On the day of the verdict, the judge rejected Salyanova’s right to make a final statement. The court claimed she had refused to speak, but the defendant said she would only speak after her lawyer had delivered her speech. The latter was occupied with a different criminal case and had asked for one hour to arrive at court, but the judge refused to wait. Salyanova stated that the reason the judge was not interested in hearing her lawyer was that the decision was already prepared.<sup>116</sup> Salyanova was sentenced to five years in prison, to be postponed until her two-year-old daughter reaches the age of 14.
- On 17 February, a criminal investigation was launched against Shykmamatov for abuse of power and corruption back in 2011.<sup>117</sup> In December, he was convicted and fined 5 million soms (\$72,000) for manipulating a tender to benefit his wife.<sup>118</sup>
- In a separate case, in late 2016, authorities had claimed to have documents from Belize confirming that Tekebayev, Salyanova, and Shykmamatov had made a deal with Maxim Bakiev to help with the privatization of a major mobile operator, Megacom.<sup>119</sup> The politicians said the documents were fake. Despite the high-profile initial announcement of allegations naming the deputies, the GKNB did not follow up on this investigation.
- On 2 August, Sadyr Japarov, another opposition politician who had earlier declared his intention to run for the presidency, was found guilty of holding the former governor of Issyk-Kul oblast Emilbek Kaptagayev hostage and sentenced to 11 and a half years in prison.<sup>120</sup> Japarov was accused of organizing and financing protests against the Kumtor gold mining company in 2013 that ended with Kaptagayev being held captive. Following the court decision, Kaptagayev himself stated that he did not support the verdict, as it had failed to prove the involvement of Japarov in the incident.<sup>121</sup>

## Corruption

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 6.25 | 6.50 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 | 6.25 |

- Kyrgyzstan has long been one of the most highly corrupt countries in the world. Every new president or government highlights corruption as a major problem to be addressed. However, despite political rhetoric, fighting corruption remains limited to the selective punishment of politically disloyal figures.
- Several high-profile criminal cases were launched in 2017, with defendants charged using the previously rarely used Article 303 (“Corruption”) of the Criminal Code. However, these were widely seen as politically motivated moves, demonstrative of the selective nature of fighting corruption in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, all the convictions of the top leadership of the Ata Meken opposition party (Omurbek Tekebayev, Aida Salyanova, Almambet Shykmamatov) were for charges of corruption committed in 2010 or 2011. These cases were widely described as hastily arranged and politically motivated persecution of outspoken critics of the president.<sup>122</sup>
- In a similar vein, in early 2017, the former leader of the Kyrgyzstan party, Kanat Isayev, was accused of the illegal sale of municipal buildings back in 2008–10, when he served as a mayor of Tokmok.<sup>123</sup> The criminal case was, in fact, opened in 2011 but only reopened in November 2016 after Isayev started criticizing constitutional reforms proposed by the president.<sup>124</sup>
- In February 2017, the chairman of the recently disbanded Military Court of Kyrgyzstan, Nurlan Ashymbek uulu, was detained and charged with extorting bribes. Ashymbek uulu had chaired the three-judge panel that reviewed the scandalous trial of Bakiyev-era top officials, officers, and soldiers. He was accused of receiving \$50,000 for the promise of a “positive” decision for Daniyar Dunganov, former deputy chairman of the National Security Council, who was charged with mass murder and abuse of power on 7 April 2010, when dozens of protesters were killed in demonstrations that eventually toppled the Bakiyev presidency.<sup>125</sup> Because the 25-year verdict for Dunganov was eventually upheld, Ashymbek uulu reportedly returned part of the money he received, which was when an arrest was made. This case shows how even high-ranking judges may be involved in corrupt deals. No less interestingly, the absence of any follow-up news about the investigation and trial of Ashymbek uulu after his arrest is symptomatic of how cases can be swept under the rug, i.e., “resolved,” in nontransparent ways.
- The latest edition of Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index placed Kyrgyzstan 135th out of 180 countries surveyed.<sup>126</sup> Kyrgyzstan’s score has improved by only one point since 2015, leaving it now slightly worse than Kazakhstan and the same as Russia. According to the 2016 Global Corruption Barometer, Kyrgyzstan had high rates of households facing bribery in order to access public services (38 percent, second highest in Central Asia after Tajikistan with 50 percent) and even higher road police corruption, with 48 percent of respondents who encountered road police in the last 12 months reporting to have paid bribes (again, second in the region to Tajikistan with 64 percent).<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Competitive Kyrgyzstan presidential election provides for orderly transfer of power, although cases of misuse of public resources, pressure and vote buying remain a concern, international observers say,” OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 15 October 2017,

<https://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2774-competitive-kyrgyzstan-presidential-election-provides-for-orderly-transfer-of-power-although-cases-of-misuse-of-public-resources-pressure-and-vote-buying-remain-a-concern-international-observers-say>, “Динара Ошуракунова: Нельзя назвать эти выборы честными” [Dinara Oshurakhunova: These elections cannot be called honest], K-News, 16 October 2017, <http://knews.kg/2017/10/oshurahunova-nelzya-nazvat-eti-vybory-chestnymi/>

<sup>2</sup> “В отношении Омурбека Бабанова возбуждено дело — Генпрокуратура” [Case opened regarding Omurbek Babanov – General Prosecutor], Sputnik, 4 November 2017, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/incidents/20171104/1036158986/ugolovnoe-delo-v-otnoshenii-babanova.html>

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- <sup>6</sup> “На старт выходят кланы” [Clans begin their competition], Delo No, 31 May 2017, <http://delo.kg/index.php/health-7/10882-na-start-vykhodyat-klany>
- <sup>7</sup> “Брат Сооронбая Жээнбекова назначен послом Кыргызстана в Украине” [Brother of Sooronbai Zheenbekov named ambassador to Ukraine], 16 November 2017, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20171116/1036341651/zhusupbek-sharipov-naznachenn-poslom-v-ukraine.html>
- <sup>8</sup> “Бывший советник Атамбаева возглавил штаб Жээнбекова в Бишкеке” [Former adviser to Atambayev heads staff of Zheenbekov in Bishkek], Kloop.kg, 18 August 2017, <https://kloop.kg/blog/2017/08/18/byvshij-sovetnik-atambaeva-vozglavil-shtab-zheebekova-v-bishkeke/>, “Ф.Ниязов возглавит штаб СДПК на выборах президента” [F. Niyazov to head staff of SDPK in presidential elections], AKIPress, 3 June 2017, <http://kg.akipress.org/news:1386971>
- <sup>9</sup> “Атамбаев не намерен занимать политические посты, но останется в списке своей партии СДПК под №1” [Atambayev does not intend to hold political office, but he will remain number one on the list of his SDPK], Kyrtag, 20 November 2017, <http://kyrtag.kg/news-of-the-day/atambaev-ne-nameren-zanimat-politicheskie-posty-no-ostanetsya-v-spiske-svoey-partii-sdpk-pod-1/>
- <sup>10</sup> “Калнур Ормушев: Может ли Сапар Исаков стать преемником?” [Kalnur Ormushev: Could Sapar Isakov become the successor?], Kaktus, 13 March 2017, [https://kaktus.media/doc/353929\\_kalnur\\_ormyshev\\_mojet\\_li\\_sapar\\_isakov\\_stat\\_preemnikom.html](https://kaktus.media/doc/353929_kalnur_ormyshev_mojet_li_sapar_isakov_stat_preemnikom.html)
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- <sup>14</sup> “Текебаев обвинил окружение Атамбаева в захвате земельного участка завода «Дастан»” [Tekebayev accuses Atambayev’s circle of appropriating the land of the factory Dastan], Azattyk, 15 September 2016, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27989495.html>
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