



Language

The protests in March 2005 (the 'Tulip Revolution') were (as in Georgia) at least partially a response to rigged parliamentary elections. But the demonstrations, which erupted in the southern city of Osh before spreading to capital Bishkek, also appeared to be a protest against presidential nepotism and economic hardship. The protesters were more violent than in Georgia and the Ukraine, looting and rioting as they attacked the presidential and parliamentary buildings. Some observers have queried how far the uprising was spontaneous or was organized by opposition leaders seeking power. The immediate outcome was that President Akayev fled to Russia and an opposition leader, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, became interim president and prime minister, but agreed to work with the newly elected parliament. He won a landslide victory in the presidential election in July 2005, in an election approved by OSCE monitors. In Spring 2006 there were protests demanding further reforms and in early November 2006 mass demonstrations called on the President to sign a new constitution limiting his power. He did so, but tension between pro- and anti-government demonstrators indicated continuing instability.

President Bakiyev was faced by another unarmed uprising in April 2010, sparked by economic hardship and anger at presidential corruption. Like his predecessor he fled the country as protests turned into rioting, but has been accused by the new government (and UN observers) of fomenting serious ethnic violence against Uzbeks in the south (2,000 were killed).

The Revolution of 2020

The popular uprising in October 2020 was the third revolution since independence, and President Jeenbekov yet another president to be forced from office. Kyrgyzstan is, however, the only former Asian republic of the USSR that has a semblance of parliamentary democracy - it adopted a parliamentary constitution after independence and has held regular elections. Indeed, the immediate reason for protesters converging on the capital Bishkek was their belief that the president had rigged the parliamentary elections of 4 October, in which two parties loyal to the president won most seats, and some of the 16 competing parties won no seats. The election was denounced by opposition leaders as the most corrupt to date, a charge illustrated by video evidence of mass vote buying. One response to the protests was that the Central Election Commission annulled the elections. A section of the protesters had however stormed government buildings and also the prison; they freed several former politicians, including former MP Sadyr Japarov, who was serving 11 years for kidnapping a local official - a charge he denied. Japarov was appointed prime minister by the former members of parliament, but within days moved into the presidency, while the Supreme Court began to review his conviction.

Although the uprising began as a protest against rigged elections, political developments were rapidly influenced by those activists prepared to use serious violence. The storming of government buildings led to at least one death and at least 680 injured, and also to burned out cars and piles of debris on the streets. Moreover, supporters of Japarov were accused of intimidating outgoing MPs: one candidate to become prime minister had been seriously assaulted when he spoke to a rally. Japarov is a fervent Kyrgyz nationalist, which gains him a popular base, and had earlier in his political career led a crowd in an attempt to occupy parliament and the presidential office. After attaining presidential power in 2020 he delayed new parliamentary elections in order to hold a presidential election in January 2021, which he won by a landslide. He then promoted plans to rewrite the constitution, sweeping away the constitutional limits on presidential power (introduced after the mass protests of 2010) to give himself overriding control not only over the state, but over parliament and the judiciary. The proposed constitutional changes, which included scrapping the one term limit on holding the presidency, were approved by 79 percent of those voting in a referendum in April 2021 - though only 37 percent of the electorate voted. The revolution of October 2020 now looks, therefore, more like a coup d'état.

However, strident Kyrgyz nationalism may antagonize the ethnic Uzbek minority living in the south of the country and there is political opposition to autocratic rule, so Japarov may at some stage be challenged by a further uprising.

The uprising of October 2020 and subsequent political developments were not generally well covered by international media, but a substantial analysis by the Foreign Policy Centre (which has cross-party parliamentary



support in the UK) is listed below. A few journal articles exploring the political implications of the 2010 deadly riots against Uzbeks, and the context of Kyrgyz nationalism in 2020 are also listed.

[Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan](#) [1], New Internationalist, 2021, pp. 38-39

Brief but informative overview of the historical background and socio-economic conditions in the country, plus a summary of political developments since 1991.

Fuhrmann, Matthew, [A Tale of Two Social Capitals: Revolutionary Collective Action in Kyrgyzstan](#) [2], Problems of Post-Communism, Vol. 53, issue 6, 2007, pp. 16-29

Hager, Anselm, [Ethnic Riots and Prosocial Behavior: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan](#) [3], American Political Science Review, Vol. 113, issue 4, 2019, pp. 1029-1044

The author examines the aftermath of the 2010 riots in Osh, when 400 Uzbeks were killed in the city by Kyrgyz from outside. Hager tests the thesis that riots heighten cohesion within the ethnic group but reduce cooperation across ethnic divides. He found that - contrary to the theory - the neighbourhoods attacked in 2010 had low social cohesion and there was a sense of being abandoned by fellow Uzbeks.

Heuer, Vera ; Hierman, Brent, [Substate Populism and the Challenge to the Centre in Post-Riot Asian Contexts](#) [4], Journal of Peacebuilding and Development, Vol. 13, issue 3, 2018, pp. 40-54

The article compares Narendra Modi (when Chief Minister of Gujarat, India, after deadly anti-Muslim riots) with the Mayor of Osh in Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 Kyrgyz attacks on Uzbeks, to examine the use of populist rhetoric to cement local political support and undermine external attempts at reconciliation.

Hug, Adam, [Retreating Rights - Kyrgyzstan: Introduction](#) [5], Foreign Policy Centre, 2021

This introduction to a substantial report on the latest phase in Kyrgyz politics provides an analysis of the events of October 2020 to February 2021 against the background of the recent political past, including the legacy of the anti-Uzbek violence in 2010.

Kamila, Eshaliyeva, [Is Anti-Chinese Mood Growing in Kyrgyzstan?](#) [6], Open Democracy, 2019

Article discussing Kyrgyz protests in 2019 against migrant Chinese workers (both illegal and legal), in the context of alarm about Chinese government treatment of ethnic Kyrgyz inside China. The author considers how far fears of large numbers of migrants could be substantiated and what the relationship was between protesters and state bodies.

Kulikova, Svetlana V. ; Perlmutter, David D., [Blogging Down the Dictator? The Kyrgyz Revolution and Samizdat Websites](#) [7], International Communication Gazette, Vol. 69, issue February, 2007, pp. 29-50

Marat, Erica, [The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After](#) [8], Washington DC, The Jamestown Foundation, 2006, pp. 151

Chronological collection of articles from Jamestown's Eurasia Daily Monitor.

Radnitz, Scott, [What really happened in Kyrgyzstan?](#) [9], Journal of Democracy, Vol. 17, issue April, 2006, pp. 132-146



Stresses that the 'Tulip Revolution' was very different from other 'colour revolutions' and notes the importance of localism. See also: , [A Horse of a Different Color: Revolution and Regression' in Bunce \[10\]](#) In Bunce; McFaul; Stoner-Weiss, [Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World \[11\]](#) (D. II.1. Comparative Assessments [12]) New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 300-324 , arguing that the events of 2005 better seen as a 'coup'.

See also:

Valerie J. Bunce; Sharon L. Wolchik, [Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries \[13\]](#), (D. II.1. Comparative Assessments [14]), pp. 166-76.

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