

# POLITICAL PARTIES UNDER CONDITIONS OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT OF KYRGYZSTAN

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**Abstract.** This article examines the functioning of Kyrgyzstan's political parties under conditions of political uncertainty and the transformation of democratic institutions. The aim of the study is to identify how changes in electoral rules, weak party institutionalization, the personalization of politics, and the digitalization of political communication affect the role of parties within the system of representative democracy. The methodological basis comprises an institutional approach, comparative political-science analysis, and a qualitative analysis of the scholarly literature, official materials of electoral bodies, international indices, and electoral-monitoring reports. The analysis shows that political uncertainty in Kyrgyzstan manifests not only in the instability of the party system but also in a shift in the logic of political representation — from programmatic party competition toward more personalized and localized forms of mobilization. The study concludes that these processes are dual in nature: they weaken the institutional stability of parties while simultaneously preserving space for civic participation, public oversight, and the renewal of democratic practices.

**Keywords:** political parties, political uncertainty, democratization, Kyrgyzstan, party system, electoral system, political representation, digitalization of politics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary political processes are characterized by the transformation of traditional mechanisms of representation, the growth of personalized politics, and the weakening of stable ties between parties and voters. Political parties remain central to the aggregation of public interests, political socialization, candidate nomination, and the formation of accountable government [1; 2]. At the same time, democratic erosion can occur gradually — through the weakening of institutional checks, parliamentary oversight, independent media, and party competition [3; 4].

The Kyrgyz Republic is of particular interest for political-science analysis. The country retains traditions of political pluralism and civic participation, yet its party system remains fragmented and weakly institutionalized: parties frequently depend on leaders, electoral cycles, and shifting rules of competition [7–9; 12; 13].

The relevance of this topic has grown following the reform of the electoral system and the early parliamentary elections of November 30, 2025. The shift to voting in 30 three-member constituencies changed the incentives of election participants, increased the significance of individual candidates, and reduced the institutional role of parties in electoral competition [8; 10; 11].

The aim of the study is to analyze the impact of political uncertainty on the functioning of Kyrgyzstan's political parties and to assess the associated risks and opportunities for the country's democratic development.

The object of the study is the party system of the Kyrgyz Republic. The subject of the study is the processes of transformation of political parties under conditions of institutional change and political uncertainty.

The central hypothesis is that changes in the electoral system and in the mechanisms of political representation diminish the role of parties as central actors of political competition, while reinforcing the personalization and localization of the political process.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs institutional and comparative approaches, together with qualitative content analysis. The institutional approach makes it possible to treat parties as elements of the system of representation, political mobilization, and government accountability [1; 2]. The comparative approach is used to relate Kyrgyzstan's experience to the broader processes of party transformation, regime hybridization, and democratic erosion [3; 4; 6].

The empirical basis of the study consists of scholarly publications on Kyrgyzstan's party system, official materials of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic, international election-observation documents, and materials from Freedom House, International IDEA, and V-Dem [7–13]. The analysis was carried out along three lines: the level of party institutionalization; changes in parties' role following the electoral-system reform; and the influence of personalized and digital communication on political representation.

Quantitative indicators were used only where an identifiable source, year of publication, and a clear measurement scale were available. Tabular summaries that do not contain statistical data represent the author's own systematization of positions found in the scholarly literature and the results of the institutional analysis.

### 3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

In the classical political-science tradition, the stability of a party system is linked to parties' social rootedness, organizational stability, programmatic clarity, and their capacity to sustain regular political competition [1; 2]. S. Huntington emphasized that political development depends not only on the expansion of participation but also on institutions' capacity to order that participation [6].

G. Sartori analyzed party systems through the structure of competition, the number of relevant parties, and the ideological distance between them [2]. For Kyrgyzstan, the problem of weak programmatic differentiation is especially significant: a formal multiplicity of parties is not always accompanied by stable ideological distinctions.

The concept of competitive authoritarianism developed by S. Levitsky and L. Way makes it possible to analyze regimes in which formal democratic institutions persist while political competition is constrained by resource inequality and institutional uncertainty [3]. Research on democratic erosion shows that the mere existence of elections does not by itself guarantee the stability of democracy if parties, parliamentary oversight, and accountability mechanisms are weakened [4].

**Table 1.** Main Theoretical Approaches to the Analysis of Party Transformation

| Approach                     | Key Idea                                                                                      | Relevance for the Analysis of Kyrgyzstan                                            |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Institutionalism             | Parties are viewed as stable elements of the system of representation                         | Allows assessment of the organizational and programmatic stability of parties       |
| Party-systems theory         | The structure of competition, the number of relevant parties, and ideological distance matter | Explains fragmentation and weak programmatic differentiation                        |
| Concept of hybrid regimes    | Formal democratic institutions can coexist with constraints on competition                    | Helps analyze resource inequality and instability of the rules                      |
| Theory of democratic erosion | Democracy is weakened gradually through the degradation of institutions and norms             | Reveals the risks of a diminished role for parties and parliamentary accountability |

Source: compiled by the author based on the theoretical approaches presented in [1–4; 6].

### 4. POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF TRANSFORMATIONAL REGIMES

Political uncertainty manifests itself in the instability of the rules of competition, the low predictability of institutional change, and the dependence of the political process on personal leadership. For parties, this means limited capacity for long-term planning, an unstable connection with voters, and the predominance of short-term electoral strategies [3; 8; 9; 12; 13].

In Kyrgyzstan, political uncertainty is reinforced by successive changes in the form of government, electoral models, and the distribution of powers among state institutions. Political participation does not disappear under

these conditions, but it becomes less tied to stable party organizations and increasingly dependent on the current institutional configuration [7–9; 13].

For comparative context, the figures below present Freedom House assessments from the Freedom in the World 2026 report. They reflect the aggregate level of political rights and civil liberties on a scale from 0 to 100 and are used as a background comparative indicator rather than as an independent assessment of the November 2025 parliamentary elections [7].

**Table 2.** Central Asian Countries by Freedom Score

| Country      | Freedom Score | Status   |
|--------------|---------------|----------|
| Kyrgyzstan   | 25 of 100     | Not Free |
| Kazakhstan   | 23 of 100     | Not Free |
| Uzbekistan   | 12 of 100     | Not Free |
| Tajikistan   | 5 of 100      | Not Free |
| Turkmenistan | 1 of 100      | Not Free |

Source: Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026 [7]. The higher the score, the higher the assessment of political rights and civil liberties.

## 5. CHARACTERISTICS OF KYRGYZSTAN'S PARTY SYSTEM

One of the key characteristics of Kyrgyzstan's party system is its weak institutionalization. Despite formal multipartyism, many parties lack a stable organizational structure, a clearly articulated ideological platform, and a stable social base. Their activity increases markedly during election periods, whereas ongoing work with voters and the development of regional organizations remain limited [12; 13].

Weak institutionalization is reflected in the volatility of party configurations, politicians' movement between parties, organizations' dependence on their leaders, and the limited participation of rank-and-file members in decision-making. In this model, a party often functions primarily as a tool for gaining access to elections and for short-term mobilization, rather than as a stable mechanism for representing public interests [12; 13].

Comparative studies treat declining trust in parties as one of the common challenges facing contemporary democracy [5]. In the Kyrgyzstani context, this problem is linked above all to the weakness of stable ties among party organizations, voters, and public policymaking [12; 13].

The personalization of political leadership increases parties' dependence on the authority, resources, and political prospects of particular individuals. This impedes the development of intra-party democracy, collegial governance, and organizational continuity. When a leader departs or the political conjuncture changes, such parties can rapidly lose influence or transform into new electoral projects [12; 13].

Another characteristic feature is weak ideological and programmatic differentiation. Party platforms frequently contain similar declarative provisions, making it difficult to identify substantive differences between political associations. As a result, voters' choices may be based less on programs than on a candidate's personality, name recognition, regional affiliation, and available resources [12; 13].

The localization of electoral mobilization shifts political competition away from nationwide party platforms toward regional ties, personal support networks, and candidate recognition. This model can strengthen a deputy's direct connection to their constituency, but it simultaneously increases the risk of fragmenting representation and weakening the nationwide party agenda [8; 11; 13].

The digitalization of political communication has a significant effect on the party system. Social media allow parties and candidates to reach voters directly, disseminate information rapidly, and attract new groups of supporters. At the same time, direct digital interaction can diminish the mediating role of party organizations, reinforce the personalization of politics, and create additional risks of disinformation, manipulative content, and emotional polarization [8; 9].

Thus, formal multipartyism in Kyrgyzstan coexists with weak organizational stability of parties, the personalization of leadership, limited programmatic differentiation, and the growing importance of local and

digital forms of mobilization. This combination reduces parties' capacity to ensure long-term representation of citizens' interests, consistent programmatic competition, and stable political accountability [12; 13].

**Table 3.** Manifestations of Political Uncertainty and Their Impact on Kyrgyzstan's Party System

| <b>Manifestation of Uncertainty</b> | <b>Impact on Parties</b>                                                      | <b>Democratic Risk</b>                             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Changes in electoral rules          | Reduced predictability of party strategies                                    | Weakening of stable party competition              |
| Personalization of leadership       | Parties' dependence on individual political figures                           | Decline in intra-party democracy                   |
| Weak ideological differentiation    | Blurring of programmatic distinctions                                         | Reduced substantive content of political choice    |
| Localization of mobilization        | Shift of competition toward regional and personal networks                    | Fragmentation of political representation          |
| Digitalization of communication     | Direct communication between candidates and voters bypassing party structures | Risks of disinformation and emotional polarization |

Source: compiled by the author based on the scholarly literature and institutional analysis of Kyrgyzstan's party system [2–4; 8; 9; 12; 13].

## 6. TRANSFORMATION OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Early elections of deputies to the Jogorku Kenesh took place on November 30, 2025. Ninety deputies were elected under a single non-transferable vote majoritarian system in 30 three-member constituencies. Voters cast their ballot for a single candidate in their constituency, which shifted the campaign's main focus from party lists to individual candidate competition [8; 10; 11].

The change in the electoral model increased the importance of individual name recognition, local support networks, and regional factors. International observers noted that the new system, together with late changes to the legal framework, narrowed the role of political parties and limited opportunities for a full public discussion of the reform [11].

Under the new conditions, parties largely lose their function as the principal organizational mechanism of electoral competition. The significance of a candidate's personal reputation, financial and organizational resources, and local mobilization networks increases. Political participation persists, but its institutional form becomes more individualized, which complicates the formation of collective party accountability [8; 11–13].

**Table 4.** Consequences of the Electoral-Model Transformation for Kyrgyzstan's Party System

| <b>Institutional Change</b>            | <b>Political Consequence</b>                                     | <b>Possible Democratic Effect</b>                     |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Reduced role of party lists            | Weakening of parties as the main actors of electoral competition | Reduction of programmatic and ideological competition |
| Reinforcement of personalized politics | Growing dependence on individual candidates and their resources  | Decline in collective party accountability            |
| Localization of electoral mobilization | Reinforcement of regional and personal networks                  | Fragmentation of political representation             |

| <b>Institutional Change</b>                | <b>Political Consequence</b>              | <b>Possible Democratic Effect</b>             |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Diminished significance of party platforms | Weakening of programmatic differentiation | Simplification of political debate            |
| Rise of situational alliances              | Instability of political alliances        | Weak predictability of parliamentary politics |

Source: compiled by the author based on materials of the CEC of the Kyrgyz Republic, International IDEA, and international election observation [8; 10; 11].

## **7. DIGITALIZATION OF POLITICS AND NEW FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Digitalization has become one of the key factors in the transformation of political participation. Social media and digital platforms allow candidates to interact directly with their audience, bypassing traditional party structures and conventional media. This expands the possibilities for mobilization while simultaneously reinforcing the personalization of politics.

Digital platforms are used especially actively by young people, creating preconditions for new forms of civic participation. At the same time, digitalization is accompanied by risks of disinformation, emotional polarization, and the simplification of political debate [8; 9]. Under these conditions, parties must not only maintain a presence in the digital space but also offer substantive programs, comprehensible mechanisms for participation, and a stable feedback loop with citizens.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The analysis conducted shows the dual character of political uncertainty in Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, instability of the rules and the weakness of party organizations reduce the predictability of competition and weaken mechanisms of political accountability. On the other hand, civic activism, public monitoring, and digital forms of participation preserve space for political engagement beyond traditional party structures [8; 9; 12; 13].

The key problem lies not in the transformation of the party system as such, but in the shortage of institutional mechanisms capable of converting political activity into stable representation. When parties remain temporary electoral projects, they cannot fully perform the functions of interest articulation, parliamentary oversight, and the formation of a long-term political agenda [12; 13].

The democratic development of Kyrgyzstan depends largely on parties' ability to adapt to new conditions: developing intra-party democracy, increasing the transparency of financing, strengthening regional structures, engaging with young people, and forming a programmatic identity. Without this, digitalization and the personalization of politics may not renew democracy but instead deepen its fragmentation.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Kyrgyzstan's political parties continue to operate under conditions of high political uncertainty and institutional transformation. Despite the formal preservation of multipartyism, the party system faces weak institutionalization, the personalization of politics, and limited programmatic stability.

The findings of the study largely confirm the hypothesis put forward. The 2025 electoral-system reform diminished the role of parties as central actors of electoral competition and reinforced the personalization and localization of political mobilization. The shift to 30 three-member constituencies increased the importance of individual candidates, but at the same time heightened the risks of fragmenting political representation and weakening collective programmatic accountability [8; 10; 11].

Strengthening democratic institutions requires the development of intra-party democracy, greater transparency in party financing, sustained engagement with voters, and the expansion of political education and media literacy. The prospects for the democratic development of the Kyrgyz Republic will depend on parties' ability to become permanent channels for representing public interests, rather than temporary electoral projects.

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