

Back to Kyrgyzstan

The authorities intensified their repression of dissent, prosecuting journalists and activists under broadly defined charges like “extremism” and “inciting mass unrest.” Legislation on “foreign representatives” continued to stifle civil society. The independent torture prevention institution was dismantled. A new law curtailed freedom of religion.

Background

Early parliamentary elections on 30 November saw presidential allies win almost all seats.

Freedom of expression

The authorities intensified their crackdown on dissenting voices, targeting investigative media outlets, journalists, bloggers, and human rights activists for prosecution under trumped-up charges such as “inciting mass unrest”, “calls for disobedience” or “extremism”.

Under amendments to the Code of Offences that came into force in February, defamation in broadcast, print and online media became punishable by fines through new fast-track administrative court hearings.

The Supreme Court upheld the prison sentence of journalist Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy in February, rejecting her appeal. She had been sentenced to six years’ imprisonment in 2024 on politically motivated charges of calling for mass riots, after exposing corruption. In October, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found her detention arbitrary, urging Kyrgyzstan to release her and provide compensation.

Legislative amendments purporting to strengthen the fight against “extremism” came into force in July. They reinstated criminal liability for possession of materials deemed “extremist” under vaguely defined criteria and introduced a new offence of using the internet or mass media to publicly incite “extremist” activities or the “violent seizure of power”.

Further amendments to penalize the spreading of “false or unreliable” information via mass media or the internet were also introduced in July.

In August, a controversial new law required all media outlets, including websites and blogs, to register, regardless of content. The Cabinet of Ministers was granted sole authority to set registration procedures, without provision for judicial or parliamentary oversight.

Human rights defender Rita Karasartova was detained in April on trumped-up charges, including “organizing mass riots”, in apparent retaliation for her human rights work. The case materials were classified and the trial was held behind closed doors. In September, a

court in the capital, Bishkek, sentenced her to five years' probation.¹ Bishkek City Court turned down her appeal on 11 December.

In September, former Kloop Media camera operators Aleksandr Aleksandrov and Dzhoormart Duulatov were each sentenced to five years' imprisonment for purportedly inciting mass unrest. Prosecutors linked them to videos critical of the government on exiled journalist Bolot Temirov's YouTube channel, though without credible evidence. Both denied any connection with the videos and said their confessions had been coerced. In November, an appeal court reduced their sentences to three years' probation. An appeal to the Supreme Court was pending at year's end.

In October, a court in Bishkek officially designated as "extremist" all materials and information published by several independent media outlets, including Kloop Media, Temirov Live and Ait Ait Dese. This designation applied to content in any format. Consequently, virtually "liking", reposting or sharing such materials could lead to prosecution. Journalists Bolot Temirov and Rinat Tukhvatshin were also designated as "extremist". An appeal against the court decision was pending at year's end.

Freedom of association

In June, the CERD Committee expressed serious concern that the 2024 Law on Foreign Representatives stigmatized civil society organizations and undermined the legitimate activities of human rights defenders and NGOs. During Kyrgyzstan's UPR in September, the authorities rejected all recommendations to repeal or amend this legislation.

Cuts to USAID assistance led to the suspension of funding for human rights and civil society development programmes. Dozens of NGOs were forced to cease activities or close because of the impact of the "foreign representatives" legislation and funding cuts.

Funding constraints, new legal amendments classifying election observations as political activity and fears of retribution for such monitoring greatly curtailed the ability of civil society to participate in public life. Only two domestic organizations received accreditation to monitor the parliamentary elections, compared with 40 in 2021.

Torture and other ill-treatment

In July, five UN special rapporteurs raised concerns about repeated failures to investigate the alleged torture during pretrial detention of pastor Pavel Schreider, the leader of the Free and True Reform Adventist Church (see below, Freedom of religion and belief), and members of his congregation. Pastor Schreider reported being beaten by five State Committee for National Security officers, including being struck with an iron pipe to force a confession. Other church members were reportedly tortured with stun guns. Pastor Schreider was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury and cognitive impairment in July and transferred to a prison medical facility.

In September, the National Centre for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT) was abolished and its mandate transferred to the Ombudsperson's Institute. UN experts expressed dismay at

the decision to close the NCPT without proper consultation, warning the move undermined torture prevention efforts.

Death penalty

In September, President Sadyr Japarov proposed reintroducing the death penalty as punishment for the rape of a child and the rape and murder of a child or adult woman. The move followed the abduction, rape and murder of a teenage girl, which sparked widespread public anger. Human rights advocates expressed concern that the reintroduction of the death penalty would violate Kyrgyzstan's international obligations, while not acting as a deterrent or addressing the root causes of gender-based violence. On 10 December, the Constitutional Court rejected the proposed amendment as unconstitutional and in breach of international commitments.

LGBTI people's rights

In September, at the UPR, Kyrgyzstan rejected all recommendations relating to LGBTI people's rights, including to amend anti-discrimination legislation to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. Kyrgyzstan's representatives argued that the recommendations were not compatible with the country's "traditional values" and social norms.

Freedom of religion and belief

A restrictive new law that significantly curtailed the right to freedom of religion or belief entered into force in January. The law continued to prohibit all unregistered religious activity, introduced new re-registration requirements and restricted registration to groups with at least 500 adult citizens resident in the same region. The law also imposed a discriminatory blanket ban on the wearing of religious clothing "that makes it impossible to identify a person" in public spaces and buildings. In February, five UN special rapporteurs reiterated their concerns about the new law, in particular the use of vague "extremism" grounds to ban religious literature and close religious communities. They warned that the law disproportionately targeted religious minorities.

In March, a court designated the True and Free Reform Adventist Church as "extremist" and banned it from operating. In July, its pastor Pavel Shreider, a Russian national, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for "incitement of racial, ethnic, national, religious, or regional enmity" after an unfair trial. He was to be deported after serving his term. His appeal faced repeated delays and was still pending at year's end.

In April, police conducted raids in Osh and Jalal-Abat provinces, stopping more than 300 women for wearing niqabs in public. At least 29 women were fined and hundreds received official warnings.

Forced evictions

In April, Osh city authorities began partially demolishing approximately 200 properties on Navoi Street – a predominantly ethnic Uzbek neighbourhood – without adequate consultation with or compensation for the residents who had been forcibly evicted. The street was one of the worst affected areas during the 2010 inter-ethnic violence in the city and was later reconstructed with international assistance.

In June, the CERD Committee criticized the redevelopment plans for Osh for failing to include reconstruction of traditional Uzbek neighbourhoods.

Right to a healthy environment

In July, geologists, ecologists and residents raised concerns about the start of a pilot project extracting the mineral titanomagnetite at the Kyzyl-Ompol field. Despite earlier assurances that mining at Kyzyl-Ompol would begin only after technical and environmental assessments had been published, operations commenced without releasing these documents.

