

# ELECTIONWATCH

## KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



### Kyrgyz Republic Pre-Election Watch: October 2010 Parliamentary Elections

In the wake of the April uprising that led to the ouster of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the dissolution of the *Jokorgu Kenesh*, the Kyrgyz parliament and the Kyrgyz people are preparing to choose a body of leaders under Central Asia's first semi-parliamentary system of government. The interim government that was established after the April 7 events proposed significant changes to the constitution that were overwhelmingly approved in a constitutional referendum held on June 27, 2010. These constitutional changes are viewed by many as a marked improvement over the prior document, and potentially as the most democratic constitution in Central Asia.

Under this new constitution, the powers of the president have been substantially reduced and additional powers given to parliament, with a significant role included for opposition political parties. The right of legislative initiative now lies with members of parliament, a popular initiative of at least 10,000 citizens, or the cabinet, and not with the president. A two-thirds vote of parliament can now overturn a presidential veto. Minority parties will have a representative that serves as a deputy speaker of parliament, and a minority party will chair all of the key parliamentary committees, including budget, security and law enforcement.

The constitutional reform also made significant changes to the structure of parliament. The number of deputies has been increased from 90 to 120. Of these, no more than 65 deputies can be elected to parliament from any one political party. Although this measure was included to ensure party diversity and prevent an absolute majority in parliament, the method for allocating the remaining seats in the event that a party exceeds this total is not specified, and could have the potential to generate conflict and distrust in the fairness of the elections. This provision could be particularly problematic if only one party reaches the national threshold of five percent of registered voters and the regional threshold of half-a-percent in every district, as well as in Bishkek and Osh.

### Political Environment

Despite the number of challenges the country has faced since the April events, including massive ethnic violence in the southern part of the country and an extensive constitutional reform that included the conduct of a nationwide referendum, the administration of the parliamentary elections is anticipated to be significantly improved from previous elections.

Twenty-nine political parties submitted party lists and were registered with the Central Election Commission (CEC). All of these lists have been posted on the CEC website for review by the public. While the general public seems to have doubts that the elections will be free and fair, based on the past conduct of elections, the high level of participation by political parties shows that they still feel that there is an incentive to be part of the process.

rather than work outside of it.

A number of challenges still remain that merit the attention of election observers and the Kyrgyz Republic's leadership. President Roza Otunbaeva's government replaced a significant number of election commissioners at every level in an effort to eliminate the massive fraud that was committed in the last presidential election; the consequence of this move, however, is an inexperienced cadre of election commissioners attempting to conduct major elections with little time for training on the procedures for doing so. An election provision also remains in place that requires citizens to vote where they are legally registered, rather than where they live, potentially preventing thousands of voters from being able to participate in the elections. The re-introduction of inking of voters is welcomed as a positive step toward reducing the potential for fraud.

Although political tensions are high, parties have been able to register and campaign in what is expected to be very competitive elections. Early polling showed the political party Ata Meken as the favored choice of voters, but the race is currently a toss-up with more than 50 percent of voters estimated to be undecided. Additionally, some newly formed parties are reported to be active in the regions and have adequate funding available to conduct campaigns, making the outcome difficult to predict. Access to both print and broadcast media has been readily available to parties without discrimination. Some opposition parties have expressed concerns that parties with ties to the current administration will abuse administrative resources, but these complaints do not yet have any real evidence behind them. IRI is optimistic that voters will be able to make real choices on Election Day about who will represent them in parliament.

## IRI in the Kyrgyz Republic

IRI's programming in the Kyrgyz Republic centers around political party development, primarily aimed at three core objectives: Strengthening political party capacity to address key areas of citizen concern, particularly by encouraging the development of issue-based platforms and campaigns; improving political party organization and management with a special focus on regional offices; and equipping youth with skills to become better informed and more politically responsible.

In advance of the October parliamentary elections, IRI has provided political parties with election code and campaign trainings, national public opinion data to assist in message development and voter targeting, and political party poll watcher trainings to monitor and report irregularities in voting and ballot counts. Additionally, IRI produced a voter frequently asked questions guide to help voters understand how to fully participate in the election process.



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