



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Baseline Snapshot

Kyrgyzstan

February 2026

## Context

Since the 2021 [constitutional referendum](#) that returned Kyrgyzstan to a stronger presidential system, power has become increasingly centralized in the executive, reversing the post-2010 parliamentary experiment and narrowing the space for pluralistic politics, and reflecting a clear departure from Kyrgyzstan's earlier [reputation](#) as the "Island of Democracy". The shift has been [described](#) as a consolidation of authority that has reduced institutional checks and encouraged a more managed political environment.

The political consolidation culminated in a snap parliamentary election on 30 November 2025 held after the legislature self-dissolved. [International observers described](#) the vote as having been administered efficiently but warned that the campaign took place in a restrictive environment, with legal and administrative changes that limited meaningful competition and constrained opposition activity. Voter turnout remained low compared with historical averages.

Economic performance has been comparatively resilient. Throughout 2024-2025, macroeconomic indicators improved: strong growth, stabilizing inflation, and an improving fiscal position were highlighted in [the IMF's 2025 Article IV consultation](#), while the [World Bank's 2025 Country Economic Memorandum](#) emphasized the need for structural reforms to sustain inclusive growth and reduce vulnerabilities such as dependence on remittances and a narrow export base. At the same time, official growth projections and short-term momentum contrasted with medium-term risks: external shocks, limited policy buffers, and structural constraints on private investment mean that fiscal and monetary prudence plus reform implementation will be critical to maintain stability.

On intra-state issues, in March 2025, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a [long-awaited border agreement](#) aimed at ending a deadly, long-running dispute, formally settling the remaining contested sections of their 970-kilometre frontier and committing to demarcation steps intended to prevent the violent clashes that had repeatedly erupted in previous years.

In October 2025, a [draft constitutional amendment proposing](#) the reintroduction of the death penalty was made public, and President Japarov subsequently asked the Constitutional Court to review its constitutionality. However, on 10 December 2025, [the Constitutional Court ruled the proposed amendments incompatible with the Constitution](#). The Court also referred to the binding international obligations of Kyrgyzstan, such as the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which [prohibits](#) the reintroduction of the death penalty after its abolition.

Taken together, these developments define the broader political and economic setting in which civil society organisations, media actors, and public institutions operated during the reporting period.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Although the 2021 [Constitution](#) of Kyrgyzstan guarantees freedom of expression (Article 32), the right to seek and receive information (Article 33), and freedom of association (Article 36)

and peaceful assembly (Article 39), civic space has tightened markedly, with growing legal and practical risks for NGOs, journalists, and activists.

Freedom of expression has deteriorated through regulatory and judicial actions. On 6 August 2025, President Sadyr Japarov [signed](#) the new [Law on Mass Media](#), which makes registration mandatory for all media and expands state oversight including the power to register, re-register, and terminate media organisations without parliamentary or judicial review. Press freedom groups have widely [criticised](#) these changes for their threat to independent journalism.

Authorities continue to use Article 278 of the [Criminal Code](#) (which criminalizes public “calls to disobedience or mass riots”) to suppress online expression. In November 2023, civic activist Zarina Torokulova [was prosecuted](#) after she reposted two Facebook posts and was placed in pre-trial detention for “online media reposts” related to an online rally. Azattyq Asia also [reported](#) the August 2023 arrest of writer and publicist Oljobay Shakir, who initiated an “online rally” planned for 31 August 2023. He was taken to the GKNB for questioning on 23 August 2023, detained, and later placed in pre-trial detention on charges related to “mass unrest” under Article 278.

In January 2024, security services conducted coordinated searches of the homes and offices of journalists affiliated [with Temirov Live](#) and the satirical [project Ayt Ayt Dese](#), detaining 11 journalists on charges of calling for mass unrest. In October 2025, a Bishkek court designated *Kloop*, *Temirov Live*, and *Ayt Ayt Dese* as “[extremist organizations](#),” effectively banning three of the country’s most influential independent media outlets.

Freedom of peaceful assembly remains constrained by repeated, court-approved bans of rallies in central Bishkek. The practice was introduced [in April 2022](#), when authorities announced that rallies in the city center were prohibited “with the aim to prevent possible mass disorders and also guided by the law on peaceful assemblies” until 1 September 2022, with assemblies redirected to designated locations including Gorky Park. Although initially presented as a temporary measure, the restrictions have since been repeatedly extended by court decisions, remaining in force through late [2023](#) and continuing into [2024–2025](#), effectively normalising long-term limitations on assemblies in central public spaces. For example, on 17 July 2025 in Bishkek, authorities [prevented](#) a peaceful protest planned by human rights defender Tolekan Ismailova near the Pervomaisky district administration, citing a court-backed ban on rallies, despite organizers arguing that such assemblies are protected by Kyrgyzstan’s Constitution.

[ICNL](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) have also documented the growing use of security and extremism legislation to restrict NGOs, journalists, and activists. [Amendments](#) on 28 July 2025 to the Law “[On Counteracting Extremist Activity](#)” raised [significant concerns](#). The law’s triggers are broad and insufficiently defined, allowing the concept of “extremism” to be stretched to cover a wide range of speech and civic activity. Additionally, in July 2025 the President signed a decree establishing a temporary, [full state monopoly on international internet traffic](#) from 15 August 2025 to 14 August 2026, and the same period saw new measures to block online content and impose [fines for allegedly ‘false information’](#).

Against this backdrop, Freedom House classifies Kyrgyzstan as “Not Free” with a score of 26/100 in [Freedom in the World 2025](#), while [Freedom on the Net 2025](#) rated it “Partly Free” at 47/100, where Kyrgyzstan is singled out for one of the sharpest global declines. The CIVICUS Monitor [downgraded](#) the country’s civic space to “repressed” in 2023, which has

remained until 2025, and it was also put on their watchlist in 2024 for repressive laws and attacks against civil society actors.

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The legal framework governing civil society in Kyrgyzstan has become significantly more restrictive. [The Law on Non-Commercial Organizations](#) (adopted in 1999) previously provided the basic framework for NGO registration and operation. However, amendments adopted in April 2024 – commonly known as [the Law on “Foreign Representatives”](#) (Law No. 72) – introduced far-reaching obligations for all non-commercial organisations that receive foreign funding or engage in vaguely defined “political activities”. It requires those CSOs to register as “foreign representatives” and it creates a basis for state interference and heightened oversight. Noncompliance mechanisms can include demands to label materials or submit an audit report (the mandatory independent annual audit is described as particularly burdensome for regional NGOs because audit providers are concentrated in major cities). After a notice period, the Ministry of Justice can also suspend activities up to six months and ultimately petition a court for liquidation; suspension can also restrict access to bank accounts beyond limited exceptions.

On 27 August 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted [Decree No. 518](#) approving implementing regulations on the procedure for maintaining a public register of “foreign representatives” and conducting inspections of their activities. [ICNL’s separate analysis](#) concludes that these regulations go beyond the scope of the law and place excessive demands on NGOs. In October 2024, the [Venice Commission](#) issued an opinion on [Law No. 72](#), warning that the vague definitions and wide administrative discretion provided in the law create a serious risk of arbitrary interference with freedom of association and recommending that the law be repealed or fundamentally revised. As pointed out in [ICNL’s Civic Freedom Monitor](#) report, while there are no blanket legal prohibitions on receiving foreign funding, recent legislative changes have created significant uncertainty and new barriers.

In addition, the new [Mass Media Law](#) also introduces stricter media-sector requirements, including a 35% cap on foreign participation in media founders/owners. While not aimed at non-media actors, [ICNL has warned](#) that misclassification of CSO websites or newsletters as ‘online media’ could create new compliance risks intended for professional media organisations.

Taken together, these measures significantly undermine the legal security and autonomy of civil society organisations, increasing the risk of sanctions and stigmatisation, as well as discouraging organisations from critical advocacy or work.

## 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society in Kyrgyzstan remains financially vulnerable due to dependance on international donors and foreign grants, while domestic philanthropy and predictable local funding streams remain limited.

Access to funding is uneven: larger Bishkek-based CSOs more easily meet donor compliance requirements, while grassroots and rural groups face higher costs and capacity limits. Frequent reporting, co-financing, and audit requirements tend to favor CSOs with stronger finance or administrative teams, which makes funding competition even more difficult for smaller and grassroots organisations. Language can also be a barrier, as translation gaps and grant materials often geared [toward Russian and English](#) can limit participation and capacity building for smaller CSOs.

A [2025 public report by OHCHR](#), based on monitoring in all seven regions and consultations with 115 CSOs, points to a significant drop in organisational sustainability. The results show that 37% of CSOs reduced or suspended programmes, 7% dissolved themselves, and 48% experienced decreased collaboration with government officials. Such trends have a direct effect on the ability of CSOs to provide services, maintain partnerships, and function on a large scale. 77% of CSOs reported self-censorship, with many reducing public-facing work and communications. For sustainability, this matters because organisations often depend on public outreach, advocacy visibility, and stakeholder engagement to retain donors, build partnerships, and justify continued funding.

Funding stability has also been affected by the withdrawal of major long-term partners. In April 2024, Open Society Foundations [announced](#) it would cease operations in Kyrgyzstan and noted that its national foundation had provided over USD 115 million over three decades. The withdrawal of a long-term funder on that scale illustrates how shifts in the civic environment can produce lasting resource shocks for local civil society. Regional [reporting](#) also indicates that the 2025 USAID funding cuts created an additional layer of uncertainty for civil society sustainability in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, where a large share of USAID-backed programmes were reportedly discontinued.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

The [Constitution](#) (Article 33) guarantees the right to seek and receive information. This right is now governed primarily by Law No. 217 (29 December 2023) "[On the Right of Access to Information](#)" (in force since January 2024). The law frames its objective as maximum openness and transparency (Article 1) and guarantees "everyone" a right of access to information held by information holders (Article 2.2), interpreted to maximize these objectives (Article 2.4). Requests do not require justification (Article 16.2), written requests must be answered within 10 business days (Article 17.2) and information is generally provided in the form/language requested and preparation of responses is free.

The law allows public bodies to refuse access to information on several grounds, including when the information is protected or secret, when there are procedural problems with the request, and – under Article 21.1(4) – when the authority "should not" possess the information in the first place. However, some of the given grounds are too broad and can be used to deny access in situations where disclosure should still be possible. The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) has [pointed out](#) that these exceptions need to be narrowed and brought in line with stronger safeguards. Article 21.1(4) is especially concerning because information should not be withheld because a public body was not supposed to have it. That kind of information may be exactly what helps uncover wrongdoing, abuse, or poor management. CLD also notes that the law is missing important protections, such as a public-

interest override and sunset clauses. For that reason, the refusal provisions should be tightened, and these safeguards should be added.

In practice, timely disclosure remains uneven. An [OECD monitoring report of 2024 found](#) that some institutional anti-corruption plans were not published or hard to access, according to both monitors and NGOs. It also reports gaps in what is available via central portals (e.g., some procurement-related information not published) and limits on external verification.

Formal mechanisms for state–civil society engagement exist in Kyrgyzstan, such as public consultations on draft laws, budget hearings, and various advisory councils. However, participation through these channels has become increasingly selective and controlled. Over the past year, civil society actors – including those representing women, ethnic minorities and marginalised groups – have often been excluded from or only formally included in discussions on key laws affecting their work. These include the Law on “Foreign Representatives”, [draft restrictions](#) that was first introduced in 2023 on “LGBTQI propaganda”, and the new [Mass Media Law](#). [International and local observers](#) reported that critical voices were sidelined, while consultations tended to involve mainly pro-government or loyal organisations. For example, media and human rights groups stated that their detailed recommendations on the media law were largely ignored, a concern echoed in a joint statement by ten organizations compiled by [Human Rights Watch](#). The [ICNL Civic Freedom Monitor](#) notes that recent “[de-bureaucratization](#)” initiatives (simplifying procedures to accelerate decisions) have shortened consultation periods and can allow consultations to be bypassed for “urgent” initiatives.

While some line ministries and local authorities still engage constructively with CSOs on [service delivery, social policy and local budgeting](#), these spaces are shrinking and remain vulnerable to political pressure. Overall, opportunities for genuine participation in national-level law- and policy-making have markedly declined, limiting civil society’s ability to influence decisions that directly affect civic space and human rights.

The Open Government Partnership designated Kyrgyzstan as [inactive](#) in May 2024 and it was later [withdrawn](#) in May 2025. This shift signals a broader retreat from open-government commitments and reflects the ongoing challenges faced by civil society in accessing genuine opportunities for engagement and influence.

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

In Kyrgyzstan, public narratives around civil society have become increasingly polarised. For instance, in the context of the 2024 Law on “*Foreign Representatives*” amending the Law on Non-Commercial Organisations ([Jogorku Kenesh](#)), President Sadyr Japarov and other state representatives publicly criticized foreign-funded NGOs. Notably, Japarov [described](#) such organisations as “grant-eaters”, accused them of spreading “unreliable” or “false” information to donors and claimed that some had previously “not been registered anywhere” and used foreign funds “as they saw fit”.

The debate around the Law on “Foreign Representatives” and related media coverage has also reportedly [used language](#) suggesting that NGOs receiving external funding promote values “alien to national traditions and mentality” and act in the interests of foreign states

rather than local communities. Analyses by [FORUM-ASIA](#), [ICNL](#) and [IPHR/CIVICUS](#) note that this law, and surrounding rhetoric, risk stigmatising critical NGOs as “foreign agents” or “grant-eaters”, especially those working on human rights, gender equality and LGBTQI issues. This negative framing is amplified by state-aligned media, which often emphasise alleged [misuse of donor funds](#) while downplaying the broader contributions of civil society to social services, anti-corruption monitoring and community development.

At the same time, independent outlets such as [24.kg](#) and analytical platforms like [CABAR.asia](#) regularly cover positive work by civil society actors such as women’s rights organisations, crisis centers and grassroots initiatives responding to rising domestic and gender-based violence. In addition, the [Human Rights Watch’s World Report 2025](#) highlights both pervasive gender-based violence and the role of civil society advocacy in recent legal reforms and the creation of “one-window” support services. As a result, marginalised groups have gained some visibility, but smear campaigns and hostile narratives continue - for example, Novastan [reports](#) that LGBTQI people in Kyrgyzstan face growing public hostility and pressure reinforced by “traditional values” rhetoric and restrictive policies.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

CSOs in Kyrgyzstan rely heavily on digital tools for communication and service delivery, but the security and openness of the online environment have [narrowed](#). In July 2025, authorities introduced [new internet controls](#), including provider blocking requirements and a temporary state monopoly over international internet traffic via EICat, a state-owned telecom operator designated as the exclusive provider for Kyrgyzstan’s international internet traffic during the pilot period, meaning other operators must route international capacity through it. This raises risks of disruption and censorship for online advocacy.

In December 2023 activist and blogger Aftandil Jorobekov faced criminal charges and pre-trial detention after posting a Facebook video opposing a flag change and calling for a peaceful protest, documented by [Human Rights Watch](#). The International Partnership for Human Rights ([IPHR’s 2025 civic space briefing](#)) describes a broader pattern of politically motivated prosecutions and detentions targeting activists, bloggers, journalists, and human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan. This pattern included the March 2025 detention of independent journalist Kanyshay Mamyrkulova on [allegations linked](#) to social media posts about the Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border, and the April 2025 pre-trial detention of human rights defender Rita Karasartova after [she reposted a message from an opposition activist](#).

The Law on “Foreign Representatives” and its implementing regulations also extend to online activities by organisations, requiring designated NGOs to label their materials and websites as produced by a “foreign representative” and exposing them to intrusive inspections, as detailed in [ICNL’s analyses](#) and [regulation review](#). In addition, [Human Rights Watch](#) and local groups also report cyber-harassment, smear campaigns and threats against journalists. For example, in February 2025, Human Rights Watch [reported that imprisoned investigative journalist Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy](#) faced sustained harassment and repeated death threats while in detention.

Freedom House’s [Freedom on the Net 2025](#) rates internet freedom in Kyrgyzstan as “Partly Free”, noting website and platform blocking, arrests of users and the presence of pro-government commentators. Although [internet penetration is relatively high](#) in urban areas,

connectivity and digital literacy remain weaker in rural regions, limiting the ability of community-based organisations outside Bishkek and Osh to use digital tools for participation and oversight and reinforcing inequalities in access to information.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next four months, civil society in Kyrgyzstan is likely to face continued pressure from the implementation of the Law on “Foreign Representatives”, intrusive inspections under Decree No. 518 and the rollout of the new [Mass Media Law](#) and internet regulations establishing a state monopoly over the [supply, routing and transit](#) of international internet traffic through the state-owned operator EICat. These measures may be used to selectively target independent NGOs, journalists and watchdog groups, especially those working on politically sensitive issues or receiving foreign funding, as already highlighted in assessments by [ICNL](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#). The broader political context, including further consolidation of presidential power after the 2025 snap parliamentary elections, heightens the risk of additional restrictions on dissent.

At the same time, there are opportunities to defend and improve the enabling environment. Critical opinions by the [Venice Commission](#), ICNL and international human rights organisations provide legal and advocacy arguments to call for repeal or substantial revision of restrictive laws. To use these openings, Kyrgyz CSOs need stronger coalitions, enhanced advocacy and communications capacity, robust legal aid and strategic litigation, and improved digital security. Continued engagement with international mechanisms, donors and solidarity networks will be essential to deter the most damaging measures and protect at-risk groups and organisations.

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