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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Kyrgyzstan

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 23

Political Environment: 30

Economic Environment: 20

Total Score: 73

- In recent years, Kyrgyzstan's media environment has been considered one of the most liberal in Central Asia. Despite the country's relatively progressive media laws, libel remains a criminal offense and carries up to three years in prison; authorities have ignored repeated calls to decriminalize it. However, unlike in previous years, no new cases filed by public officials were reported in 2009.
- In April, the independent *Uchur* newspaper was sued by the Zhannat Hotel and ordered to pay almost US\$75,000 in moral and material damages; staff at the paper had only been informed of the libel lawsuit on the day the trial started.
- All media outlets must register to operate, and although a number of broadcasters have applied for permission, authorities have not approved any new licenses since 2006. Legislation passed in 2008 – but yet to be fully implemented – maintains state control over the public broadcaster and places a number of restrictions on private radio and television outlets.
- In March 2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) affiliate Echo of Manas ceased carrying the service's broadcasts after repeated government threats to revoke its license. Four more radio and television affiliates also halted RFE/RL programs under pressure.
- The media environment deteriorated in 2009 amid numerous violent attacks on journalists. Gennady Pavlyuk, an independent journalist with a history of exposing corruption in Kyrgyzstan, died after he was thrown from a window with his hands bound in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Pavlyuk was an ethnic Russian, lived in Kyrgyzstan, and headed the Kyrgyz bureaus of several Russian publications. As of 2009, the 2007 murder of journalist Alisher Saipov in the southern city of Osh remained unsolved, and the details of the government investigation were still concealed. Saipov, an ethnic Uzbek, lived and worked in Kyrgyzstan and was critical of both the Uzbek government and Kyrgyz relations with them.
- At least seven other journalists suffered physical attacks in 2009. In a typical example, opposition journalist Syrgak Abdyldayev was brutally beaten and repeatedly stabbed in March; he left the country in August after receiving death threats.
- Independent journalists reporting on politically sensitive issues like government corruption and the improper privatization of state companies continued to endure

aggressive harassment from tax inspectors, security officers, and the state antimonopoly committee.

- Unlike in many of its Central Asian neighbors, media in Kyrgyzstan express some diversity of opinion, although coverage remains somewhat biased. President Kurmanbek Bakiyev consolidated his power in 2009, winning reelection in July. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which monitored the election, noted that "broadcast media gave limited and unbalanced coverage of election contestants, and the state media displayed a strong bias in favor of the incumbent."
- Nearly 50 newspapers and magazines print regularly with varying degrees of freedom. The independent printing press run by local nongovernmental organization Media Support Center surpassed the state-run printing house, Uchkun, as the country's leading newspaper publisher.
- Approximately 50 state-owned and private television and radio stations operate in the country, with two television stations, both state-owned, broadcasting nationwide.
- State-owned media outlets benefit from government subsidies. However, the ability of authorities to use advertising to influence media content has receded as more private sources of advertising revenue become available.
- Internet news sites, blogs, and forums provided a lively alternative for those with access (approximately 40 percent of the population in 2009), though there were occasional reports that the government blocked independent news websites like RFE/RL and blogging platforms like LiveJournal. Internet access outside towns and cities remains limited.

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