

**MEDIA**

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**INDEX**

**2005**



**IREX**

KYRGYZSTAN COMPLETED 2005 WITH CENSORSHIP ENDED AND A HITHERTO UNKNOWN LEVEL OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. HOWEVER, AS THE MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX (MSI) PANEL NOTED, IN ADDITION TO SOBER CRITICISM, NUMEROUS ARTICLES THAT FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF SO-CALLED BLACK PR APPEAR BOTH IN THE PRINT MEDIA AND ON INTERNET WEBSITES THAT BASE THEIR COVERAGE ON RUMOR.

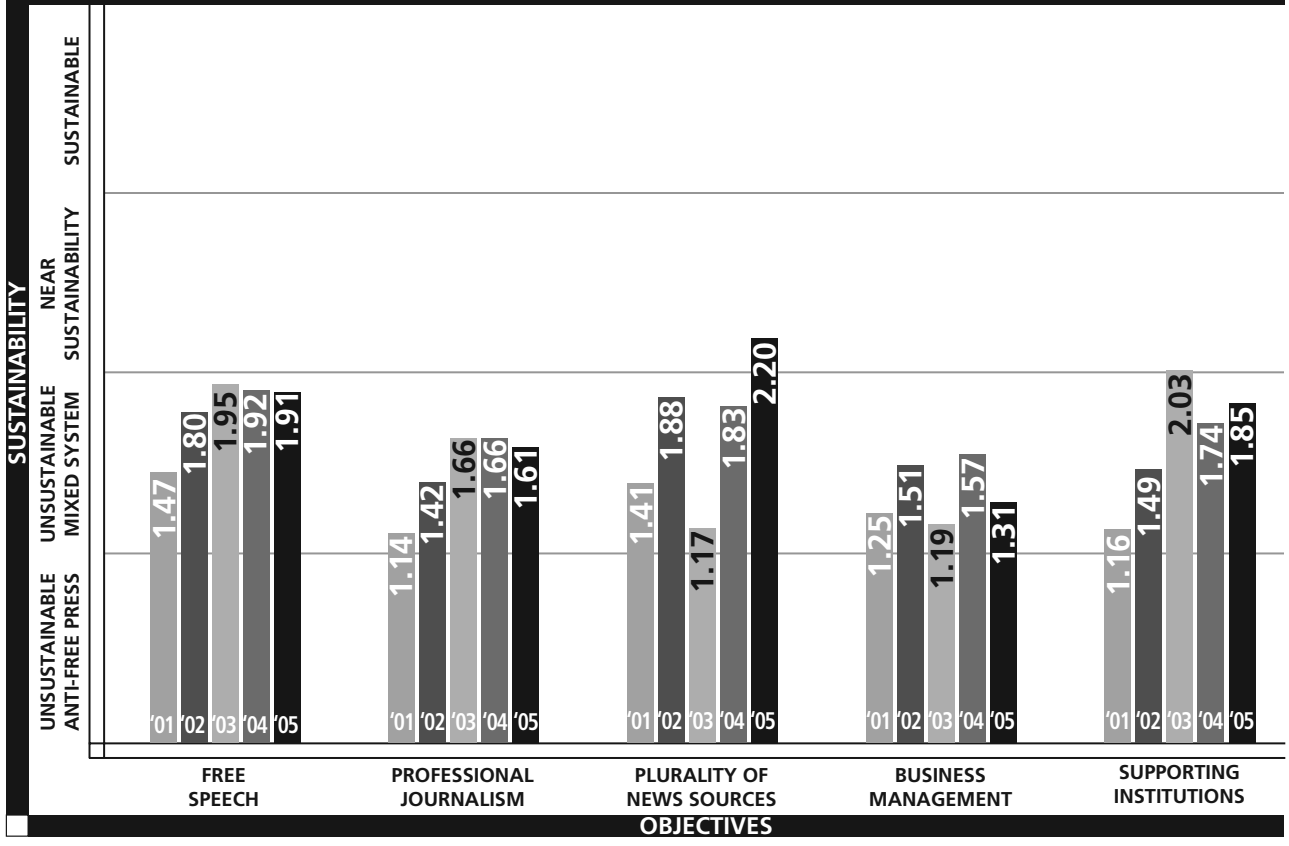


The year 2005 in Kyrgyzstan was marked by dramatic political events. After widely disputed elections appeared to return President Askar Akayev to office in March, protests led with startling speed to his departure from the country and announcement of a new round of balloting. Former opposition leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev was elected president in July.

Media outlets played a major role in the dramatic political developments when they reversed decades of subservience to report more critically on Akayev, his family, and his regime during the initial presidential election and the protests that followed. The new political alignment was reflected in the media, as well. For example, the newspapers *Moya Stolitsa-Novosti* (MSN) and *Respublika*—which had been the most active opponents of the former government—turned into the most loyal supporters of the new leadership. And after the March events, the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek*, which had represented the interests of the former government, became an emphatically opposition publication, carrying out the directives of the newspaper’s director, Adil Toygonbayev, Akayev’s son-in-law, who continued to promote the interests of the republic’s ex-president. A crisis manager was even sent from Israel to join the paper’s editorial staff, although the direction of the paper ultimately changed following a court decision that required *Vecherniy Bishkek*, which had come under pressure some years previously, to turn over a large percentage of the stock to Toygonbayev.

Kyrgyzstan completed 2005 with censorship ended and a hitherto unknown level of freedom of expression. However, as the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel noted, in addition to sober criticism, numerous articles that fall into the category of so-called black PR appear both in the print media and on Internet websites that base their coverage on rumor. It has been conjectured that the current “information war” is being waged by former favorites of the ex-president who refuse to reconcile themselves to the power shift, but not a single court action against journalists or publications has been brought since the revolution.

# MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KYRGYZSTAN



**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2-3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3-4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

The mass media are divided into two categories: government publications partly funded out of the republic budget and nongovernmental publications funded from private sources. But the new government has offered a new vision for the development of the media. Thus, immediately after the revolution, the new political leaders declared that government newspapers would be set free. However, it is possible that many government media, released to follow their own courses, do not have the management leadership to survive in a market economy. These media have no systems in place to earn money, and since they receive their funding from the state budget, they have no serious financial foundation, their marketing skills are essentially undeveloped, and the media market is oversaturated.

The government media have been trying to improve the popularity of their publications, but they cannot yet withstand competition from the free press. The nongovernmental media, on the other hand, operate in highly competitive conditions and need to design their work in such a way as to win a readership. Despite all the difficulties of survival in a market economy, new media have appeared, including the newspaper *Novyy Kyrgyzstan*, the Belyy Parokhod news agency, and others.

Kyrgyz media outlets, as a rule, lack clear-cut systems of management, and their process of soliciting advertisements is unsystematic, the MSI panel said. For many media, it is much easier to get a grant than to build a sustainable business base. This results in low incomes for both media outlets and journalists, which prevents the media from achieving financial independence and developing their coverage.

However, as a result of the political changes, there is a significant increase in the plurality of media voices available to citizens. This MSI indicator rose significantly for 2005, although the overall situation in the media sector remained rather stagnant.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.91 / 4.00**

Since the popular revolution of March 24, 2005, the legal status of Kyrgyz media has not changed. Freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan is guaranteed by the Kyrgyz Republic Constitution, which contains a provision forbidding the passage of laws restricting freedom of speech and of the press, and by the Law on the Mass Media, the Law on the Protection of Professional Activity, and the Law on Guarantees of Access and Freedom of Access to Information. All media outlets, government and independent, are equal before these

**Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.**

**FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:**

- > Legal/social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and the offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

laws. However, according to MSI panelists, not a single law on the media meets international standards.

As Aleksandr Kulinskiy, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Kyrgyzstane*, noted, "The laws in this area are obsolete and need to be revised." It is possible to restrict the work of media outlets and journalists because of the many legal gaps. For example, the 1992 Law on the Mass Media, which is still in force, contains no legal concept of television.

The article on libel contained in the criminal code is a source of special concern for journalists. As Marina Sivasheva, the editor of the Open Kyrgyzstan website observed, "There is no statute of limitation. This means that a journalist can be taken to court 10 or 15 years after the publication of an article."

There has been some progress. A Kyrgyz Republic Law on Freedom of Access and Guarantees of Access to Information was drafted during 2005 by an expert group that included representatives of the media, business, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the government. The president's office and Transparency International of Kyrgyzstan, with the

support of the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan, submitted the bill for public discussion.

It is still too early to say that freedom of speech is valued in Kyrgyzstan. As Igor Shestakov, director of the Interfax News Agency, said: "In our country all the journalists could be shot, and no one would pay any attention. Suffice it to recall the example of last year when, with the exception of several nongovernmental organizations, society remained quiet when the staff of the Piramida television and radio broadcasting company went off the air because of a policy disagreement with the new management." At the same time, as Kuban Mambetaliyev, chairman of the board of the Journalists' Nongovernmental Organization, said: "We no longer have such cases as occurred under President Akayev, when journalists would be thrown in prison for criticizing parliamentary deputies and the like."

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The licensing of electronic media is based not on law but on administrative orders and resolutions. This made it possible for the previous government to make political decisions with respect to certain media. Marina

Sivasheva noted, "Until the events of March 2005, television broadcast licensing occurred under pressure by the country's political leadership—independent television networks and radio stations operated in a vague legal field, and licenses that were issued were temporary and short-term." Broadcast licenses are issued by the National Communications Agency, but they may be issued only upon receiving authorization to broadcast from the State Radio Frequencies Commission. Officials on the state communications agency are appointed by the government.

Media companies operate under essentially the same conditions as other businesses. However, the MSI panelists said that more companies have entered the market than it can support. According to Viktor Shloyev, the commercial director of Polonya LLC, "The existing tax base in Kyrgyzstan is very high for the media." For example, there are no concessions on the value-added tax (VAT) for media, as has been the case in Russia.

The Law on the Mass Media does not give government media any advantage over independent media.

However, some panelists believe that government media journalists have greater access to information. According to Marina Sivasheva, "The government media have advantages over independent media in accreditation to cover official activities and the opportunity to accompany top officials on foreign trips at state budget expense, while representatives of independent media have to pay for such trips at the expense of their own media outlets." Other panelists, however, said that since the revolution, the status of government and independent media has become the same. According to Aleksandr Kulinskiy, "Now the authorities do not give any clear preference to the government media. Quite to the contrary—the new government gets along better with the nongovernmental media."

The country's new leaders have voiced their own vision of the development of the media in Kyrgyzstan. Following the election, a commission on the denationalization of the media was established almost immediately to begin planning reform of state media. It is intended for the government in Kyrgyzstan to be served by a single newspaper (instead of three), which will publish laws and other official documents, and by the National Television and Radio Company (NTRK), and for the rest of the media to be set free to operate independently.

Panelists noted that not a single crime was committed against journalists in 2005. However, libel continues to be a matter of both administrative and criminal investigation. Furthermore, an accused party must prove its innocence in court, and no statute of limitations exists with respect to libel. Panelists reported, however, that since the change in government, the number of lawsuits related to libel has declined sharply.

This has not left journalists feeling fully protected. As an example, Bektash Shamshiyev, a journalist with the Azattyk radio station, cited the case of Iryspek Omurzakov, a journalist with the newspaper *Tribuna*, and a trade union that was defending the honor of a physician. He said the doctor had taken offense at an article by the journalist and brought suit in the Bazarkurganskiy District Court. "The judge, without even inviting the journalist to appear at the trial, rendered a verdict for him in his absence," said Bektash Shamshiyev.

Access to public information at the legislative level is the same—difficult—for all journalists. The reason, in the opinion of Maksuda Aytliyeva, editor-in-chief of Salam Radio in the city of Batken, is that "officials do not always comply with the law on access to

information, and the media are not creating a precedent." As Marina Sivasheva puts it: "Publicly significant information is accessible for all journalists, but they are not fighting for the right of access to any and all information."

There are no restrictions on access to sources of international news on the Internet. The exceptions to this stems from the financial capability of some journalists and media outlets, especially regional media with weekly circulation around 150,000, said Anonina Blindina, editor-in-chief of the *Chuyskiye izvestia* newspaper.

One may enter journalism freely in Kyrgyzstan, and the government does not issue licenses for the right to practice journalism. Admission to journalism departments at institutions of higher learning is under the same conditions as other departments, with no official interference. Nor is there administrative involvement in the hiring of journalists, panelists said.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

**Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.61 / 4.00**

In terms of professional standards of quality, journalism in Kyrgyzstan leaves something to be desired, the MSI panelists concluded. They said it will take time for fundamental changes to occur in the quality of the journalistic product. Journalists have a poor conception of ethical codes, and self-censorship is practiced at all levels, from editors to journalists, out of a fear of lawsuits. Journalists' salaries are low, and this may leave them vulnerable to taking money to put out compromising information, covert advertisements, or "black PR."

Panelists assessed journalism in Kyrgyzstan as excessively subjective, although most journalists are familiar with the parameters and standards of international journalism. "There are frequent cases in which certain publications, in the pursuit of 'juicy' facts, publish unverified reports," said Viktor Shloyev. "They lack serious evaluations of current events." Zholdosbay Osmonov, a journalist with Jalalabat Television and Radio in Jalalabat, observes: "Sometimes it proves impossible to cover a problem treated in an article or report objectively, since it is impossible to obtain comments or explanations from different sides." According to Marina Sivasheva, "Journalists are, by and large, subjective in their reports, since they do not understand the lines separating the terms: fact, judgment, and opinion. And they frequently offer readers their subjective opinion, rather than information sources. That is, a journalist tries to act as

an expert and specialist in all areas and all fields. After all, it is much simpler to write an article sitting home than to engage in a search for four or five sources and obtain comments from them." There are exceptions, panelists said. Igor Shestakov said: "Our agency's work is based solely on the objective provision of information and the mandatory presentation of several viewpoints, because we work for the entire world and have a stake in maintaining our readers' trust."

There are codes of journalistic ethics drawn up by the Union of Journalists, the Journalists' Trade Union, and the Journalists Nongovernmental Organization. But there is no ethical code common to all journalists, just as there is not, among journalists, the practice of conforming to ethical standards. Consequently, as Marina Sivasheva notes, "media outlets settle scores with one another over differences of opinion." Some journalists are prepared to write anything for a certain amount of money. Bakut Orunbekov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, said that "since the revolution, there have appeared some obviously 'paid'

***"In our country all the journalists could be shot, and no one would pay any attention," said Igor Shestakov.***

## Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

media outlets that are carrying out someone's 'contract' to defame the new government."

The average salary in government media outlets is no more than \$100 to \$150 monthly, with independent outlets offering only slightly higher wages, panelists said. In the regions, the salaries of the reporters and editors never exceed \$15 to \$30 monthly. There is not a significant gap between print and broadcast media wages.

In the opinion of the panelists, self-censorship has not disappeared as a phenomenon since the revolution. But it has become much more specifically loyal and selective. Journalists and editors are forced to resort to self-censorship for several reasons—fear of losing their jobs, an editor's pressure, the possibility of offending certain political forces and officials, and fear of lawsuits. In the opinion of Maksuda Aйтиyeva,

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"Journalists and editors practice self-censorship, since they have no confidence they will be protected."

The Kyrgyz media give broad coverage to most key events and

issues, especially the political situation. "The quantity of information provided about political events has naturally increased. There is relatively little demand for social information," said Aleksandr Kulinskiy. However, social and regional issues are not ignored. For example, all outlets report on the situation of the Uzbek refugees who showed up in Kyrgyzstan following the 2005 riots in Andijan.

The number of news programs and political shows on local television channels rose during 2005. Two analysis programs showed up on the NBT (Independent Bishkek Television) network under the titles "Personality" and "Tamga." Piramida network added a new program called "New View." NTRK kept pace with the independent television networks, adding programs such as "Dobysh" (Voice), "Bagyt" (Direction), and "Obet Sabazy" (Lesson in Upbringing). Yevropa Plus Radio has started carrying the talk show "I Want to Live in Kyrgyzstan," on which the hottest current topics are discussed by qualified people. Some panelists believe entertainment programs still outweigh news shows, while others say there is a balance.

By and large, only large-circulation newspapers

and major television and radio companies have the technical capabilities for the collection, production, and dissemination of news at a relatively modern level. Bishkek media outlets are in the best position. Journalists tend to lack basic equipment: digital recorders and cameras, professional video cameras, vehicles, and cellular telephones. Viktor Shloyev said that international organizations such as the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan, USAID, and Internews provide significant help with updating equipment.

High-quality reports appear in the media but are rare. While it is possible to find quality coverage of economics, culture, business, investments, the banking sector, and agriculture at times, reports on political topics clearly predominate. In addition, observes Bektash Shamshiyev: "Journalists are reluctant to treat crime topics, and rarely do they practice such a provocative genre of journalism as investigative reporting. No one wants to sacrifice himself for the sake of truth and justice." And Kuban Mambetaliyev added: "Journalists may not conduct journalistic investigations out of a fear of the objects of investigation—corrupt officials, drug barons, and other dangerous persons—and also out of a lack of sources of funding to cover the investigative process."

At the same time, quite often various international organizations interest journalists by holding competitions in the coverage of specialized subjects such as drug abuse or HIV/AIDS and offering the winners substantial monetary prizes. According to Oleg Ryabov, deputy editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, "Such competitions are a powerful incentive for journalists, but they are not always popular with readers."

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 2.20 / 4.00**

Kyrgyzstan has an increasing diversity of news sources, but the focus is largely confined to the capital, Bishkek. The greatest number of publications is distributed in the capital, and the countryside and small cities suffer from information starvation. The poorer segments of the population live mainly in the outlying regions, and they mainly use radio since the purchase of a television set or daily acquisition of newspapers are impermissible luxuries for many rural families.

In the opinion of the MSI panelists, both government and private independent media often reflect the opinions of the individuals or groups that are behind a publication. Igor Shestakov said, "Most media outlets are used for the political and other purposes of certain



**Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.**

**PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:**

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

entities (the state, businessmen, politicians). Often the staff of media outlets serves private and political interests, rather than the public interest."

Since the revolution, however, there has been a trend toward the establishment of reasonably neutral media outlets, and some government media outlets have abandoned their former practice, which was guilty of one-sidedness, and started to present various points of view. One example of this is the newspaper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, which has drastically changed its image and started to carry articles that reflect diametrically opposing points of view. Oleg Ryabov observes: "The circulation of the weekend supplement to the newspaper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* has risen by nearly 3,000 since the revolution." But according to Aleksandr Kulinskiy, "The public cannot yet obtain the full spectrum of information from the government media."

The residents of big cities enjoy advantages with respect to the diversity of information sources, since they have access to diverse print publications and electronic media outlets, including cable television and the Internet. However, people tend to limit their media consumption to that produced by outlets that reflect their political leanings, rather than take in a range of views, according to the MSI panelists.

Economics does limit access to various points of view. "For the most part, people buy the Friday or Saturday editions of newspapers with the television listings," Viktor Shloyev said.

For the residents of remote regions of the country, the information field is limited to just a few media outlets, Radio Azattyk (Radio Liberty) and government television and radio broadcasts. Zholdosbay Osmonov said that in his province, only 3 percent of the population can afford to buy private print publications.

There are no restrictions on citizens' access to international sources of information. Access to foreign print media, as well as to the Internet and satellite television, depends exclusively on economics. International print publications are freely offered for sale, but because of their expense they do not sell well. Cable television has been acquiring greater popularity, but not many can afford it.

Kyrgyzstan has several local news agencies, such as Aki-press (private), Kabar (government), Kyrgyzinfo (a joint-stock company), and Belyy parokhod (private). Zholdosbay Osmonov said, "Regional media take advantage of the services of the news agencies, using their news and including attributions to them." The quality of the news provided by the local news agencies does not always suit media editors, however. Antonina Blindina observed: "We use the news agencies' information, but since it is written unprofessionally and ungrammatically, staff journalists have to rework it." For the most part, local news agencies provide their information free of charge. As Antonina Blindina noted: "If the news agencies demanded payment, our paper would be forced to drop their services because we don't have the money."

***"Most media outlets are used for the political and other purposes of certain entities (the state, businessmen, politicians). Often the staff of media outlets serves private and political interests, rather than the public interest," said Igor Shestakov.***

All of the broadcast television and radio stations create their own news and analysis programs, as well as talk shows. But Kuban Mambetaliyev said the independent broadcasters—NBT Independent Bishkek Television (NBT), New Television Network (NTS), Piramida, and Kyrgyz Public Educational Radio and Television (KOORT)—differ from government media

***“We use the news agencies’ information, but since it is written unprofessionally and ungrammatically, staff journalists have to rework it,” said Antonina Blindina.***

“by virtue of their opposition viewpoint and the promptness with which they cover extreme events.” Zholdoshbay Osmonov noted: “The content of

the news from private media outlets is influenced by the following factors: who owns a given media outlet and the affiliation with certain political, economic, or other interests.” However, other viewpoints were also expressed. For example, in the opinion of some panelists, the owner of a media outlet does not always influence the outlet’s internal policy and may entrust it to the editor-in-chief or staff.

In addition, representatives of several international news agencies work in Kyrgyzstan, including Interfax, RIA-Novosti, ITAR-TASS, Reuters, the Associated Press, and Agence France-Presse. However, the news agencies’ services are not always accessible to local and regional media outlets.

According to unofficial data, Internet users do not exceed 500,000. The number of Internet service providers increased during 2005 to six: Ak-Tel, KyrgyzTelekom, Sayma-Telekom, Azia-Info, Totel, and Elkat. With the exception of KyrgyzTelekom, they are all private.

Information about the real owners of media outlets was not available to the public until the March revolution. Marina Sivasheva said, “Readers had to ‘extract’ that information from the media outlets themselves” and make it public. For example, the information provided in *Vecherniy Bishkek* did not indicate that its owner was ex-president Akayev’s son-in-law Adil Toygonbayev, but the whole republic knew. Since the events of March 24, there has been unprecedented transparency in Kyrgyzstan with respect to media ownership, the MSI panelists said. According to Aleksandr Kulinskiy, “The names of the owners and the terms and value of deals involving the sale of media outlets are publicly known.”

The problems of ethnic minorities are treated in the media. Marina Sivasheva said, “There have been especially many articles and reports on such problems in 2005, since the March events, in support of the Russian-speaking population, among which a disposition to emigrate has grown stronger.” There are also newspapers published in the languages of ethnic minorities, such as in the Uzbek and

Dungan languages. These publications are accessible to everyone.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.31 / 4.00**

Non-state media outlets for the most part still are not well-managed businesses that allow editorial independence, the MSI panel concluded. Private media outlets survive mainly on funding from the publisher or on grants from international organizations. One reason for this is the limited advertising market.

On the whole, in Kyrgyzstan today the media are not profitable. “Only a few media outlets—the newspapers *Vecherniy Bishkek* and *Delo No.*, Piramida television, and *Piramida-programma*, which have occupied their own niches in the media market for a long time now and have regular readers, viewers, and advertisers—can be considered successful and profitable,” said Marina Sivasheva. The newspapers *Moya Stolitsa-Novosti* and *Agym* are examples of independent media outlets as well-managed businesses. For print media outlets, the main sources of revenue are advertising and subscriptions. In the opinion of Aleksandr Kulinskiy, “From the economic standpoint, 2005 has been a great trial for the media, since one of the media’s chief sources of profit, advertising, declined substantially after the revolution. In

#### Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

##### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

outlying regions, the advertising market continues to be weak by virtue of those regions' weak economies."

Because there is a limited number of commercial enterprises that are potential advertisers, the media advertising market is also limited and has long been divided up among the largest-circulation print media and the most highly rated and popular television networks, such as the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* and the Piramida television network. Private outlets for the most part survive through financial infusions from publishers and on grants from international organizations. "Many editors, especially of print publications, do not regard their work as a form of business. They believe that the mass media do not fall under the definition of a business as such," said Artem Petrov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Novyy Kyrgyzstan*.

Local news agencies are not well-developed businesses yet. The Kabar News Agency works thanks to government subsidies, and the Aki-Press News Agency survives through financial support from international organizations.

Market research is still not widespread, and what exists is not well used to develop strategic plans and increase advertising revenues. As Kuban Mambetaliyev put it: "The results of research are hardly used at all but merely taken note of." Antonina Blindina said, "Market research is not carried out because media staffs cannot afford to have marketing departments. The results of market research carried out by marketing services are usually limited to the city of Bishkek, and therefore do not reflect the real rating of publications." The determination of broadcast ratings is also a great rarity, and it is not clear how they are determined.

Some panelists said that many newspapers suppress or distort circulation data. Bakytbek Orunbekov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, said, "The only place you can find out actual circulation numbers is at the print shop." A different opinion was expressed by Marina Sivasheva: "Circulation numbers are determined with a high degree of accuracy, since they are indicated in the documents of a printer's production department, which determines a publication's bill for the actual product produced on the basis of those numbers."

Companies that support media outlets include the Uchkun government press, Erkin-Too, several private regional printers in Kara-Kol, Osh, and Jalalabat, and the US-supported printing facility associated with the Freedom House Media Support Center. On the whole, most enterprises operate effectively, although some panel members questioned the quality of the work at the government presses.

Poor management of the Kyrgyzpochtasy organization, which handles the sale and distribution of newspapers, has proved impossible to solve. As Kuban Mambetaliyev noted, "The government postal agencies that are branches of Kyrgyzpochtasy do not pay their debts to the newspapers for copies sold." The same situation can be seen in the private distribution system of the Kyrgyzbasmasoz Joint-Stock Company, which also has debts to media outlets that go unpaid for years at a time. According to Oleg Ryabov, "This year alone the Kyrgyzpochtasy owes *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (a government newspaper) 1,200,000 SOM (more than \$29,000), *Narodnaya gazeta* (the newspaper of the Union of Trade Unions) about 1 million SOM (more than \$24,000), and *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (a government newspaper) more than 2 million SOM (\$49,000), etc. Kyrgyzpochtasy also has debts to international publications that have offices in Kyrgyzstan—the newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and others."

In this regard, Igor Shestakov notes: "The government does not regulate the process entailed in the repayment of funds to the newspapers for the sale of copies and subscriptions by the government monopolistic enterprise Kyrgyzpochtasy." Therefore, in recent years the print media

outlets have increasingly given preference to private distributors. As Viktor Shloyev observed: "More and more, print media outlets are giving up their services related to the distribution of their publications and preferring—following the example set by the newspapers *Vercherniy Bishkek*, *Delo No.*, *Agym*, and others—to work with private distributors."

The distribution of print media in remote regions of the republic is a big problem. Newspapers are received in some of the republic's provinces (Osh, Batken, and Jalalabat, for example) two to three days late due to reliance on ground transportation. In the past several years, rates for shipment by air have increased fivefold and now exceed international standards by nearly

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60 percent, leaving virtually no media outlets able to afford this price. Another problem that province and regional media outlets experience with the distribution to remote regions is the acute shortage of vehicles in the Kyrgyzpochtasy government distribution system.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.85 / 4.00**

Lately the role of the supporting institutions for the media sector has increased somewhat. For example, the Journalists' NGO established in 1998 operates effectively, defending the interests of journalists and media outlets in cases of persecution by governmental entities. Moreover, staffers of the NGO annually monitor violations of the rights of the media with the support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). There is also the Media Agency, which lobbies for bills pertaining to the media and provides legal aid to journalists in court. A number of human-rights NGOs (the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, the Interbilim Center, and others) cooperate with media outlets and provide support in cases of conflict and on free-speech issues. Lately, however, as Aleksandr Kulinskiy, observed, "Some of these NGOs are more concerned right now with politics, and the basis for their work in the area

of freedom of speech has disappeared." The most active NGOs in defending the interests of the media are the TsPGO (Center for the Support of Civil Society) and the Osh Regional Media Center. According to Viktor Shloyev, "By and large, the NGOs pursue the objectives of consolidating local media outlets and, especially, improving journalists' professional skills. But the NGOs exist mainly in the big cities and not in the outlying regions."

There is no association of publishers, but there is an association of television and radio broadcasters, although it is relatively ineffective.

Virtually all the higher-education institutions, including the Technical University and the Agrarian Academy, have journalism departments. However, the training of media specialists is weak at most schools, with the Slavic University and the American University of Central Asia among the exceptions. According to Kuban Mambetaliyev, "Theoretical knowledge is provided in journalism departments, but they do not offer practical seminars of the proper quality. Nor are prominent journalists and editors enlisted to teach special courses for students." Consequently, after graduation from higher schools, young specialists are not capable of professional work. At Kyrgyz State National University, a UNESCO grant has been used to establish the university's own television and radio centers where students follow the international model of mastering the latest technologies and learning journalism in a practical setting. This same method is widely used in the journalism department at Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University.

In the opinion of panelists, there is another side to the problem with young personnel: A great many people land in journalism departments who have no interest in journalism but merely need a higher-education degree and have no desire to be journalists. Moreover, the earnings in this niche are not attracting young people. Students in journalism departments make no secret of the fact that the profession of translator or work in an international organization looks far more attractive. Oleg Ryabov relates: "Every year approximately 40 people come to our staff to carry out required internships. If two of them manifest the desire to actually work and gain experience, we're doing well. For the most part, the students say that they don't need that, that they have other plans for their future, and ask to be given credit without doing the work."

For this reason, the journalism profession has encountered great problems in acquiring new blood. Bakytbek Orunbekov recalled that when he joined his

**Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.**

**SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:**

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

newspaper, it “employed journalists whose average age was 60 or greater. Everyone was working in the same old way, and none of them even knew how to use a computer.” Trainings conducted by various international organizations such as Internews Kyrgyzstan, the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan, the United Nations Development Program, the Eurasia Foundation, and others are helping. Workshops devoted to the legal aspects of journalists’ work are highly popular.

Panelists agreed that the sources of newsprint are private and in no way restricted. The work of private printers is not restricted either, but for the most part they handle various printing commissions and not the printing of newspapers. In Bishkek, newspapers are printed at three places—the Uchkun and the Erkin-Too government printers, and the Freedom House press. Antonina Blindina said, “The Uchkun government print shop is selective in its approach to clients. Our newspaper, for example, may get printed on paper that is not of a very high quality.” Many print media outlets have limited technical capabilities. Most newspapers today are printed in black and white. However, the Freedom House Media Support Center has set high printing rates that most newspapers

cannot afford. In the outlying regions, newspapers have extremely limited capabilities.

The channels for the dissemination of information (newsstands,

transmitters, the Internet) are private, apolitical, and in no way restricted. For example, the government neither regulates nor controls access to the Internet. Television transmitters are state-owned and provide for the broadcast of the national television network, which covers 90 percent of the country. Private television and radio stations have transmitters that cover narrow territories (a city or part of a province). And the channels for the distribution of print media are limited by the capabilities of the Kyrgyzpochtasy government company and the KyrgyzBasmaoz private distribution company. These two companies cannot provide for distribution of print media in the country’s remote regions, which exist in an information vacuum.

***“Some of these NGOs are more concerned right now with politics, and the basis for their work in the area of freedom of speech has disappeared,” said Aleksandr Kulinskiy.***

## Panel Participants

**Maksuda Aйтиyeva**, Editor-in-Chief, Salam radio station, Batken, Batken Province

**Antonina Blindina**, Editor-in-Chief, *Chuyskiye izvestiya* newspaper, Chuy Province

**Aleksandr Kulinskiy**, Editor-in-Chief, *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Kyrgyzstane* newspaper, Bishkek

**Kuban Mambetaliyev**, Chairman of the Board, Journalists' NGO, Bishkek

**Bakytbek Orunbekov**, Editor-in-Chief, *Kyrgyz Tuusu* newspaper, Bishkek

**Zholdoshbay Osmonov**, Journalist, Jalalabat Television and Radio Company, Jalalabat

**Oleg Ryabov**, Deputy Editor-in-Chief for Management, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* newspaper; Editor-in-Chief, *Narodnaya gazeta* newspaper

**Igor Shestakov**, Director, Interfax News Agency, Bishkek

**Viktor Shloyev**, Commercial Director, Polonya LLC, Bishkek

**Bekdash Shamshiyev**, Journalist, Azattyk radio station, Bishkek

**Artem Petrov**, Editor-in-Chief, *Novyy Kyrgyzstan* newspaper, Bishkek

**Marina Sivasheva**, Editor, Open Kyrgyzstan website; Journalism Instructor, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek

## Moderator

**Yelena Buldakova**, Kyrgyzstan

## Observers

**Chinara Omurkulova**, Country Director, IREX/Kyrgyz Republic

**Maria Stefurak**, Media Development Specialist, USAID

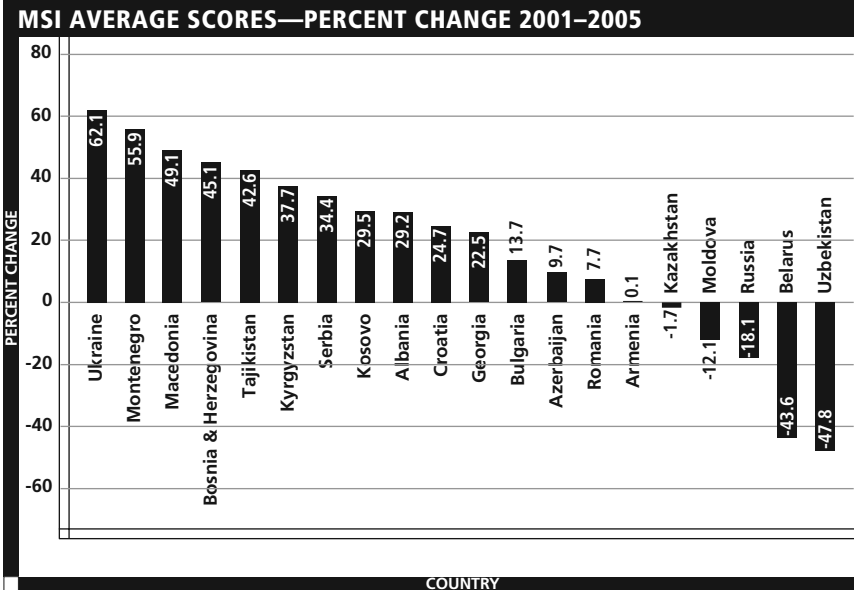
**Jennifer Croft**, Democracy Development Specialist, USAID

# KYRGYZSTAN AT A GLANCE

**SOURCE:**  
(CIA World Factbook)

**GENERAL**

- **Population:** 5,146,281 (July 2005 est.)
- **Capital city:** Bishkek
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uygur 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census)
- **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%
- **Languages:** Kyrgyz (official), Russian (official)
- **GDP:** \$2.1 billion (Based on the National Statistics Committee's figures for the past 10 months of 2005)
- **GDP per capita:** \$1,700 (purchasing power parity) (2004 est.)
- **Literacy rate (% of population):** 98.7% (older than 15 years); 10% of the population above age 15 has a higher education
- **President or top authority:** President Kurmanbek Bakiyev (elected for a five-year term on July 10, 2005)
- **Next scheduled elections:** 2010



**MEDIA-SPECIFIC**

A total of 938 media outlets (newspapers, magazines, bulletins, television stations, and radio stations) are registered with Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Justice.

■ **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** 64 government newspapers, 60 nongovernmental newspapers, 12 agency newspapers; the daily independent newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* circulates 20,000 copies on weekdays and 60,000 on Fridays (which includes television listings); the independent newspaper *Moya*

*Stolitsa Novosti* circulates 5,000 copies on weekdays and 60,000 on Saturdays (which includes television listings); and *Azbim* (in Kyrgyz) circulates around 7,000 to 8,000 copies on weekdays and around 15,000 on Fridays (which includes television listings).

■ **Number of radio stations and television stations:** 36 radio stations, 47 television stations

■ **Broadcast stations and networks:**

- **Television:** ORT, RTR (Russia), NTS (New Television Network), KOORT, Piramida, NTRK (Kyrgyz Republic National Television and Radio Company), NBT (Bishkek National Television)

- **Radio:** Russian Radio, Europa Plus, Radio Chanson, Love Radio, Kyrgyz National Radio, Piramida

■ **Number of Internet users:** NA

■ **News agencies:** Kabar (government), Aki Press (independent), Bely Parokhod (independent)

**MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KYRGYZSTAN**

