

# IISA's Blog Post



Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs

## [KYRGYZSTAN ELECTIONS; A NEW HOPE FOR THE REGION?]



## **Kyrgyzstan elections: a new hope for the region?**

**By Zenobia Homan**

On paper, Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian country to have staged successful, democratic elections. The general election on October 4<sup>th</sup> did not have a foregone conclusion, and was not uncontested. Kyrgyzstan now has 14 political parties, none of which gained an absolute majority. This means a coalition will have to be formed – an idea ‘modern and Western’ Britain still struggles with. According to the definitive results, the leading Social Democratic Party (SDPK) got 38 out of the 120 seats on offer. Runner-up Respublika-Ata Jurt has won 28 seats. Other parties with deputies in parliament are ‘Kyrgyzstan’ (18 seats), Onuugu-Progress (13 seats), Bir Bol (12 seats) and Ata-Meken (11 seats). However, while this sounds like fantastic progress compared to surrounding dictatorships, there are a few serious details to be kept in mind. Kyrgyz political parties are basically facades for patronage: they target specific, regional, voters, and they lack long-term plans (such as economic policy

development). It is questionable whether there will be any real opposition. In addition, voters could only participate through a rather invasive biometric registration process – something which not everyone was especially keen on, and contributing to the relatively low turn-out of 59%. What is more, one journalist has actually travelled across the country, to places less well-reported on, and established a general indifference laced with scepticism. In Uzbek neighbourhoods of Osh many people indicated little enthusiasm for voting. They did not seem to believe any party properly represents their interests, Uzbek members or not, and they were also unconvinced anything would be changing for the better.

Placed in the geopolitical context of the region; Kyrgyzstan elections are important to observe. As the situation in Afghanistan continues to remain unstable and as both Russia and China flex their muscles in Central Asia; Kyrgyzstan’s democratic exercise is

strategically significant.. Furthermore, given Russia & China's record on the 'democratic experiences' as well as the western record on compromising its ideals of democracy over 'security' in the region in its recent history; we may have further grounds for some pessimism.

In addition, there is no Islamic party in this primarily Muslim country. The only such party in Central Asia belonged to Tajikistan, and was banned three weeks ago.

Then again, to tie this back into our highly praised Western politics – the major British parties also differ little from one another (or at least have done so until now?). If a journalist was to drive around the UK o, they would still find many people sceptical, and feeling under-represented. We should not be too harsh on Kyrgyzstan, and instead praise its efforts – keeping an eye on future developments, and hoping that it will not fall back but push forward.

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