

COUNTRY PROFILE: KYRGYZSTAN

June 2008



BASIC FACTS:

- Population (July 2008 est.): 5,356,869, annual growth (2008 est.): 1.38%
- Infant mortality rate – 32.3 deaths/1,000 live births (2008 est)
- Human Development Index rank (2007): 0.696 (medium) (116th)
- Literacy rate: 98.7% over the age of 15
- Average life expectancy: 69.12 years (2008)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

A Central Asian country of striking beauty, towering peaks and proud nomadic traditions, most of Kyrgyzstan was formally annexed to Russia in 1876. The Kyrgyz staged a major revolt against the Tsarist Empire in 1916 in which almost one-sixth of the Kyrgyz population was killed. Kyrgyzstan became a Soviet republic in 1936 and achieved independence in 1991 when the USSR dissolved. The current President, Kurmanbek Bakiev, came to power in 2005 following the so-called Tulip Revolution. Bakiev replaced Askar Akayev, who had been in power since 1990. While Kyrgyzstan does possess oil and gas resources, it imports the vast bulk of what it needs. The economic situation is dire, particularly in the south where unemployment is very high and poverty rife, and the country's politics have turned volatile in recent years. Current concerns include: privatization of state-owned enterprises, negative trends in democracy and political freedoms, reduction of corruption, improving interethnic relations, and combating terrorism.

POLITICS:

The 1993 constitution defines the form of government as a democratic republic. The executive branch includes a president and prime minister. The parliament currently is unicameral. The judicial branch comprises a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, local courts, and a Chief Prosecutor. In March 2002, in the southern district of Aksy, five people protesting the arbitrary arrest of an opposition politician were shot dead by police, sparking nationwide protests. President Akayev initiated a constitutional reform process which initially included the participation of a broad range



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: Kyrgyz Republic
- Population: 5,356,869
- Capital: Bishkek
- Largest city: Bishkek
- Area: 198,500 sq km
- Major languages: Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungun 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census)
- Major religion(s): Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%
- Life expectancy: 65.12 (men), 73.33 (women)
- Monetary unit: 1 som = 100 tyiyns
- Main exports: cotton, wool, meat, tobacco; gold, mercury, uranium, natural gas, hydropower; machinery; shoes
- GDP per capita: \$2,000 (2007 est.)
- Internet domain: .kg
- International dialling code: +996

of government, civil, and social representatives in an open dialogue, leading to a February 2003 referendum marred by voting irregularities. The amendments to the constitution approved by the referendum resulted in stronger control by the president and weakened the parliament and the Constitutional Court. Parliamentary elections for a new, 75-seat unicameral legislature were held on February 27 and March 13, 2005, but were widely viewed as corrupt. The subsequent protests led to a bloodless coup on March 24, after which Akayev fled the country and was replaced by acting president Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

Interim government leaders are developing a new governing structure for the country and working to resolve outstanding constitutional issues. On July 10, 2005, acting president Bakiyev won the presidential election in a landslide, with 88.9% of the vote, and was inaugurated on 14 August. However, initial public support for the new administration substantially declined in subsequent months as a result of its apparent inability to solve the corruption problems that have plagued the country since its independence from the Soviet Union, along with the murders of several members of parliament. The political opposition organized demonstrations in Bishkek in April, May, and November 2006 resulting in the adoption of a new constitution that transferred some of the president's powers to parliament and the government. In December 2006, the Kyrgyz parliament voted to adopt new amendments, restoring some of the presidential powers lost in the November 2006 constitutional change. By late-September 2007, both previous versions of the constitution were declared illegal, and the country reverted to the Akayev-era 2003 constitution, which was subsequently modified in a flawed referendum initiated by Bakiyev. The president then dissolved parliament, called for early elections, and gained control of the new parliament through his newly-created political party, Ak Jol, in December 2007 elections.

ECONOMY:

Kyrgyzstan is a poor, mountainous country with a predominantly agricultural economy. Cotton, tobacco, wool, and meat are the main agricultural products, although only tobacco and cotton are exported in any quantity. Industrial exports include gold, mercury, uranium, natural gas, and electricity. Following independence, Kyrgyzstan was progressive in carrying out market reforms such as an improved regulatory system and land reform. Kyrgyzstan was the first Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country to be accepted into the World Trade Organization. Much of the government's stock in enterprises has been sold. Drops in production had been severe after the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, but by mid-1995, production began to recover and exports began to increase. The economy is heavily weighted toward gold export and a drop in output at the main Kumtor gold mine sparked a 0.5% decline in GDP in 2002 and a 0.6% decline in 2005. GDP grew more than 6% in 2007, partly due to higher gold prices internationally. The government made steady strides in controlling its substantial fiscal deficit, nearly closing the gap between revenues and expenditures in 2006, before boosting expenditures more than 20% in 2007. The government and international financial institutions have been engaged in a comprehensive medium-term poverty reduction and economic growth strategy. In 2005, Bishkek agreed to pursue much-needed tax reform and, in 2006, became eligible for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. Progress fighting corruption, further restructuring of domestic industry, and success in attracting foreign investment are keys to future growth.

Sources:

CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

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Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyrgyzstan>