

2001 IFES Survey in Kyrgyzstan

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May 2002



Funding for Project Provided by
The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

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IFES PROGRAMMING IN KYRGYZSTAN

IFES has worked in Kyrgyzstan under USAID funding since 1994 conducting projects in civil society development, technical election assistance, and civic education. In 1995, 1996 and 2001 IFES conducted national public opinion polls designed to gauge perceptions of democracy and the future of the country. This data has proven integral to the development of IFES' ongoing programmatic strategy.

IFES believes strongly that student-focused civic education is the ideal project to pursue in Kyrgyzstan, which has recently experienced some setbacks in its transformation to a democratic society. The investment in youth is long-term, but based on IFES experience with students over the last several years, a new and vibrant cadre of future leaders is being formed. These future leaders are experiencing rising expectations, which together with information and education will enable them to change society for the better. Investment in youth, supporting civic education-oriented NGOs and strategically engaging the government on matters of education and elections is an approach IFES feels is optimal to promoting the further democratic development of society.



Prior to the election cycle of 2000, IFES was most active in conducting electoral sector reform and NGO development projects. IFES carried out a two-and-a-half year election law reform project, which concluded with the acceptance of a codified election law in 1999. The law included many positive new provisions, including affirmative voting, rights for domestic observers, and expanded role for political parties. In addition to this IFES implemented an election grievance adjudication project, domestic election observer training, a comprehensive print and electronic voter education project, a media monitoring project as well as developed pollworker training manuals, accompanied by nationwide trainings.

Upon conclusion of the election cycle in 2000, IFES began to focus its work on the area of civic education for young persons, developing a high school civics textbook and conducting a number of projects designed to broaden students' understanding and interest in government, volunteerism, and active civic participation. The focus of IFES efforts in 2002 is, though not limited to, civic education and technical election assistance.

In order to strengthen civic education in Kyrgyzstan IFES is currently undertaking several endeavors. A **Civics Textbook and Course** designed by IFES is being pilot tested in schools throughout the Kyrgyz Republic, including Bishkek, Osh, Issyk-Kul, and Jalal-Abad. Part One of the student textbook and teacher's manual is in use, with part two nearly completed. All materials are translated into three languages, and courses taught in Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian. Critical Thinking teacher training has been conducted in all regions of the course/book's pilot usage to enhance teacher's ability to effectively teach the course. One of the great accomplishments of this project, one that makes the textbook and course particularly effective is a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between IFES, the Minister of Education, and U.S. Ambassador John O'Keefe in late summer 2001, which provided guarantees of the Ministry's support for the project.

Student Action Committees (SACs) are being implemented for a second consecutive year. SACs promote student involvement in solving community/school problems through hands-on

involvement. SACs are being conducted in the Bishkek area, Osh, and parts of Chui and Issyk-Kul Oblasts.

Student Local Government Day (SLGD) projects bring students and local government officials together so students can gain a greater appreciation for and interest in representative governance. Pilot SLGDs were held in the Bishkek area in 2001. SLGDs are planned for students in IFES' pilot school program in Bishkek and Osh.

Democracy Summer Camps are conducted for both high school and university students with two events held in 2001 and one event in 2000. The Camps provide students with direct experience in issues of human rights, tolerance, gender equality, and conducting and running election campaigns. Previous camps have been conducted in Osh and Issyk-Kul, with seven more scheduled for the summer of 2002 (in Jalal-Abad, Osh, Batken, Kerben, Issyk-Kul, Talas and Naryn).

A **University Student Elections** initiative has been undertaken at low cost but high impact to promote the holding of fair student body elections at several universities in the country. The project serves as a useful lesson for students in all aspects of the election process. Student elections projects are held in American University of Bishkek, Slavonic University, and Osh State University.

A **Tertiary Civic Education** project involves the creation of a civics course for university students, based on the adaptation of existing materials. IFES is working with university professors and others to create a CD-rom based course of higher study of civics for first and second year college students.

Technical Election Assistance is another area that IFES strives to make a contribution. IFES, in close coordination with USAID and the U.S. Embassy, monitors on an ongoing basis electoral reform efforts in the country. In October 2001 IFES provided assistance for local elections by printing a "householder" leaflet familiarizing citizens with the election and providing training materials for pollworkers. IFES has maintained a positive and productive working relationship with the Central Election Commission since 1994, and provides the U.S. Embassy with a "participant's view" of the electoral situation on a regular basis.

IFES is extremely pleased with the contributions it has been able to make in Kyrgyzstan thus far. However, because IFES is dedicated to the development process in Kyrgyzstan, IFES looks to the future to do even more. As important as the development of materials in support of the civic education and technical election assistance programs is, the training of key personnel, be they teachers, pollworkers, or NGO leaders is also very important. IFES includes training of users as a critical component of every project it undertakes, and strongly advocates expanding the program to reach as many persons as possible, particularly at the village and rayon level. All civic education projects seek as well to address gender equality issues and conflict resolution/tolerance, which are topics in urgent need of understanding and appreciation by young persons and adults alike.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this survey was to analyze the views of the Kyrgyzstani public on political and economic developments, public institutions performance, media, elections, civil society, democracy and human rights, and to gauge any shifts in the opinion environment since the 1996 International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) public opinion survey. A similar public opinion poll was also implemented by IFES in 1995. The results of these surveys have been used by IFES and other international assistance organizations to design programs for voter information, civic education and civil society development. Feedback from the surveys has proved to be useful when shaping such IFES' activities as its civic education course, civil society development programs and technical elections assistance. Currently, IFES is piloting its civics textbook and course in schools throughout Kyrgyzstan, with all materials available in Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian. It also encourages greater student activism in the community/school and greater political efficacy and involvement in representative governance through programs like Student Action Committees (SACs), Student Local Government Days (SLGDs), Democracy Summer Camps, and University Student Elections Assistance. In addition, IFES, in close coordination with USAID and the U.S. Embassy, continues to monitor ongoing electoral reform efforts in Kyrgyzstan and provides necessary technical elections assistance. IFES is confident that the data from this 2001 survey will prove integral to the development of these ongoing programs.

This report's findings are based on the IFES nationwide opinion survey fielded in Kyrgyzstan between July 27 and August 17, 2001. The survey was conducted with a sample of 1,600 respondents, including an oversample of 100 interviews with young adults aged 18-25. The data file has been weighted to be nationally representative by region, age, and gender. The margin of error for a sample of 1,600 respondents is plus/minus 2.4%. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at a respondent's home. The *Executive Summary* of the survey provides an overview of the survey data and its major findings in all of the categories of questions, while the body of the survey analysis focuses on individual categories in greater detail and discusses the data in terms of their meaning. The presentation of the survey results, organized thematically, reports opinions on the following subjects:

- Information and Major Media Sources
- Overall Situation and the Economy
- Political Interest, Efficacy, and Knowledge
- Democracy and Human Rights
- Institutional Performance, Confidence and Corruption
- Elections and Civic Society

The *Appendix* contains an analysis of youth (18-25) attitudes in Kyrgyzstan.

Fieldwork and data processing was conducted by INFOREX, a research organization in Kyrgyzstan, with the weights developed and tabulations conducted by INFOREX and Rakesh Sharma, IFES Opinion Research Specialist. The survey analysis, along with the formatted report and tables, was prepared by Rakesh Sharma, with comments provided by Vladimir Pototskii of INFOREX. Anthony Bowyer, Irina Zaslavskaya and Irina Volchansky provided editorial assistance.

Fieldwork was made possible by funds provided by the International Foundation for Election Systems. This publication and the overall project were made possible through support provided

by the Office of Democracy and Governance, Bureau for Europe and the New Independent States, US Agency for International Development (USAID), under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement No. AEP-A-00-95-00038-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or IFES.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the results from a survey of the Kyrgyzstani public conducted by the International Foundation for Election Systems between July 27 and August 17, 2001. The survey was conducted with a sample of 1,600 respondents, including an oversample of 100 interviews with adults aged 18-25. The data file has been weighted to be nationally representative by region, age, and gender. The margin of error for a sample of 1,600 respondents is plus/minus 2.4%. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at a respondent's home. This summary outlines the opinion climate in Kyrgyzstan as well changes in political, economic, and social attitudes since the previous IFES survey in Kyrgyzstan in 1996¹.

Information Sources

- A majority of Kyrgyzstanis express dissatisfaction with the availability of information on political and economic developments. Seventy-three percent of respondents say that they do not have much or any information on economic developments in Kyrgyzstan while seventy-one percent say they have little or no information on political developments. Perceived levels of information decline with a decrease in education level, and men profess more information than women.
- The most important sources of information for Kyrgyzstanis are Russian Federation television programs. Seventy-two percent of those surveyed say they watch such programs "regularly" or "sometimes". Sixty-four percent say they also watch Kyrgyzstan-produced television programs in Russian, with sixty-two percent referring to the Kyrgyz language Kyrgyzstan TV as their main source of the news information. By far the most frequently watched news TV channel, with 66% mentioning using it as their source for the news about developments in Kyrgyzstan is KTR. The second most watched news channel is TV Pyramida, with ten percent of viewers.
- Radio is somewhat less popular with forty-two percent listening to the Kyrgyzstani radio programs in Russian, followed by Kyrgyzstani radio programs in Kyrgyz (39%) and the Russian Federation radio programs (30%). Another significant source of information for Kyrgyzstanis is newspapers. Among them the most popular are Kyrgyz newspapers in Russian, with forty-four percent reading them "regularly" or "sometimes". Kyrgyz newspapers in Kyrgyz are also popular (38%). Russian newspapers are less popular, with twenty-one percent reading them "regularly" or "sometimes".
- When looking at the objectivity assessment by the Kyrgyzstanis of the sources of information available to them, the Russian media – TV, radio and newspapers are judged to be the most objective by those who use them. Russian TV is considered to be objective by eighty percent, compared with the fifty-nine percent for Kyrgyz TV in Russian and fifty-two percent for Kyrgyz TV in Kyrgyz. Following the same pattern, Russian radio is considered to be objective by 75%, compared with 64% for Kyrgyz radio in Russian and 62% for Kyrgyz radio in Kyrgyz.

¹ Olds, Hugh, *Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan 1996*, Washington, DC, 1996.

Current Situation and Economy

Attitudes toward the current and future economic situation are influenced to a large extent by the respondent's perceived economic status and ethnicity. The higher the perceived financial status of the respondent's family, the more positive the respondent is about the economic situation and the faster the pace toward market economy desired. With regard to ethnicity, ethnic Russians are by far more pessimistic about the economic situation than ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

- A majority of the respondents (64%) are dissatisfied with the current situation in Kyrgyzstan and 34% are satisfied. This represents a slight improvement over the 1996 IFES survey in Kyrgyzstan, where 71% of the respondents were dissatisfied and 27% were satisfied. Economic difficulties are the most often-cited reason for dissatisfaction.
- Seventy-four percent of respondents feel that changes in Kyrgyzstan since independence have either had a 'major' or 'small' effect on their lives. Those who feel that the changes have had an effect on their lives are slightly more likely to be positive as to the direction of the impact: 52% feel that the changes have had a positive impact, while 47% feel that the changes have had a negative impact. Economic status plays a large part in the response, as those with high SES are more likely to mention positive impacts (76% positive, 24% negative) and those with low SES are more likely to mention negative impacts (27% positive, 72% negative).
- More than two-thirds of respondents (66%) feel that their current economic situation is either somewhat bad or very bad, while 32% of respondents believe that it is somewhat or very good. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of people with positive economic outlooks since 1996, when 23% felt that their current economic situation was good and 73% felt it was bad.
- And most respondents do not expect the economic situation to get better over the next year. Thirty-two percent expect the situation to remain the same while 26% expect the economic situation to get worse. Twenty-seven percent expect the economic situation to get better over the next year.
- There is a mixed message regarding the pace of development toward a market economy in Kyrgyzstan. Compared to the 1996 survey, a higher percentage of respondents would like to move to a market economy 'quickly' (34% vs. 26% in 1996). However, the total percent of those advocating movement to a market economy either 'quickly' or with 'steady reforms' has dropped since 1996 (72% vs. 78% in 1996), and the percent saying that Kyrgyzstan should not pursue a market economy has increased (12% vs. 8% in 1996).

Political Interest and Efficacy

The survey reveals a Kyrgyzstani public that has relatively low interest in politics and which also suffers from low political and voter efficacy.

- Interest in politics has stayed fairly steady, and low, since the 1996 IFES survey. Forty-nine percent of Kyrgyzstanis are either 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in politics, compared to 53% in 1996. More respondents say that they are either 'not too' or 'not at all' interested (50%). Interest in politics generally goes up with age and education.

- When asked how often they discussed politics with family and friends, half responded that they discussed politics 'often' or 'sometimes', while almost an equal percentage (49%) report 'rarely' or 'never' discussing politics. Discussion of politics is closely related to interest in politics. The frequency of discussion goes up or down with the level of interest in politics.
- A majority (65%) of respondents feels that they can influence their friends and neighbors in discussions about politics while 18% do not agree that they can influence their friends and neighbors on political matters. This is despite the fact that a majority (56%) feels that government is too complicated to "...really understand what is going on." Only 31% disagree with the notion that government is too complicated.
- A large percentage of Kyrgyzstanis are skeptical of the influence that ordinary Kyrgyzstanis can have in a democracy. Sixty Five percent of respondents agree that, "People like you have little or no influence on the way things are run in Kyrgyzstan." Further, a plurality (45%) disagrees 'completely' or 'somewhat' that voting gives people a chance to influence decision-making in Kyrgyzstan. Forty-four percent of respondents believe that voting does influence decision-making. Belief in the influence of voting has declined over time: in 1996, 51% agreed that voting provides influence, while 43% disagreed with this statement.
- Fifty-seven percent of respondents feel that they cannot get their elected deputies to listen to their concerns. Only 26% of respondents feel that they can get their elected deputies to pay attention to their concerns. Ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks reflect the national-level opinion on this question, while ethnic Russians feel more neglected than the other two ethnicities.
- A lack of interest in politics is also indicated by the fact that most respondents do not know the name of their mayor or rayon *hakim* (69%) or their deputy to the *Jogorku Kenesh* (64%). On the other hand, there is near-universal knowledge of the President (99%).

Democracy and Rights

The Kyrgyzstani public finds itself in an ambiguous relationship with democracy at the time of the survey. While a plurality thinks democracy is preferable to any other system of government, nearly an equal percentage are willing to contemplate other systems of government. A majority feels that Kyrgyzstan is democratic, but only partially so. Finally, half are at least somewhat satisfied with the way democracy is practiced in Kyrgyzstan, but most think that it only benefits a select few in society.

- When asked what type of political system is preferable, a plurality (46%) feels that democracy is preferable to any other type of government. However, 27% feel that in certain situations a non-democracy can be preferable, while 21% do not think it matters what form of government Kyrgyzstan has. A large segment of the public is willing to abide a non-democratic system. Those with low Socio-Economic Status (SES) and a high level of dissatisfaction with the current situation are most likely to consider non-democratic alternatives.
- A fifth of respondents (23%) feel that Kyrgyzstan is a fully democratic country. Half (50%) feel that it is 'partially' democratic, 17% do not feel it is a democracy at all, and 9% cannot say whether it is a democracy or not. Ethnic Russians are the most likely to say that Kyrgyzstan is not democratic, while those aged 18-25 are more likely to say that Kyrgyzstan

is at least a partial democracy than those above 25 (78% vs. 70%). In 1996, respondents were asked a slightly different question in that they were asked whether Kyrgyzstan was 'primarily a democracy'. At that time, sixty percent felt that Kyrgyzstan was primarily a democracy and 27% felt that it was not a democracy.

- When asked for the meaning of democracy, the most popular responses are rights and freedoms (58%), independence (7%), equal rights (6%), power of the people (6%), and legal state (3%).
- Fifty-one percent of the respondents are satisfied with the way democracy is practiced in Kyrgyzstan, and 41% are dissatisfied with the practice of democracy in the country. The primary reasons for dissatisfaction are both political and economic: no democracy (11%), low living standards (6%), unemployment (3%), lack of social protection (3%), economic recession (3%), and inflation (2%).
- Kyrgyzstanis do not see democracy benefiting people equally in society. Only 23% feel that democracy benefits 'most' people in society. Sixty percent feel that it benefits a select 'some' while 9% feel that democracy benefits 'no one'. As for who the 'some' beneficiaries are, the most cited are: government and the authorities (27%), the rich (14%), top echelons of power (13%), businessmen or entrepreneurs (6%), and deputies (3%). Socio-economic status and ethnicity are important factors in responses to this question: those with high SES are more likely to say that democracy benefits most people, while those with low SES are more likely to say that it benefits some people.
- There is generally strong support for various civil and personal rights in Kyrgyzstan. A majority of respondents feel that it is 'very' or 'somewhat' important that the following rights be respected in Kyrgyzstan: equal opportunities for women (89%); private property (85%), honest elections and freedom of religion (each 86%); freedom of speech (76%); choice of political parties and candidates when voting (66%); and the right to form political parties (53%). A plurality of respondents (49%) cites freedom of association as being important.
- Respondents were also asked whether they felt these rights are respected in Kyrgyzstan. While a majority in most cases feel that the rights are respected, there is a wide discrepancy in some cases between the percentage of respondents who feel the right is important and the percentage that feel it is respected. For example, eighty-six percent of respondents feel that honest elections are important. However, only 59% feel that this right is actually respected in Kyrgyzstan, a deficit of 27% between the two questions. Similar sentiments are found, to a smaller extent, with some other rights: freedom of speech (58% feel it is respected compared to 76% who feel it is important, a deficit of 18%); private property (72%, -13%); and minority rights (65%, -18%). On the other hand, a higher percentage thinks that some rights are respected than the percentage that thinks they are important: right to form political parties (57% think it is respected compared to 53% who feel it is important, a surplus of 4%); freedom of religion (90%, +4%); right of association (53%, +4%); and choice of parties (+3%).
- While a majority of respondents cites the importance of rights in most cases, there is not a particularly deep attachment to these rights. In this way, attitudes toward rights mirror attitudes toward democracy among Kyrgyzstanis. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "In order to ensure order and discipline in society, it is necessary to limit the political and civic rights of people," a majority (57%) agrees with this proposition. This has

not changed since 1996, when 57% agreed with the statement. Support for limiting of rights goes down somewhat when a dictatorship is mentioned: a plurality (44%) disagrees with the statement that in order to ensure order, "...it is necessary to have a dictatorship." An equal 44% agree with this statement. Attitudes on this question are different from 1996 when a majority (56%) disagreed with the statement. Agreement with both these statements is highest among those aged 56 and above, the generation that has spent most of its years under communist rule.

Public Institution Performance

On the whole, Kyrgyzstanis are extremely dissatisfied with the performance of the government and do not exhibit a great deal of confidence in any public institution or personality. They also see official corruption as a frequent and serious problem in Kyrgyzstan.

- Respondents give a low rating to the government's performance on virtually all issue areas. Only 9% of respondents feel that the government is handling job creation 'very' or 'somewhat' well, compared to 89% who feel it is doing 'not very well' or 'not at all well'. Similar sentiments are echoed for the government's performance on inflation (10% well, 87% not well); narrowing income inequality (5% and 87%); handling corruption (12%, 71%), and reducing crime (18%, 76%). The government does better in its performance on two essentially political issues: handling terrorism (47% well, 43% not well), and resolving differences between the North and the South (29% well, 39% not well). Many respondents (34%) either reply "Don't Know" or do not provide an answer regarding differences between the North and South, indicating a lack of information on this matter for many Kyrgyzstanis.
- The low ratings for government performance translate into low confidence in public institutions among respondents. When asked to assess the level of confidence they have in specific institutions, more respondents profess a lack of confidence than the number who profess confidence. President Akayev inspires confidence in the highest percentage of respondents (40%) but more say that they do not have much or any confidence in him (46%). The *Jogorku Kenesh* and local governments inspire less confidence than the president (30% and 25%, respectively) and the courts inspire the least amount of confidence (16%) among respondents.
- Local and regional governments fare somewhat better than the central government in terms of providing services, but still do not provide services adequate enough to satisfy a majority of their constituents. Fifty-one percent of respondents are not satisfied with the services provided by their local government. Forty-three percent of respondents are either completely satisfied with the services provided by their local government or are satisfied to 'some extent'. There are similar sentiments for oblast governments, where 42% are either completely satisfied or satisfied to 'some extent' but 45% are dissatisfied with the services provided by their oblast government.
- Low confidence in public institutions, as well as relatively low levels of political efficacy all contribute in dampening civic participation in Kyrgyzstan. Very few respondents report contacting public officials and few are members of non-governmental organizations. Only nine percent of respondents report having tried to contact an elected official to address a problem or issue. The most frequent reason given for not trying to contact an elected official was that the respondent did not need assistance (31%). But other reasons included that trying to contact officials was pointless (26%), the respondent doesn't know what officials to

contact (6%), officials don't visit their constituents (6%), and that there is no opportunity to contact elected officials (5%).

- On a more positive note, among those who contacted elected officials 63% received a response from the official and 36% did not. A majority of those who received a response were satisfied with the response (56%).
- Eighty-one percent of respondents believe that official corruption is 'very' or 'somewhat' common in Kyrgyzstan, and 82% also believe it is 'very' or 'somewhat' serious. Further, 49% of respondents believe that Kyrgyzstanis accept corruption as a fact of life, while only 18% disagree with this notion (30% answer "Don't know"). Perceptions of corruption have increased slightly since 1996, when 76% of respondents felt that corruption was 'very' or 'somewhat' common and 78% of respondents felt it was 'very' or 'somewhat' serious.
- Of the respondents who feel that their fellow citizens accept corruption as a fact of life, 48% do not feel that this contributes much to official corruption while 42% do feel that accepting corruption as a fact of life does contribute to official corruption.

Elections and Civil Society

- Overall, 80% report voting in the November 2000 elections. Those who did not vote gave as reasons that they did not have opportunity to vote, they did not want to vote, that they don't believe in fair elections, and because the result was pre-determined. Those who voted did it hoping for a better life, to exercise their rights, to support Akayev, and to ensure a good president. There were no major differences by ethnicity for voter participation. Participation generally tended to go up with age.
- When asked to rate the overall organization of the November 2000 elections, 49% of respondents rate it as 'somewhat' or 'very' good and 30% rate it as average. Respondents are also generally satisfied with different aspects of the electoral process with more reporting being satisfied than dissatisfied with the registration process, information on how to vote, information on marking ballots, and polling station staff and facilities. The fairness of the election process is the only item for which more respondents express dissatisfaction rather than satisfaction. Forty-nine percent of respondents are very or somewhat dissatisfied with this aspect of the election while forty-six are satisfied with it.
- A majority of those who voted report having at least a 'fair amount' of coverage on the various candidates (52%), while 46% report not having much information. For those who had at least a fair amount of coverage on the elections, TV (80%) was the most popular source of information on the elections, followed by posters (52%), newspapers (45%), friends and family (36%), and radio (33%).
- Forty-two percent of respondents feel that the media coverage of the various candidates was fair. However, a sizable 35% feel that the coverage was only partially fair or completely unfair. Among the reasons given for impartial coverage were: unequal coverage of candidates (28%), little reliable information (23%), negative things not revealed (9%), and mudslinging (10%).

- Respondents were asked whether they were pressured or bribed to vote a certain way. Fourteen percent report being pressured to vote for a particular candidate, and 9% were offered rewards for their vote.
- When asked to assess their satisfaction with the electoral system as a whole, a majority (52%) say that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with it, while 42% were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied. Ethnic Kyrgyz are the most likely to be dissatisfied with the electoral system (60%). Satisfaction in the electoral system has risen since the 1996 survey. In that survey, 35% were satisfied with the electoral system and 57% were dissatisfied.
- Kyrgyzstanis generally approve of other types of political participation besides voting, as long as the action is not confrontational. Overall, 81% approve of citizens attending public meetings, 70% approve of contacting elected officials about problems, 61% of writing to newspapers, 51% approve of attending rallies and protests, and 45% approve of signing a petition. A majority disapproves of boycotts (59%) and hunger strikes (70%).
- A majority of respondents feel that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are either 'essential' (26%) or 'very necessary' (33%) for Kyrgyzstan. And 61% of respondents feel that citizens in Kyrgyzstan have the possibility of forming NGOs. Attitudes voicing the necessity of NGOs have increased since 1996 when 52% of respondents felt that NGOs were either essential or necessary, as has the belief that citizens of Kyrgyzstan have the possibility of forming NGOs (54% in 1996).
- Twenty-nine percent of respondents are of the opinion that NGOs can deliver some services more efficiently than state organizations. Twenty percent disagree and 49% don't know enough to answer. Among the services which respondents felt could be more efficiently undertaken by NGOs were allocating humanitarian aid (22%), solving everyday social problems (19%), helping poor people (15%), and providing financial support (15%).
- However, the actual experiences of respondents with NGOs differ from their attitudes. Only 2% of respondents have been members of an NGO. Fifty-one percent have never been members but have heard of NGOs and a fairly large 43% have never heard of any NGOs. When asked whether they have ever been 'affected' by NGOs, 7% reply that they had been affected positively, 1% negatively, and 3% both positively and negatively. Eighty-five percent report not being affected by NGOs. And only 14% of respondents are aware of NGOs active in their communities. This is significantly lower than 1996, when 33% of respondents were aware of NGOs in their communities.
- Even more disappointing than the figures above is the fact that only 10% of respondents are willing to volunteer their time for a non-governmental organization, while 74% are not. This is down from 42% who were willing to volunteer in 1996. A solid majority of all sub-groups indicate that they would not be willing to volunteer for NGOs.

INFORMATION AND MAJOR MEDIA SOURCES

Access to Information

Kyrgyzstanis generally express dissatisfaction with the amount of information available to them on economic and political matters. Close to three-quarters of respondents state that they have 'not very much' or 'absolutely nothing' when asked about information on economic and political developments. The data for these two questions is presented in Figure 1, along with data on the same questions from the 1996 IFES survey.

Figure 1. Information on Economic and Political Developments

	1996 (n=1494)		2001 (n=1600)	
	Great Deal/Fair Amount	Not Very Much/Absolutely Nothing	Great Deal/Fair Amount	Not Very Much/Absolutely Nothing
<i>"How much information do you think you have about the economic developments in Kyrgyzstan?"</i>	22%	77%	24%	73%
<i>"And how much information do you feel you have about political developments in Kyrgyzstan?"</i>	24%	74%	25%	71%

There has been little improvement in the information climate of Kyrgyzstan between 1996 and 2001. Figure 1 indicates that the larger part of the Kyrgyzstani public does not have a level of information sufficient to satisfy its needs. This feeling is prevalent throughout all major sub-groups but some express greater lack of information than others.

Women are more likely than men to say that they don't have sufficient information about both economic reforms (77% vs. 68%) and political developments (76% vs. 65%). Ethnic Russians are more likely to feel dissatisfied with both types of information than ethnic Uzbeks or ethnic Kyrgyz. It should be noted, however, that ethnic Kyrgyz mirror the percentages in the entire sample when it comes to expressing dissatisfaction with economic reforms (71%) and political developments (69%).

Perceived amount of information also declines with level of education. For example, 31% of those with a primary-level or lesser education say they have absolutely no information on economic reforms compared to not a single respondent who expressed this sentiment among those with a university degree. The corresponding percentages for information on political developments are 33% and 9%. Since SES goes up with education, it is not surprising that levels of information also increase with SES.

Those aged 18-25 are slightly less likely to have sufficient information than those above 25 on both economic developments (20% vs. 25%) and political developments (23% vs. 27%).

Major Media Sources

Television is by far the preferred news medium for most Kyrgyzstanis. When asked about their sources of news, 73% of respondents report using at least one television outlet 'regularly'. This

compares with 44% who list radio outlets and 31% who list newspapers as regular sources of information. Those aged 18-25 are significantly more likely to regularly listen to news on radio than those over 25 (57% and 39%, respectively), and are slightly more likely to regularly use TV outlets for news than those over 25 (76% and 72%, respectively).

Urban residents are more likely to regularly use at least one TV, radio, or newspaper source than rural residents, with the most significant difference occurring with newspapers (44% urban, 24% rural). Cost and lack of distributional infrastructure are the most likely reasons for this disparity in regular use of newspapers. Ethnic Uzbeks are much less likely to be regular readers of newspapers (13%) than Kyrgyz (32%) or Russians (39%). Education seems to play a part in the relatively low consumption of newspapers among ethnic Uzbeks. Twenty-three percent of ethnic Uzbeks have a primary-level of lesser level of education, compared to 9% among ethnic Kyrgyz and 15% among ethnic Russians.

Television Sources

A majority of respondents report being regular viewers of Russian Federation TV channels (53%). This compares to 29% who report regularly watching Kyrgyzstani TV channels in Kyrgyz and 34% who regularly watch Kyrgyzstani TV channels in Russian for a total of 63% who regularly watch Kyrgyz TV channels. A sizable percentage (13%), mostly ethnic Uzbeks, also report regularly watching TV channels based in Uzbekistan. Overall, more respondents regularly watch TV stations based in Kyrgyzstan than in other countries.

As expected, there are significant variations among ethnicities in the media sources used regularly. Ethnic Kyrgyz are more likely to regularly use Kyrgyzstani TV in Kyrgyz (42%) than ethnic Russians (7%) or ethnic Uzbeks (27%). Russians are much more likely to regularly watch Russian Federation TV (73%) than ethnic Kyrgyz (49%) or ethnic Uzbeks (40%). Interestingly, more ethnic Kyrgyz report regularly watching Russian Federation TV than Kyrgyz TV in Kyrgyz.

Those aged 18-25 are more likely to regularly watch Russian Federation TV (59%) than Kyrgyzstani TV in Kyrgyz (23%) or Kyrgyzstani TV in Russian (34%). Those over 25 are significantly more likely to regularly watch Kyrgyzstani TV in Kyrgyz than the 18-25 group (31% vs. 23%). This finding implies that the level and content of information of those 18-25 is likely to be somewhat different from those older than 25, and this is likely to affect attitude and opinion formation in the future.

Respondents who reported TV as a source were next asked if the source was objective or not. The results for TV sources were as follows:

- Russian Federation TV (80% 'mostly' or 'somewhat' objective, 12% 'not too' or 'not at all' objective)
- Kyrgyz TV in Russian (59%, 35%)
- Uzbekstani TV (57%, 29%)
- Kyrgyzstani TV in Kyrgyz (52%, 41%)

Foreign TV sources are considered more objective than domestic TV channels in Kyrgyz. As TV is by far the most popular news source in Kyrgyzstan, this might be one reason why Kyrgyzstanis are not satisfied with the amount of information available to them.

Radio

Kyrgyzstani radio in both Russian and Kyrgyz has the most regularly listened-to radio outlets (23% each), followed by Russian Federation radio (17%). A further 8% reported regularly listening to Uzbekstani radio outlets.

The patterns by ethnicity outlined for TV sources are also present for radio sources. Ethnic Russians are about as likely to regularly listen to Russian Federation radio (33%) as Kyrgyzstani radio in Russian (31%), and much more than Kyrgyzstani radio in Kyrgyz (3%). On the other hand, ethnic Kyrgyz are more likely to turn to Kyrgyzstani radio in Kyrgyz (32%) than Kyrgyzstani radio in Russian (24%) or Russian Federation radio (13%).

Youth (18-25) are most likely to regularly listen to Kyrgyzstani radio in Russian (33%) than Russian Federation radio (29%) and Kyrgyzstani radio in Kyrgyz (20%).

The objectivity ratings among regular or occasional users of these radio sources are as follows:

- Russian Federation radio (75% objective, 15% not objective)
- Kyrgyzstani radio in Russian (64%, 28%)
- Kyrgyzstani radio in Kyrgyz (62%, 28%)
- Uzbekstani radio (60%, 25%)

Newspapers

Newspapers are the only news source for which many more respondents report regularly using domestic sources than foreign sources. This is probably because foreign sources are harder to obtain and more expensive than domestic sources.

Overall, the highest regular readership is for Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Russian (22%) followed by Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Kyrgyz (15%) and Russian Federation newspapers (7%). As is to be expected, ethnic Russians are more likely to read domestic newspapers in Russian (35%) than ethnic Kyrgyz (20%) or ethnic Uzbeks (8%). Ethnic Kyrgyz are more likely to read domestic papers in Kyrgyz (21%) than ethnic Russians (2%) or ethnic Uzbeks (5%). Youth have generally similar patterns of regular newspaper use as those over 25.

In terms of objectivity, these sources are rated as follows:

- Russian Federation newspapers (74% objective, 15% not objective)
- Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Russian (65% objective, 29% not objective)
- Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Kyrgyz (56% objective, 37% not objective)

For all three media sources, Russian Federation sources are considered significantly more objective in their news coverage than Kyrgyzstani sources. This is true even when one controls for ethnicity: all three major ethnic groups rate Russian Federation media sources higher than domestic media sources. The increasing press restrictions and harassment of journalists by state authorities might play a role in these assessments. The 2002 edition of the Human Rights Watch World Report highlights some of these actions:

“The opposition newspaper Asaba (The Standard) was declared bankrupt on April 20, after losing a court battle over the repayment of a loan and receiving an unprecedented US \$100,000 fine for libel of a member of Parliament. The government-controlled

*Uchkun publishing house refused to publish the newspaper Res Publica, as a result of, according to the paper's editor, an edition containing an article about the financial dealings of President Akaev's wife.*²

Growing control of the content of official state media over the last few years seems to have prompted Kyrgyzstanis to search for other sources of reliable news and information.

Figure 2 provides complete data on sources of information and perceptions of their objectivity. Figure 3 lists the most popular specific sources for each media outlet.

Figure 2. Use and Perceived Objectiveness of Sources (in percent)

	Use of Sources (n=1600)		Objectiveness of Sources (n indicated for each source)		
	Regularly/ Sometimes	Rarely/ Never	N	Very/ Somewhat Objective	Not Very/ Not At All Objective
Kyrgyzstani TV in Kyrgyz	62	38	1204	53	39
Kyrgyzstani TV in Russian	64	35	1261	58	36
Russian Federation TV	72	28	1303	79	13
Uzbekstani TV	24	76	495	60	27
Other International TV	4	95	113	49	22
Kyrgyzstani radio in Kyrgyz	39	60	754	62	28
Kyrgyzstani radio in Russian	42	58	830	65	27
Russian Federation radio	30	70	594	75	15
Uzbekstani radio	16	84	307	58	27
Other International radio	7	93	148	27	8
Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Kyrgyz	38	62	793	56	37
Kyrgyzstani newspapers in Russian	44	56	885	65	29
Russian Federation newspapers	21	79	493	74	15
Uzbekstani newspapers	2	98	72	56	29
Other international newspapers	2	98	61	46	24
Kyrgyzstani magazines in Kyrgyz	9	91	223	45	40
Kyrgyzstani magazines in Russian	11	89	280	56	31
Russian Federation magazines	14	86	322	71	16
Uzbekstani magazines	2	98	39	48	36
Other international magazines	3	97	99	56	18

1. "Now, I am going to read out a list of news sources that are available here in Kyrgyzstan. For each news source I mention, please tell me if you use it regularly, sometimes, rarely, or not at all."

2. "Thinking about each news source just listed, please tell me whether you think these news sources are objective in their news coverage?"

² Human Rights Watch. *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002*. New York, 2002. 329.

**Figure 3. Most Popular Channels or Newspapers for News about Kyrgyzstan
 (n=1600)**

Television		Radio		Newspapers	
KTR	66%	Kyrgyzstan Obondoru	17%	Vecherny Bishkek	14%
TV Pyramyd	10%	Radio Pyramid	7%	Delo N	9%
KOORT	4%	Europe +	7%	Kyrgyz Tuusu	8%
ORT	4%	21 Vek	7%	Asaba	8%
Osh TV	3%	Radio 1	6%	Obo	3%
RTR	2%	Russian Radio	4%	Aalam	3%
NBT	2%	Radio Azattyk	4%	Slovo Kyrgyzstana	2%
Other TV	1%	Ekho Doliny	2%	Respublika	2%
DK/NR	9%	Radio Asmaz	2%	Pyramid	1%
		Other radio	5%	Local Oblast paper	6%
		DK/NR	40%	Local Rayon paper	5%
				Other newspaper	7
				DK/NR	31%

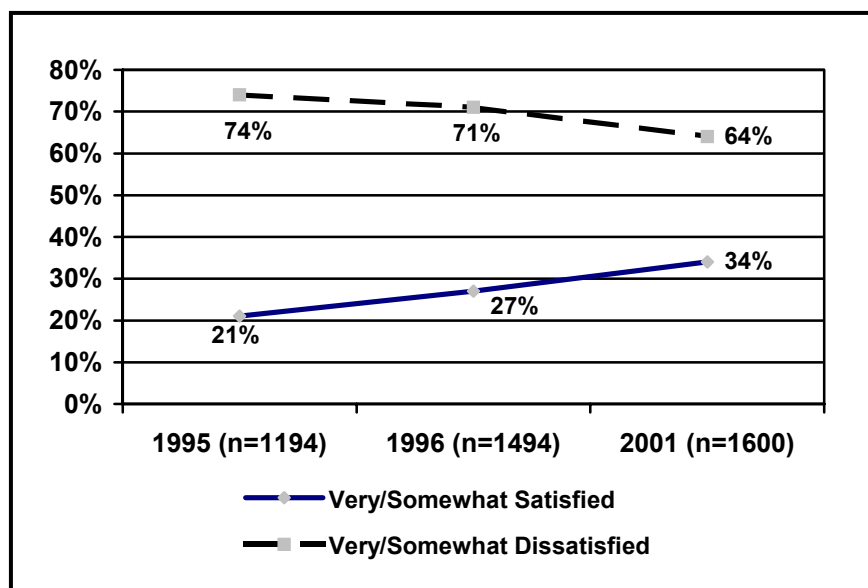
"What is the most frequent (TV channel that you watch, radio station that you listen to, newspaper that you read) for news about developments in Kyrgyzstan?"

OVERALL SITUATION AND THE ECONOMY

Satisfaction with Situation

The survey finds that Kyrgyzstanis are generally dissatisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Sixty-four percent of respondents reported being either 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan, while 34% are 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied. There is some improvement in the satisfaction levels compared to the previous IFES surveys in Kyrgyzstan in 1995³ and 1996 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Satisfaction with Situation in Kyrgyzstan
 (1995: n=1194; 1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



"How satisfied are you with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan?"

Most major subgroups in the population are more dissatisfied than satisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan, but there are some interesting differences among the subgroups:

- Residents of Bishkek and the northern region of the country are likely to be much more dissatisfied with the situation (78% and 77%, respectively) than those in the southern and eastern regions of the country (55% and 63%, respectively).
- Members of the two largest minorities are much different in their evaluations; ethnic Russians are much more likely to be dissatisfied (78%) than ethnic Uzbeks (45%) and vice versa (22% of ethnic Russians satisfied and 53% of ethnic Uzbeks satisfied). Ethnic Kyrgyz reflect the national percentages (33% dissatisfied, 64% satisfied).
- Satisfaction increases as Socio-Economic Status rises: those with high or moderately high SES are more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied (53% vs. 34%) while those with low or moderate low SES are much more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied (79% vs. 19%). Medium SES respondents are more dissatisfied than satisfied (60% vs. 38%).
- There is little difference between those aged 18-25 and others in their satisfaction with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan.

³ Wagner, Steve, *Public Opinion in Kyrgyzstan 1995*, Washington, DC 1995.

Ethnic Uzbeks live primarily in the southern part of the country and the fact that ethnic Uzbeks are the most satisfied ethnicity might account for the low level of dissatisfaction in the south. The fact that satisfaction increases with increasing SES and, conversely, dissatisfaction increases with decreasing SES might suggest that economic difficulties are at the core of the rationale for dissatisfaction. Some evidence for this might be found in the fact that even among Russians, the most dissatisfied of ethnic groups, 50% of the high SES respondents are satisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, 63% of low SES Uzbeks (the most dissatisfied of ethnic groups) are dissatisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Respondents were asked why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Figure 5 provides the most common responses to this question.

**Figure 5. Reasons for Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction
 (Multiple responses accepted, n=1600)**

Reasons Satisfied		Reasons Dissatisfied	
Pol. & Econ. stability	12%	Unemployment	24%
No war, peace	6%	Low living standards	20%
Democracy	4%	Inflation	10%
Can have own business	4%	Economic recession	10%
There is work	3%	Lack of social protection	9%
Independence	1%	Low wages, pensions	8%
Other	2%	Ineffective leadership	6%
DK/NR	7%	Lack of stability	5%
		Lack of discipline	3%
		Corruption	2%
		Nationalism, ethnic relations	1%
		Crime, drugs	1%
		No democracy	1%
		Other	4%
		DK/NR	4%

"Why are you satisfied/dissatisfied with our country's situation today?"

Economic difficulties are the major reason why respondents are dissatisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Seventy-two percent list economic problems as reasons for their dissatisfaction (81% if one considers 'lack of social protection' as an economic problem). Political concerns, such as lack of democracy do not play a large part in causing dissatisfaction. On the other hand, those who are satisfied are more likely to list democracy, political and economic stability, and peace as reasons for satisfaction.

As shown above, those who are more comfortable economically are more likely to be satisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Perhaps because of their relative economic security they are more likely to indicate political and social stability as their sources of satisfaction. Those on the lower end of the economic scale are primarily concerned with their day-to-day livelihood and list economic concerns as the major reason for dissatisfaction.

Changes since Independence

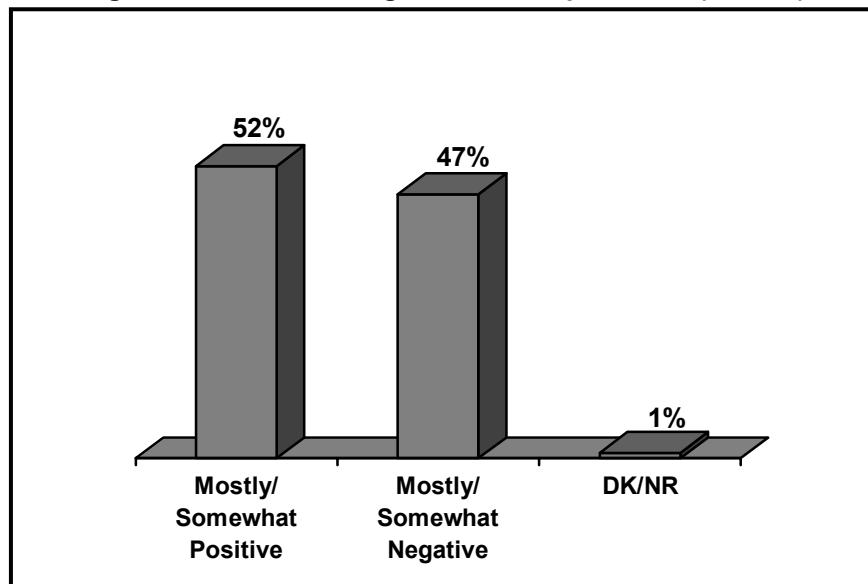
Respondents to the survey were also asked about the changes that have taken place in Kyrgyzstan since independence was achieved in 1991. First, respondents were asked what effect the changes in Kyrgyzstan since independence have had on their lives. The 'changes' were not defined for the respondents. A majority of respondents feel that these changes have had either a major effect (33%) or a small effect (41%) on their lives. Twenty percent feel that the changes have had no effect, and 5% did not know or did not answer.

Interestingly, both those very dissatisfied and very satisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan are more likely than average to say that the changes have had a major effect on their lives (39% and 45%, respectively). Based on the responses to the satisfaction questions, one can surmise that the differing economic fortunes of these two groups form a strong basis for this response. The relationship between SES and attitudes on the direction of changes is discussed after figure 6 below.

Ethnic Russians are more likely to say that that these changes have had a major effect on their lives than other ethnic groups.

The respondents who answered that the changes since independence did have an effect on their lives were next asked whether these changes had been positive or negative. The responses are listed in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Effect of Changes since Independence (n=1181)



"Has the affect of these changes on you and your family been mostly positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or mostly negative?"

As the figure indicates, Kyrgyzstanis are slightly more likely to say that the changes that have taken place since 1991 in Kyrgyzstan have been positive. However, socio-economic status is once again a critical factor in responses to this question. A majority of those among the high SES group that answered this question feel that the changes have been positive (76%) rather than negative (24%). The corresponding percentages for the middle SES group (57% positive, 42% negative) and the low SES group (27% positive, 72% negative) reflect the same

relationship as with satisfaction. These differences between SES categories are stable across the three major ethnicities.

All respondents were asked what specific 'good' or 'bad' things had happened in Kyrgyzstan since independence. Among the 'good' things listed were:

- Independence of country (20%)
- Democracy (9%)
- Law on land (9%)
- 3000 year celebration of Osh (7%)
- 1000 year celebration of Manas (7%)
- Opportunities to open business (5%)
- Improvement in the educational system (4%)
- Positive changes in economy (2%)

Eighteen percent replied that 'nothing good' had happened since independence, and 21% replied, "Don't know."

Among the 'bad' things listed were:

- Events in Batken (30%)
- Unemployment (20%)
- Economic recession (18%)
- Low living standards (14%)
- Lack of social protection (10%)
- Inflation (10%)
- Crime, law and order (8%)
- Corruption (7%)
- Migration (2%)
- Natural calamities (2%)

In comparison to the question asking about 'good' things, very few respondents (2%) said that 'nothing bad' had happened since independence.

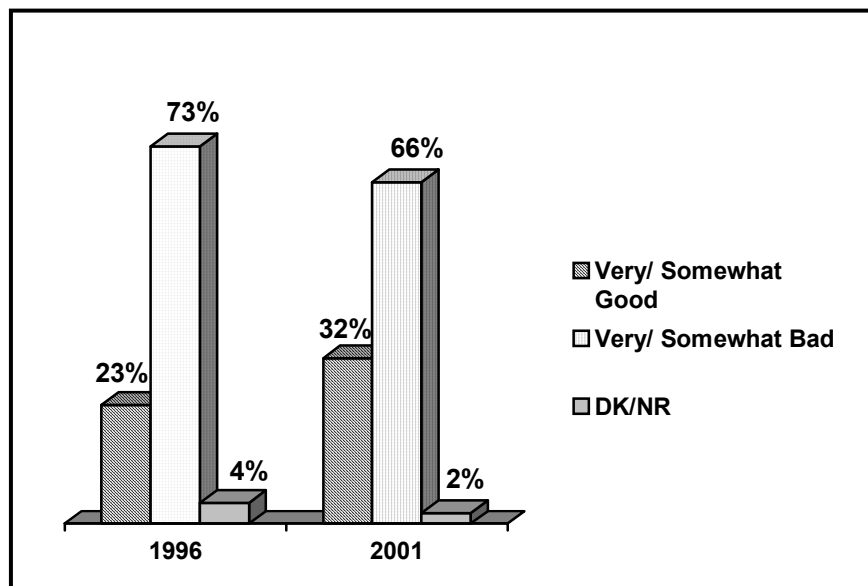
It is interesting to note that most of the responses for 'good' things refer to political or social developments in Kyrgyzstan since independence. Very few respondents cite economic sector developments as 'good' things. This mirrors the responses given by those who were satisfied or dissatisfied with the situation in the country. Even more troubling, from a development standpoint, is that less than ten percent cite democracy as a 'good' thing to have happened since independence.

On the other hand, the existence of militant rebels in Batken province is thought of as the number one 'bad' thing to have happened. Economic developments are also frequently mentioned as 'bad' things and far outnumber the 'good' economic developments. Clearly, most respondents feel that since independence, economic developments in Kyrgyzstan have more often been of the negative variety than of the positive variety.

Current and Future Economic Condition

The negative assessments of the economic situation intimated in the previous two sections are fully modulated when respondents are asked about the current economic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Twenty-six percent of respondents feel that the current economic situation is 'very' bad and 40% feel that it is 'somewhat' bad. In contrast, only 1% feels the economic situation is very good, while 31% feel it is somewhat good. Figure 7 provides data on this question from 2001 as well as 1996.

Figure 7. Current Economic Situation
 (1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



"How would you describe the current economic situation in our country?"

Figure 4 indicates that attitudes toward the current economic situation are actually more positive in 2001 than they were in 1996. Compared to 23% who felt the economic situation was good in the 1996 survey, 31% feel this way in 2001. And compared to the 73% who felt that the situation was bad in 1996, 66% feel similarly in 2001. This might be explained by the fact that economic developments in Kyrgyzstan seem to be on a positive trend. Inflation has fallen from 35.3% in 1999 to 21.5% in 2000⁴. GDP growth has increased from 2.1% in 1998 to 5.7% in 2000⁵. However, these figures should not detract from the fact that two-thirds of Kyrgyzstanis still feel that the economic situation in Kyrgyzstan is 'very' or 'somewhat' bad. An explanation for this might partially lie in the fact that prosperity is not evenly distributed in Kyrgyzstan. 1997 figures show that the bottom 10% (economically) of the Kyrgyz public consumes 2.7% of all goods and services in Kyrgyzstan while the top 10% consumes 31.7% of goods and services⁶: the top tier of society consumes more than 10 times as much as the bottom tier of society.

It is not surprising, then, that a respondent's opinion on the direction of the country since independence is related to their assessment of the current economic situation. Those who feel that the country has gone in a negative direction (primarily those with low SES) are significantly

⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators Database*, July 2001.

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2001*,

⁶ *ibid.*

less likely to say the current economic situation is good than those who feel that the country has gone in a positive direction (15% and 50%, respectively).

This difference is also evident when respondents are asked whether the economic situation of the country will improve or deteriorate over the next year. Overall, a plurality of the respondents (32%) feels that the economic situation will stay the same over the next year. When margin of error is taken into account, there is no statistically significant difference in the percentage of respondents who feel that economic situation will deteriorate over the next year (26%) and those who feel that it will improve (27%).

However, those who feel that changes in Kyrgyzstan since independence have been positive have a much more favorable view of the economic situation over the next year (41% better), compared to those who feel that changes have been negative (19% better).

Young people (18-25) are less pessimistic about future economic conditions (32% better, 18% worse) than those above age 25 (26% better, 31% worse). Ethnic Russians are the most likely to be pessimistic about future economic conditions. Forty percent of ethnic Russians believe the economic situation will worsen over the next year, compared to 26% of ethnic Kyrgyz and 15% of ethnic Uzbeks. Even among the relatively optimistic 18-25 year olds, ethnic Russians are much more likely to be pessimistic than other ethnicities (41% worse versus 15% for ethnic Kyrgyz and 12% for ethnic Uzbeks).

Combining attitudes on current and future economic conditions reveals a polarity of opinions on economic matters in Kyrgyzstani society⁷. The majority of respondents (56%) feel that the current economic situation is bad or very bad and is likely to stay the same or get worse. The next largest group among respondents (30%) is made up of those who feel the current economic situation is good or very good and is likely to stay the same or get better. Few are willing to project a future different from the present; only 13% think the current situation is bad or very bad but is likely to get better, and a negligible 1% feel the current situation is good but it likely to get better.

Most of those who are dissatisfied with the current situation in Kyrgyzstan and those who feel that the country has gone in a negative direction since independence fall squarely into the pessimist camp on the economic front (69% and 72%, respectively, feel that the economy is bad and will get worse). The percentage that feels this way among those who are satisfied and who see positive direction are much lower (34% and 32%, respectively). This general pessimism among those who have not benefited from Kyrgyzstan's development since independence has implications not only for the economic attitudes and public official ratings in Kyrgyzstan. As the discussion on democracy-related questions will illustrate, this pessimism also has implications for the perceived need and benefits of democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

Pace of Economic Reforms

On a somewhat positive note, there is greater sentiment for quickening the pace of economic reforms among respondents than in the 1996 survey. When asked at what pace Kyrgyzstan should work toward a market economy, a statistically equal percentage cited "small, steady reforms" (38%) and "as quickly as possible" (34%). This represents a change from 1996 when a majority (52%) wanted steady reforms and 26% wanted reforms to move as quickly as

⁷ Analysis excludes those who answer "Don't know" or do not respond to either question.

possible. Twelve percent of respondents in this survey do not wish to pursue economic reforms, a percentage little changed since 1996 (12%).

However, enthusiasm for quick reforms is not shared equally across society and is, once again, emblematic of the divide between those who are generally satisfied with Kyrgyzstan's future and direction, and those who are not (Figure 8 below). The desire for a quicker pace of reforms is greater among those who see positive developments since independence and those who are generally satisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Figure 8. Pace of Economic Reforms

	Total Sample (n=1600)	Direction since Independence		Satisfaction with Situation	
		Positive (n = 575)	Negative (n = 592)	Satisfied (n = 537)	Dissatisfied (n = 1030)
As quickly as possible	34%	42%	26%	40%	31%
Small, steady reforms	38%	39%	41%	38%	38%
Should not pursue	12%	8%	16%	10%	13%
Don't know	15%	11%	17%	12%	16%

"Should we work toward a market economy with small but steady reforms, should we get to a free economy as quickly as possible, or should we not pursue a free economy at all?"

There are also some differences by age and education on this question. The youngest age group of 18-25 and the one most likely to benefit from economic reforms instituted in the present is the most likely to want quicker reforms (41%) while those 55 and above who have little or no window for enjoying the fruits of reform are least likely to want quick reforms (19%). Those with primary or a lesser level of education are the least likely to be supportive of economic reforms. These respondents are most likely to fall into the low SES group and are most likely to feel that the situation in Kyrgyzstan has taken a negative turn since independence. Given this experience, it is not surprising that they would be least likely to support economic reforms.

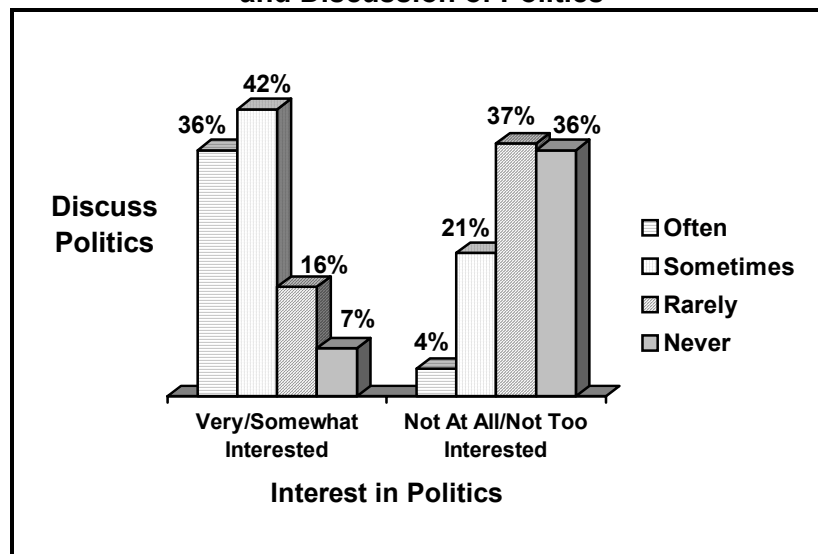
POLITICAL INTEREST, EFFICACY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Interest in Politics and Government

The percentage of respondents interested in political affairs has decreased slightly from the 1996 to 2001 IFES surveys in Kyrgyzstan. In 1996, 53% of respondents reported being interested in political affairs (40% very interested and 13% somewhat interested). In 2001, 49% of respondents report being interested in political affairs and 50% report being either 'not too interested' or 'not at all interested' in political affairs (compared to 47% in 1996). Interest in politics in Kyrgyzstan is much lower than interest in politics in other Newly Independent States in which IFES has conducted surveys. For example, 59% of respondents in Armenia and 62% of respondents in Ukraine said that they were at least 'somewhat' interested in politics in surveys conducted in 2001^{8 9}.

The relatively modest level of interest in politics also translates into a lack of political discussion. When respondents were asked how often they discussed politics with their acquaintances, 20% mentioned often, 32% sometimes, 26% rarely, and 22% never. Not surprisingly, those somewhat or very interested in politics were more likely to discuss politics than those not interested in politics (figure 9 below).

Figure 9. Relationship between Interest in Politics and Discussion of Politics



"How interested are you in matters of politics and government?"

"When you meet your friends, do you talk about politics – often, sometimes, rarely, or never?"

Interest in politics is related to a large extent to levels of information. Those respondents who say that they have at least a fair amount of information on economic developments in Kyrgyzstan are much more likely to be very or somewhat interested in politics (71%) than those who do not have much economic information (43%). A similar pattern holds for those with at least a fair amount of information on political developments in Kyrgyzstan (74% interested) versus those without adequate information (41% interested). Determining whether availability

⁸ Carson, Thomas and Rakesh Sharma, *Attitudes and Expectations: Public Opinion in Ukraine 2001*, Washington, DC, p. 14.

⁹ Carson, Thomas, *Citizens' Awareness and Participation in Armenia*, Washington, DC, p. 62.

of information leads to an interest in politics or an interest in politics leads individuals to seek information is beyond the scope of this report, but this finding does point to the importance of the availability of information for a politically aware populace.

The education level of the respondents plays a part with interest increasing with increasing education. Interest in politics peaks for the 46-55 age group (58% at least somewhat interested), but then quickly falls to its lowest point for the 55 and above age group (39%).

There is a significant difference in interest between residents of Bishkek and those living in small cities (less than 200,000 residents) and rural areas. Residents of Bishkek are far more interested in politics (56% at least somewhat interested) than residents of smaller cities (45%) and rural areas (48%).

Political Efficacy

The survey attempted to measure the different dimensions of political efficacy via two types of questions. For the first type of question, respondents were given two statements and asked to choose the one with which they agreed (strongly or somewhat). They were given a total of three sets of statements:

- A. In discussions about politics with friends and neighbors, I can influence their opinions.
- B. As far as politics are concerned, friends and neighbors do not listen to me.

- A. The way the government operates sometimes seems so complicated that I cannot really understand what is going on.
- B. I can usually understand the way that government works.

- A. We are usually able to make our elected deputies listen to our problems.
- B. We are usually unable to make our elected deputies listen to us.

The second series of questions asked respondents to agree or disagree with a statement (strongly or somewhat). The respondents were given two statements:

- A. People like you have little or no influence on the way things are run in Kyrgyzstan.
- B. Voting gives people like you a chance to influence decision-making in our country.

The data for these questions is presented in the table below:

Figure 10. Political Efficacy (n=1600)

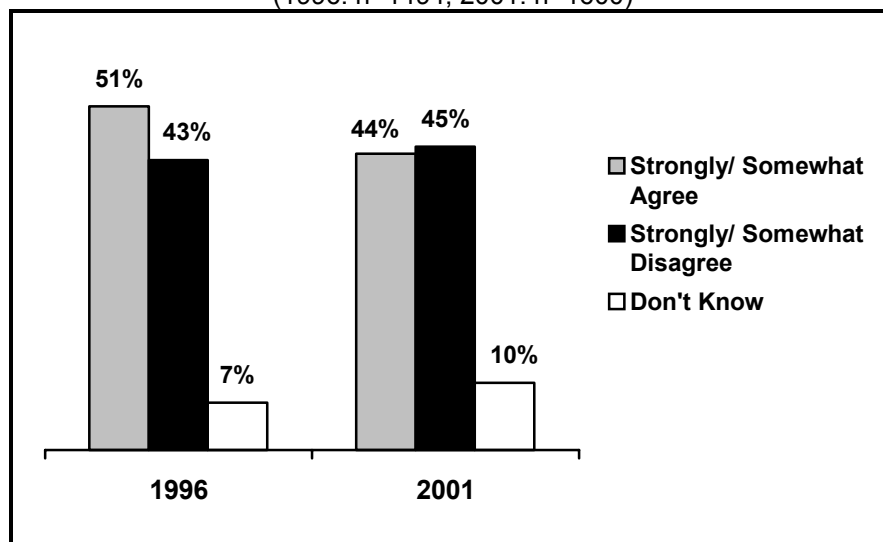
	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat	Agree With Neither
I can influence Friends and Neighbors In Political Discussions	65%	18%	8%
Government too complicated	56%	31%	4%
We can make elected deputies listen to our problems	26%	57%	7%
People like me have no influence	65%	32%	-
Voting gives people like me influence over decision-making	44%	45%	-

For the most part, figure 9 shows that the majority or close to the majority of Kyrgyzstanis lack confidence in their ability to exert much influence on the political environment in Kyrgyzstan. The only sign of confidence is shown when respondents are asked about their ability to influence their friends and neighbors in political discussions. A majority of respondents (65%) agree strongly or somewhat that they can influence their acquaintances in these types of discussions. Of course, those interested in politics and those with greater amounts of political and economic information are more likely to exert confidence on this question. But even among those with reported low levels or no information on political and economic affairs, many more feel that they can influence their acquaintances than not: 49% vs. 20% for those with low levels of both economic information and political information. This is also true of other groups shown to be pessimistic about economic affairs in the last chapter: those who feel the country has gone in a negative direction since independence, those dissatisfied with the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, and those on the lower end of the socio-economic ladder.

When asked about their influence on the environment outside their circle of friends and relative, however, the confidence exhibited with acquaintances breaks down for the majority of Kyrgyzstanis. Fifty-six percent of respondents agree strongly or somewhat that government is too complicated to understand; 57% disagree with the statement that they can make their elected deputies listen to their concerns; 65% at least somewhat agree that people like them have no influence on the way things are run in Kyrgyzstan; and 45% at least somewhat disagree with the notion that voting provides influence on decision-making to ordinary people.

It is especially revealing that attitudes toward the power of the vote as an influential tool have reversed since 1996. Figure 11 below compares data from the two surveys.

Figure 11. Attitudes toward Voter Efficacy in Kyrgyzstan, 1996 vs. 2001
 (1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



Agree or Disagree: "Voting gives people like you a chance to influence decision-making in out country."

Since 1996, there has been a decline in the percentage of Kyrgyzstanis who believe that the most fundamental concept of a democracy, the power to choose your representatives, is sufficient to give them influence over what goes on in their country.

It would be logical to expect that even though the majority of respondents lack some form of political efficacy, at least those who are informed about political developments and interested in

politics would buck this trend. But this does not turn out to be the case. Although members of these groups are more likely to be optimistic about people influencing the political environment than other, a majority in these two groups also lacks confidence in their influence on, and understanding of, the political system. Figure 12 provides the data.

Figure 12. Political Efficacy, by Political Interest and Information

	Political Interest		Political Information	
	Very/Somewhat Interested	Not Too/Not At All Interested	A Great Deal/ A Fair Amount	Not Very Much/ None At All
Government Too Complicated				
Agree	56%	56%	52%	58%
Disagree	39%	23%	41%	28%
Don't know	3%	14%	4%	10%
Can Make Representatives Listen				
Agree	31%	20%	31%	23%
Disagree	58%	56%	57%	58%
Don't know	6%	15%	6%	13%
People Have No Influence				
Agree	61%	56%	61%	57%
Disagree	32%	30%	35%	32%
Don't know	5%	12%	4%	10%
Voting Gives Influence				
Agree	49%	39%	47%	43%
Disagree	46%	48%	49%	45%
Don't know	5%	14%	4%	10%

Disillusionment about the ordinary citizen's chances of influencing public officials or policy seems to have set in among a majority or close to a majority of all sub-groups in Kyrgyzstani society. One group that is particularly disillusioned is the ethnic Russian population in Kyrgyzstan. Ethnic Russians are significantly more likely than ethnic Kyrgyz or ethnic Uzbeks to disagree that voting gives influence (74% ethnic Russians vs. 40% ethnic Kyrgyz and 34% ethnic Uzbeks); much more likely to agree that people have no influence (83% vs. 52% and 55%), and more likely to disagree that they can make their representatives listen to them (66% vs. 58% and 46%). The combination of economic resignation among ethnic Russians detailed in the last section and the lack of political efficacy outlined in this section may be a primary reason why it is estimated that close to half a million ethnic Russians have emigrated from Kyrgyzstan since 1992¹⁰.

To aid in the analysis of the data, factor analysis was conducted to identify unique factors in the dataset. This procedure looks at the correlation patterns among different variables in a dataset and identifies underlying *factors* that can help explain attitudes and opinions on different

¹⁰ Burke, Justin. "RFE/RL 03/02/01: Russian emigration on rise." Online posting. 2 Mar. 2001. 26 Feb. 2002 <news:http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200103/0005.html>.

questions. One of the factors identified through this analysis was what we will call a Political Efficacy factor. This factor comprises four of the variables identified in this section¹¹ and reflects a respondent's interest in politics and attitudes about the capacity of individuals or groups of individuals to make an impact on the political process. This factor can be used to provide further support for some of the arguments outlined earlier in this section. Responses to the four items comprising this factor were added together to form a scale of political efficacy and a mean score was then derived for each respondent. Comparison of the mean scores provides the following differences between several subgroups¹²:

- University-educated respondents have a higher mean efficacy score than those with secondary or post-secondary education; primary or lesser-educated respondents have the lowest mean efficacy score
- Those with a great deal or a fair amount of information on political and economic developments have a higher mean score than those with little or no information
- Men have higher mean scores than women.

It should be noted that men profess higher information levels than women, and university-educated respondents have the highest level of information among all respondents. The importance of information is underscored in these findings.

It should be pointed out that unlike attitudes on economic matters, there are not many significant differences by direction of country and satisfaction with the current situation on overall efficacy. Unhappiness with the existing environment does not play a role in forming attitudes toward the role of the citizen in the country's political system.

Knowledge of Political Leaders

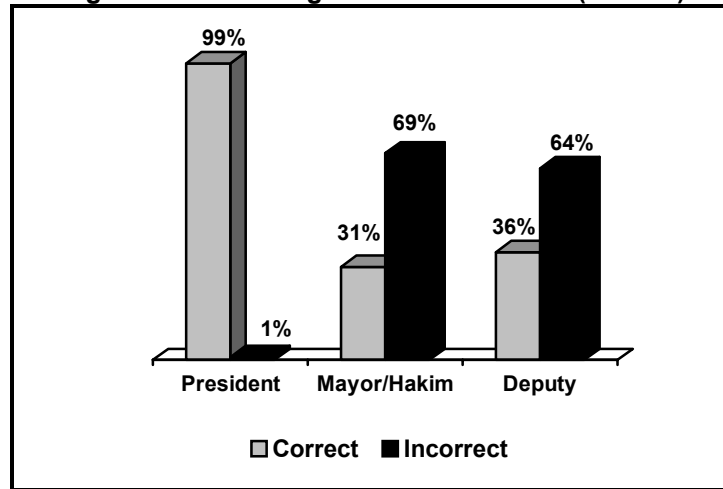
Finally, to gauge respondents' knowledge of their political leaders, respondents were asked to name the president of Kyrgyzstan, the city mayor or *rayon hakim* where they lived, and their representative to the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Answers were coded as either correct or incorrect. The data for these questions is presented in figure 13¹³.

¹¹ Opinions and attitudes on interest in politics, discussion of politics with friends, whether people have influence on the political process, and whether government is too complicated were found to covary with each other on these four questions

¹² Differences arrived at by using ANOVA; all results are significant at the 0.05 level.

¹³ "Don't know" answers and no responses are coded as incorrect.

Figure 13. Knowledge of Public Officials (n=1600)



*“Can you tell me the name of...
...the City Mayor (Rayon Hakim for rural areas) for this area?
...your deputy to the Jogorku Kenesh?
...the president of Kyrgyzstan?”*

There is near-universal knowledge of the president but much lower knowledge of the legislative representatives and the leading local official. This is perhaps an indication of the primacy of presidential power in Kyrgyzstan, and a further reflection of the lack of engagement and interest in the political process on the part of the population.

As would be expected, those with greater levels of information are more likely to know the name of their deputy to the *Jogorku Kenesh* and their local head than those with lower levels of information. Those who know the names of these two officials have a higher mean efficacy score than those who cannot name the officials.

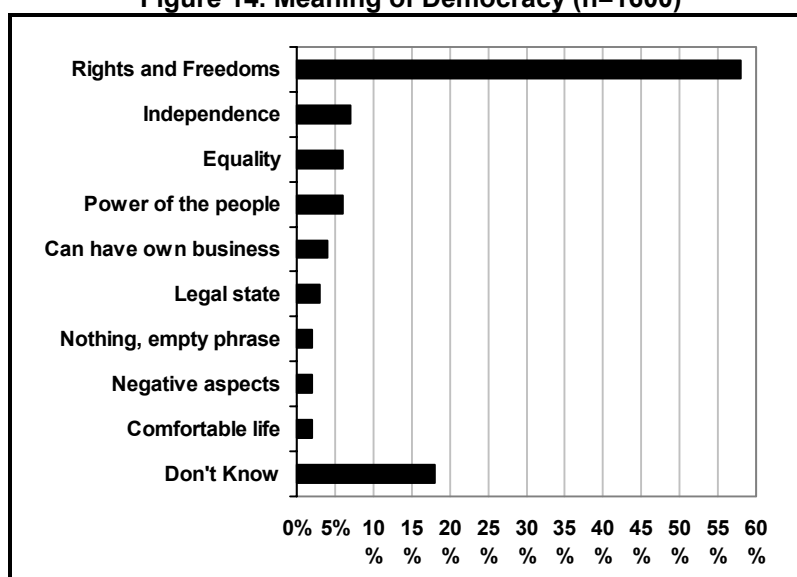
DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Kyrgyzstani public finds itself in an ambiguous relationship with democracy at the time of the survey. While a plurality thinks democracy is preferable to any other system of government, nearly an equal percentage are willing to contemplate other systems of government. A majority feels that Kyrgyzstan is democratic, but only partially so. Finally, half are at least somewhat satisfied with the way democracy is practiced in Kyrgyzstan, but most think that it only benefits a select few in society.

Meaning of Democracy

Respondents were asked what democracy meant to them. The responses are listed in figure 14 below.

Figure 14. Meaning of Democracy (n=1600)



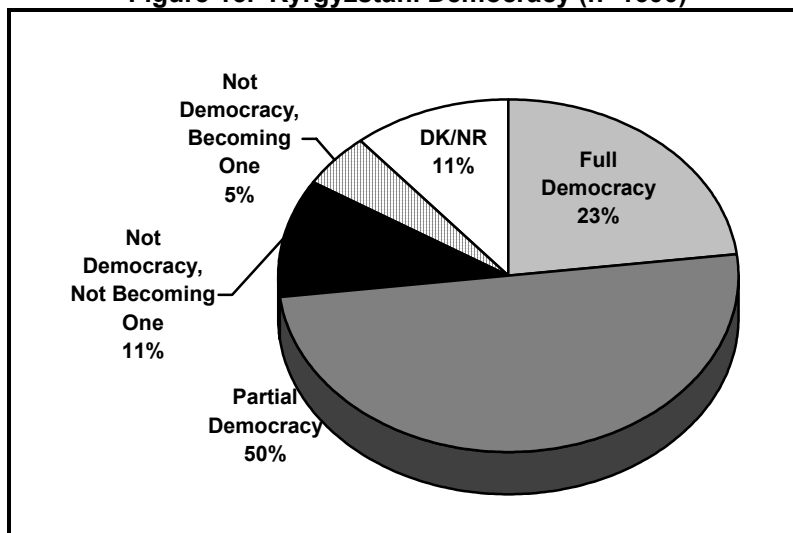
"When you hear the word 'democracy' what does it mean to you?"

Most of the responses ascribe meanings that connote idealistic conceptions of democracy. There are a few negative responses and meanings that have more to do with economic benefits, but overall the respondents think of democracy in liberal terms.

Democracy in Kyrgyzstan

When asked whether Kyrgyzstan is a democracy, 23% of respondents reply that the country is 'fully democratic', 50% feel that it is 'partially democratic', 17% feel that it is not democratic, and 9% don't know. Of the respondents who feel that Kyrgyzstan is not democratic, 17% feel that it is becoming democratic, 43% feel that it is not becoming democratic, while 35% don't know. In the 1996 IFES survey, respondents were asked a slightly different question. They were asked if Kyrgyzstan is 'primarily a democracy'. Respondents did not have the option of saying that it was a partial democracy. In 1996, 60% of respondents felt that Kyrgyzstan was 'primarily' a democracy and 27% felt that it was 'primarily' not a democracy. Combining the responses to these two questions together leads to the data presented in figure 15.

Figure 15. Kyrgyzstani Democracy (n=1600)



"In your opinion, is Kyrgyzstan a democracy?"

It is difficult to compare the data from this year's survey with the 1996 survey because one cannot be certain how the word 'primarily' should be interpreted. It could be that many of those who felt that Kyrgyzstan was primarily a democracy in 1996 would have said it was a partial democracy if given that option.

In spite of this, it is instructive that half of all respondents feel that Kyrgyzstan is only a partial democracy. The reasons for this response are not hard to deduce. Once known as an 'island of democracy' in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has increasingly come to resemble the repressive regimes found in the other Central Asian states. From 1989 to 1998, Freedom House rated the country as 'Partly Free' in its annual survey of freedom around the world¹⁴. But the last few years have seen increasingly onerous actions on the part of the government that have led Freedom House to rank that country as 'Not Free' in 2002¹⁵. The developments over the past few years increasingly lead to the conclusion that Kyrgyzstan is at best a partial democracy.

As a result, it is useful to examine this variable to see if there are specific groups in society who disproportionately think that Kyrgyzstan is fully democratic. The findings harken back to the discussion on economic attitudes. There are significant differences in the opinion that Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy between those who think that the country has gone in a positive direction since independence (31% believe Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy) and those who think it has gone in a negative direction (13% full democracy). There are also significant differences between those who are satisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan (34% full democracy) and those who are not (16% full democracy).

There are also differences on this attitude among different educational groups and ethnicities. The opinion that Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy decreases by education, and ethnic Russians are much less likely to say that Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy. But even these differences relate directly to the respondent's opinion on Kyrgyzstan's direction and his or her satisfaction levels. Figure 16 below first provides the data on the opinion of 'full democracy' between different educational groups and ethnicities. Below each grouping, however, data is provided for

¹⁴ *Nations in Transit*, Washington DC: Freedom House, 1998.

¹⁵ *Freedom in the World, 2001-2002*, Washington Dc: Freedom House, 2002.

the same groups but this time it is controlled for opinions on the direction of the country. It is immediately apparent from looking at the second set of figures that opinions on the direction of the country are the primary factors behind this opinion.

Figure 16. Opinion on Kyrgyzstan as a 'Full Democracy'

		EDUCATION LEVELS			
		Primary or Less	Secondary	Post-Secondary	University
Total Sample		24%	29%	22%	17%
Controlled for Direction of Country	Positive Direction	38%	39%	28%	24%
	Negative Direction	12%	18%	12%	11%
		ETHNICITY			
		Kyrgyz	Russian	Uzbek	Other
Total Sample		25%	12%	31%	16%
Controlled for Direction of Country	Positive Direction	33%	23%	33%	15%
	Negative Direction	15%	8%	23%	12%

The percentage of each group saying Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy is much higher for those among the group who say the country has gone in a positive direction since independence than among those who say it has gone in a negative direction. The figures are similar when the opinions are controlled for satisfaction levels.

The discussion above seems to imply that rather than basing their opinion of Kyrgyzstani democracy completely on idealistic notions of democracy (figure 15 above), respondents, at least the well-off, are partially basing their opinion on how they have fared since Kyrgyzstan became an independent 'democracy' (recall that high SES respondents are disproportionately likely to say that the country has gone in a positive direction and that they are satisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan).

Benefits of Democracy and Satisfaction with Democracy

During the survey, respondents were given additional questions about democracy in Kyrgyzstan. They were asked whether they believe democracy benefits most people in Kyrgyzstan, just a few, or none. Respondents were also asked if they were satisfied with democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

A majority of respondents (60%) believe that democracy benefits only some people in Kyrgyzstan, while 23% believe that it benefits most people, and 9% feel that it benefits no one. A majority of most subgroups feel that only some people benefit from democracy. But there are significant differences of opinions on the direction of the country and overall satisfaction levels. Those who feel the country has been headed in a positive direction are much more likely to say that democracy benefits most people (37%) than those who feel the country has been headed in a negative direction (12%). The opposite occurs for the response 'some people': those who feel the country has been headed in a negative direction are more likely to believe that democracy benefits some people (72%), compared to those who think the country has been headed in a positive direction (52%).

Similar differences exist with overall satisfaction levels. Those who are very or somewhat satisfied are much more likely to think democracy benefits most people (36%) than those who are dissatisfied (14%). For the response 'some people': those who are satisfied are less likely to say democracy benefits some people (52%) than those who are dissatisfied (72%).

Those who replied 'some people' were then asked who these people are. The most frequent responses are:

- Government authorities (27%)
- The rich (14%)
- Top echelons of power (13%)
- Businessmen, entrepreneurs (6%)
- Those with connections (3%)
- Deputies (3%)
- Ordinary people (2%)
- Other (2%)

For most respondents, democracy in Kyrgyzstan is a top-down system that benefits those at the top.

Despite these sentiments, half of all respondents are completely (10%) or somewhat satisfied (41%) with the way democracy is practiced in Kyrgyzstan. Forty-one percent of respondents are completely or somewhat dissatisfied with the way democracy is practiced. Once again, opinions on the direction of the country and overall satisfaction lead to the expected differences in satisfaction with democracy. Ethnic Russians are the least satisfied of all ethnic groups with democracy in Kyrgyzstan (57%), while ethnic Uzbeks are the most satisfied (65%). Ethnic Kyrgyz reflect the data from the national sample (50% satisfied, 42% dissatisfied). Those aged 46 and above are significantly more dissatisfied with democracy than those 45 and below.

Those who were dissatisfied were asked for their reasons for dissatisfaction. The most frequent responses are:

- There is no democracy (11%)
- Rules and laws (11%)
- Low living standards (6%)
- Unemployment (3%)
- Lack of social protection (3%)
- Economic recession (3%)
- Corruption, crime (3%)
- Inflation (2%)
- Other (2%)

Economic conditions form a sizable part of the reason why people are dissatisfied with democracy. The increasingly repressive policies of the government and restrictive rules and laws lead many to believe that there is no democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

So how do these various opinions on democracy impact the views of Kyrgyzstanis on the value of having democracy in Kyrgyzstan? Unfortunately for those who espouse democracy as an ideal system of governance, as many Kyrgyzstanis are willing to contemplate a system of government other than democracy as are not.

Respondents were given three statements and asked to choose the one with which they most agreed. The three statements and the percent that chose them are given below:

- Democracy is preferable to any other form of government (46%)
- In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable (27%)
- To people like me, it doesn't matter what form of government we have (21%)

Forty-eight percent of respondents are willing to not have democracy while 46% feel that democracy is preferable. Respondent's opinion on the direction of the country again plays a key role on the formation of opinions on this question. Education levels are also important as higher-educated Kyrgyzstanis are more likely to feel that democracy is preferable than lesser-educated Kyrgyzstanis (figure 17).

Figure 17. Preferred System of Governance in Kyrgyzstan, by Direction and Education

	Democracy Preferable	Non-Democracy in Some Situations	Does Not Matter
Direction Since Independence			
Positive	57%	26%	13%
Negative	39%	29%	25%
Education			
Primary or less	31%	18%	36%
Secondary	44%	26%	24%
Post-Secondary	48%	27%	18%
University Degree	54%	33%	11%

Rights

One of the main reasons for the increasing concern about Kyrgyzstani democracy is the deterioration of human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan over past few years. In its latest World Report, Human Rights Watch states:

“The deterioration in respect for human rights that had dominated the lead-up to the October 2000 re-election of President Askar Akaev continued unabated in 2001. The government harassed the political opposition, independent media, and human rights defenders.”¹⁶

Attitudes toward the increasingly authoritarian environment in Kyrgyzstan were indirectly assessed through a few questions on this survey. First, the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with two statements:

A. “In order to ensure order and discipline in society, it is necessary to limit the political and civic rights of people.”

¹⁶ *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002*; New York: Human Rights Watch; 2002.

B. "In order to ensure order and discipline in society, it is necessary to have a dictatorship."

These questions were also asked in the 1996 IFES survey so comparison of attitudes on this issue is possible. The data for the two years is presented in figure 18.

Figure 18. Rights and Dictatorship, Trend Data

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
"In order to ensure order and discipline in society, it is necessary to limit the political and civic rights of the people."				
1996 (n=1494)	31%	26%	23%	17%
2001 (n=1600)	30%	27%	17%	17%
"In order to ensure order and discipline in society, it is necessary to have a dictatorship."				
1996 (n=1494)	21%	19%	23%	33%
2001 (n=1600)	25%	19%	16%	28%

The figure above shows that opinions have not changed much since 1996 on the question of limiting rights to maintain order. A majority of respondents agree that rights should be limited to maintain order (57% in both 1996 and 2001). There has been a shift, however, in the need for a dictatorship to impose order. The percent agreeing with this statement has only shifted slightly (44% in 2001 vs. 40% in 1996). However, the percent disagreeing has decreased substantially since 1996 (44% in 2001 vs. 56% in 1996). In other words, the net difference between "disagree" and "agree" on this statement has decreased from plus 16 to plus 2. Substantially more Kyrgyzstanis are willing to endure a dictatorship in order to bring order to their society.

As would be expected, those who feel that democracy is preferable as a system of governance are less likely to agree with each of these statements than those who are willing to do without democracy in Kyrgyzstan. A majority of post-secondary and university-educated respondents disagree with the two statements, while a majority of those with lesser education agree with the statements. Ethnic Russians are much more likely to disagree with these statements than either ethnic Kyrgyz or ethnic Uzbeks.

On another series of questions, respondents were given a list of political and civil rights and asked how important these rights were to them. Then they were asked whether these rights are respected in Kyrgyzstan. The results for these two questions, as well as the percentage differences between the perceived importance of the rights and the perceptions of how much they are actually respected, are presented in figure 19.

Figure 19. Political and Civil Rights (n=1600)

Right	Importance Attached to Right		Respect of Right		Surplus/ Deficit
	Very/ Somewhat Important	Not Very/ Not At All Important	Completely/ Somewhat Respected	Not At All Respected	
One can choose from several parties and candidates when voting	66%	23%	69%	14%	+3%
Honest elections are held regularly	86%	11%	59%	35%	-27%
The rights of minority ethnic groups are protected	73%	15%	65%	13%	-8%
The private property of individuals is protected by law	85%	9%	72%	14%	-13%
Citizens have the right to form political parties	53%	32%	57%	14%	+4%
The right to publicly criticize the government is protected	76%	17%	58%	31%	-18%
All can freely practice the religion of one's choice	86%	10%	90%	4%	+4%
All can form associations or unions without any government involvement	49%	32%	53%	12%	+4%
Equal opportunities for women	89%	8%	88%	8%	-1%

1. "I will read you the list of rights that many people consider important. How important is it to you that the following rights be respected in Kyrgyzstan?"

2. "Continuing to think about the rights listed on this card, how much do you think these rights are respected in Kyrgyzstan today?"

From looking at the data above, it seems clear that personal rights, such as private property rights, religious rights, free speech, etc. are more important to Kyrgyzstanis than associational rights (right to form parties, associations). It is also clear that several rights are not being respected as much as Kyrgyzstanis would like.

The largest deficit in respect vs. importance is for honest elections. The survey was fielded just a few months after presidential elections that were widely criticized for being not free and fair. A preliminary conclusion issued by OSCE/ODIHR observation mission after the election criticized the election for excluding prominent opposition leaders, for pressure placed on a domestic monitoring organization, and for government authorities interfering in the work of election commissions¹⁷. Hence the difference in perceptions between respect for honest elections, and their importance is not surprising.

The next largest deficit is for the right to criticize the government. The report has already cited sanctions placed on media outlets in Kyrgyzstan (see footnote 1). This deficit could also point

¹⁷ *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Kyrgyz Republic Presidential Elections, Oct. 30, 2000.

< http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/kg/kyrg00-2-prelim.pdf>

to a specific problem of opposition figures being imprisoned for criticizing the government or in order to stop these politicians from competing in elections.

Private property protection is also felt to be lacking in relation to the need for such protection. The deficit in respect of minority rights is mainly driven by the high importance placed on such rights by ethnic Russians and other small minorities, and these groups' feelings that these rights are not respected as much as they should be.

INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE, CONFIDENCE, AND CORRUPTION

On the whole, Kyrgyzstanis are extremely dissatisfied with the performance of the government and do not exhibit a great deal of confidence in any public institution or personality. They also see official corruption as a frequent and serious problem in Kyrgyzstan.

Evaluation of Government Performance

To broadly evaluate government performance, a list of several governmental functions was presented to respondents and they were asked to rate how the current government was handling the problem. The list of functions and responses is detailed in figure 20.

Figure 20. Government Performance (n=1600)

	Very Well (1)	Somewhat Well (2)	Not Very Well (3)	Not At All Well (4)	Mean Score
Creating jobs	2%	7%	38%	51%	3.42
Keeping prices low	1%	9%	34%	53%	3.44
Narrowing income gaps between rich and poor	1%	4%	28%	59%	3.56
Reducing crime	3%	15%	31%	45%	3.28
Fighting corruption in government	2%	10%	24%	47%	3.41
Fighting terrorism	8%	39%	24%	19%	2.61
Resolving differences between the northern and southern parts of Kyrgyzstan	5%	24%	26%	13%	2.67

"How well would you say the current government is handling the following problems?"

There is not one function where the government is given a positive rating. For the majority of functions, the government's job performance is rated quite negatively. The last column of the figure above presents a mean score for each function based on the responses from all respondents who gave a definitive response for a particular function. The possible scores can range from 1 to 4 with 1 being an absolute positive rating (the government is doing the job very well) and 4 being an absolute negative rating (the government is not doing the job at all well).

As the table illustrates, the government is rated very poorly on most of the functions. The worst rated function is the narrowing of income gap between rich and poor. This is followed by job creation, handling inflation, fighting corruption, and reduction in crime. Unemployment, inflation, and corruption were some of the issues mentioned when respondents were asked why they were dissatisfied with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. So it is not surprising to see these functions receiving low ratings.

The government gets better grades on two functions: fighting terrorism and resolving differences between the northern and southern parts of Kyrgyzstan. The terrorism issue primarily refers to the ongoing insurgency in Batken province on which the government has clamped down recently. There is a North-South difference in the evaluation of the government's performance on terrorism¹⁸. A majority of those in the South (52%), more likely to be affected by terrorism, say the government is doing very or somewhat well on this issue, while 39% of those in the

¹⁸ North is comprised of respondents from Bishkek, Chui, Talas, and Issyk-Kyl. South is comprised of respondents from Osh, Naryn, Jalalabad, and Batken.

North say the government is doing well. The tangible results of the government’s anti-terrorist policy are more visible to the respondents in the South than those in the North.

A vast majority of all major subgroups give the government a negative rating on all of the economic functions, as well as fighting crime and corruption. On the questions of fighting terrorism and handling regional differences, there are some minor differences between those who are satisfied and dissatisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan, with those satisfied giving the government a slightly more positive rating. Residents of Bishkek (in the North) are more positive about the resolution of regional differences than those in the South.

Another set of questions was directed toward local government performance and asked respondents whether they were satisfied with the quality of services provided in their city or village and in their oblast. Interviewers were instructed to give examples of the types of services each entity provided. Regarding the city/village services, 51% of respondents were not satisfied with the quality of services provided, another 24% were satisfied to an extent, and 19% were satisfied. Regarding oblast services, 45% were not satisfied, 27% were satisfied to an extent, and 15% were satisfied. As we will see below, local services and infrastructure comprise a significant portion of the pressing issues that most respondents want addressed in their communities.

Confidence in Government Institutions

As a prelude to some questions about confidence in several government institutions, respondents were asked to identify the critical issues facing their communities. Many of items identified in this list of issues in figure 21 below are generally the same as the reasons for dissatisfaction identified earlier in the report.

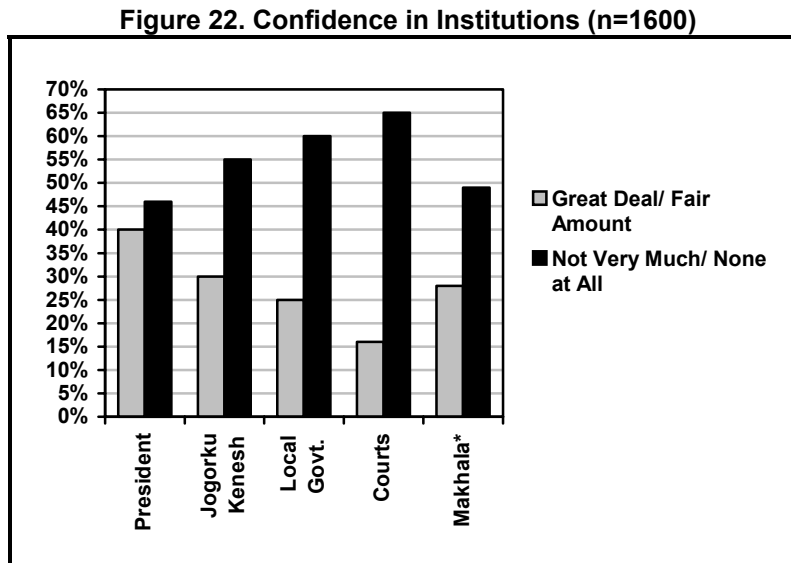
Figure 21. Critical Issues Facing the Respondent’s Community (n=1600)

Unemployment	28%
Lack of drinking water	24%
Poverty, low living standards	18%
Problems with electricity and gas	16%
Problems in agricultural sector	10%
Social and everyday life problems	8%
General dirtiness of town, village	7%
Bad roads	6%
Poor utilities	5%
General economic problems	6%
Crime, prostitution	4%
Lack of irrigation water	4%
Problems of young people	3%
Poor healthcare services	3%
Education system	3%
Other	11%
Don’t know	9%

“As you may know, not all cities and villages have the same set of problems. What do you think are the most important issues facing [name of community]?”

Economic problems and problems with basic infrastructure and service deliveries comprise the majority of the list. The large number of infrastructure and service problems point to a local government system that is either administratively incapable or not given enough resources by the center to provide basic services for the citizens of Kyrgyzstan.

The respondents were then asked how much confidence they had in specific institutions and officials to handle the issues facing their communities. They were asked about confidence in the president, the *Jogorku Kenesh*, their local government, the courts, and (in the case of respondents in Osh oblast) their *makhala*. The responses for each are presented in figure 22 below.



"How much confidence do you have in each of these institutions to address the issues that you just named?" (n=1600, except for Makhala where n=711)

*Osh respondents only

For every institution or official, more respondents do not have confidence in that institution than do. A majority of respondents do not have confidence in the *Jogorku Kenesh*, their local government or the courts. In the 1996 survey, respondents were also asked about their level of confidence in the courts and a similar percentage of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in the courts (62%).

The president receives the highest level of confidence. Obviously, those who are satisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to profess confidence in the president (50%) than those who are not satisfied (34%). Surprisingly, ethnic Kyrgyz are more likely to express little or no confidence in the president (51%) than express confidence (35%), while ethnic Uzbeks express the greatest confidence (47%). Actually, ethnic Uzbeks express the greatest level of confidence out of all ethnic groups in all the institutions while ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Russians are relatively similar in their lack of confidence in all institutions.

Those with a university degree or higher express the greatest lack of confidence out of all education groups in all institutions. Regionally, respondents in Bishkek are the least likely to express confidence in all institutions.

Contact with Elected Officials

The lack of confidence expressed by most respondents in local and national-level institutions may be one reason why very few respondents (9%) report having contacted an elected official to help resolve a problem or issue. Members of the ethnic Kyrgyz community are the least likely to have contacted elected officials (7%) compared to ethnic Russians (13%) and ethnic Uzbeks (13%).

Those respondents who did try to contact elected officials did so primarily through a personal or public meeting. A letter was another popular way to try to reach elected officials. Sixty-three percent of these respondents reported that the officials did respond to their attempted contact. Of these respondents, a majority (56%) were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with the response and 43% were not satisfied with the response.

Those who did not report contacting elected officials were asked why they did not do so. The more frequent responses were:

- Did not need assistance (31%)
- Pointless to contact officials (26%)
- Don't know the officials (6%)
- Official doesn't visit us (6%)
- No opportunity to contact official (5%)
- I solve my own problems (3%)

The first and last responses deal with the respondent not wanting an official's help. But the rest of the responses indicate a desire on the part of the respondent to obtain help but not being able to do so either because there is no easy way to contact an official or because they feel it is pointless to do so. Both of these reasons point to a serious failure of communication between the government and the people. Greater efforts should be made by government officials to foster dialogue with their constituents to counter the apathy indicative in the responses above.

Corruption

If there is one thing that had bound the experience of all post-Soviet states together, it is corruption. The citizens of the republics that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union have all had their lives affected in significant ways by official corruption. As we have seen in some of the open-ended responses earlier in the report, Kyrgyzstan is not an exception.

A majority of respondents do not disagree with this statement and acknowledge that corruption is both frequent and serious. Figure 23 provides data on these two questions from this survey and the 1996 IFES survey.

Figure 23. Frequency and Seriousness of Corruption

	Frequency of Corruption				
	Very Common	Somewhat Common	Somewhat rare	Very Rare	Don't Know
1996 (n=1494)	44%	32%	6%	4%	15%
2001 (n=1600)	51%	30%	5%	1%	13%
Seriousness of Corruption					
	Very Serious	Somewhat Serious	Not Too Serious	Not Serious At All	Don't Know
1996 (n=1494)	53%	25%	6%	2%	13%
2001 (n=1600)	52%	29%	5%	1%	12%

1. "In your opinion, how common is the problem of state corruption in Kyrgyzstan?"
 2. "And how serious is the problem of state corruption in Kyrgyzstan?"

Perceptions of corruption have increased somewhat since the 1996 survey. Eighty-one percent of respondents in 2001 say that corruption is very or somewhat common compared to 76% in 1996. And 81% feel it is very or somewhat serious compared to 78% in 1996. Attitudes on these questions are measurably related to opinions on the beneficiaries of democracy. Those who replied that 'some' people benefit from democracy are more likely to say that corruption is very common (59%) than those who feel that 'most' benefit from democracy (43%). Similar sentiments are found on the seriousness of corruption (59% 'some' benefit, 46% 'most' benefit). Official corruption not only has economic costs but also contributes to the de-legitimization of democracy in the eyes of citizens.

Respondents were next asked whether they thought that the citizens of Kyrgyzstan accept corruption as a fact of life. A plurality (49%) feels that citizens do accept corruption as a fact of life, while 18% don't agree. Thirty percent have no opinion on this matter. Ethnic Russians are much more likely (72%) to say that citizens accept corruption as a fact of life than ethnic Kyrgyz (46%) or ethnic Uzbeks (34%). The higher the level of education, the greater the percentage who say that corruption is accepted as a fact of life, with the peak for those with a university degree (65%). Those who are dissatisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan are more likely than those satisfied to say that corruption is commonly accepted (57% vs. 40%). A majority of those with lesser education (primary or less, 52%) and close to a majority of those above age 55 (44%) do not give an opinion on the subject.

Those who replied that citizens do accept corruption as a fact of life were next asked whether this contributes to corruption in Kyrgyzstan. Forty-two percent believe that it does contribute to corruption and 48% do not.

Lastly, respondents were asked to list the private or public institutions in which they had encountered corruption. As is usually the case in surveys, actual experience with corruption is less frequent than perception. The most frequently reported institutions where corruption was encountered follow:

- Everywhere (5%)
- Government departments (28%)
- Educational sphere (9%)

- Healthcare institutions (5%)
- Courts (5%)
- Customs office/Tax authorities (4%)
- Prosecutor's office (3%)
- Village council (2%)
- Traffic police (1%)
- Work place (2%)
- Did not encounter (16%)
- Don't know/No response (43%)

ELECTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The October 2000 Presidential Election

As indicated earlier in the report, the October 2000 presidential election was widely criticized for lacking many of the fundamental requisites for a free and fair election. This election experience was another sign of Kyrgyzstan's movement away from democratic politics. The IFES survey asked respondents several questions about the October 2000 presidential election to gauge their attitudes toward several different aspects of the electoral process.

Eighty percent of respondents reported voting in the October 2000 presidential election, just one percent outside the actual turnout of 77.25%¹⁹ if margin of error is taken into account. Incumbent president Akayev received 75% of the votes²⁰. There were no major differences for most subgroups in society as to participation. Respondents in Bishkek were much less likely to have voted (65%) than other areas of the country (83%). Those aged 18-25 were much less likely to have voted (68%) than those above 25 (85%). If respondents who were not eligible to vote due to age are taken out of the youth sample, 71% of the youth sample reported voting.

Respondents were next asked their reason for voting or not voting. The responses to these questions are presented in Figure 24 below.

Figure 24. Reasons for Voting/Not Voting

Reasons for Voting (n=1282)		Reasons for Not Voting (n=310)	
With hopes for a better life	34%	There was no opportunity	39%
It is a right	24%	Don't believe in fair elections/result was known	19%
For a good president	19%	Younger than 18	14%
To support Akayev	14%	Did not want to	15%
Other	7%	Other	6%
Don't know/No response	6%	Don't know/No response	10%

"Why (did you vote/didn't you vote) in the election?"

A plurality of the respondents who voted did so hoping that their choice would lead to an improvement of conditions in Kyrgyzstan. Many also voted to exercise their right to vote. A closer examination of respondents who answered, "For a good president" was undertaken to test whether some people might have voted specifically to express their displeasure with President Akayev. The hypothesis is that most of the respondents who give this response would be ones who did not express confidence in President Akayev. The results do not indicate this as a reason for voting. Of those who said the reason they voted was for a good president, 44% had a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the president and 46% did not have confidence in Akayev.

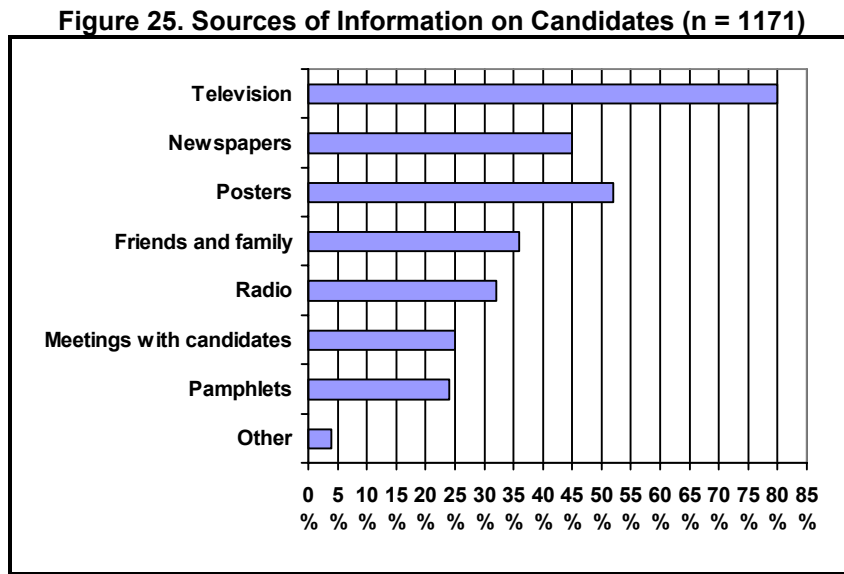
Of those not voting, it is noteworthy that the second highest response was due to the belief among these respondents that the election was rigged.

¹⁹ Figure obtained from <<http://www.ifes.org/eguide/resultsum/kyrgyzstanres.htm>>.

²⁰ Ibid.

A majority of those who voted reported having a great deal or fair amount of information on the candidates contesting the election (14% great deal, 38% fair amount). Thirty-eight percent felt they did not have enough information and 8% felt they did not have any information at all. Ethnic Russians were the least likely to have information on candidates (52% not much or at all). The amount of information on candidates goes up with education.

The primary sources for information on candidates for the election are listed in Figure 25. Multiples responses were allowed on this question.



"How much information did you have about various candidates before you went to vote?"

Television is by far the most popular source of obtaining information on candidates in Kyrgyzstan. This is true for all regions as well as for urban and rural areas. Respondents in rural areas, however, were more likely to mention friends and family and meetings with candidates as sources of information than respondents in urban areas. Respondents in urban areas, especially Bishkek, were more exposed to posters and pamphlets.

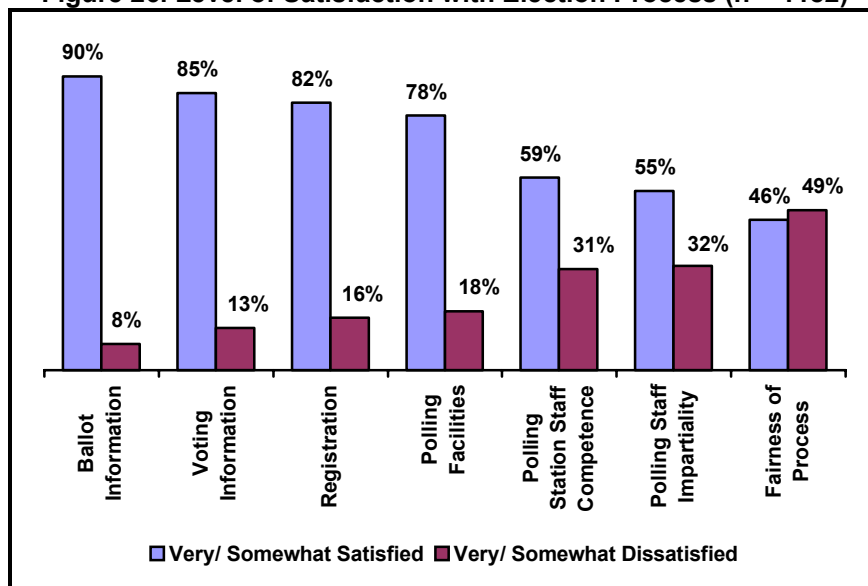
Satisfaction with Facets of Election Process

Those who voted in the election are generally satisfied with most aspects of the election process. The survey asked voters to assess their satisfaction with the following aspects of the election process:

- The voter registration process
- Information on how to vote
- Information on how to mark the ballot
- Fairness of the election process
- Competency of the polling station staff
- Facilities and equipment at the polling station
- Impartiality of the polling station staff

Figure 26 lists the responses to each of these items.

Figure 26. Level of Satisfaction with Election Process (n = 1182)



"Please tell me how satisfied were you with the following aspects of the election?"

Voters are mostly satisfied with the majority of technical aspects of the election process. High satisfaction ratings are given for information on marking the ballots, information on how to vote, voter registration, and the status of the polling facilities. As the Central Election Commission is responsible for these aspects of the process, this reflects positively on their work before and during the election process.

Slightly lower ratings are given to the competency of the polling station staff and polling station impartiality. Polling staff impartiality is especially stressed as a problem by respondents in Osh oblast (42%).

The lowest satisfaction ratings are for the overall fairness of the election process. Ethnic Kyrgyz are much more critical of the fairness of the electoral process (58%) than ethnic Russians (40%) or ethnic Uzbeks (26%). Closer inspection reveals that ethnic Kyrgyz in certain oblasts are more dissatisfied than other oblasts. The highest rate of dissatisfaction among ethnic Kyrgyz is in Osh (70%) and Batken (67%) oblasts. By contrast, ethnic Kyrgyz in Naryn (64% satisfied) and Issyk-Kul (70% satisfied) are more satisfied than the national sample with the fairness of the process.

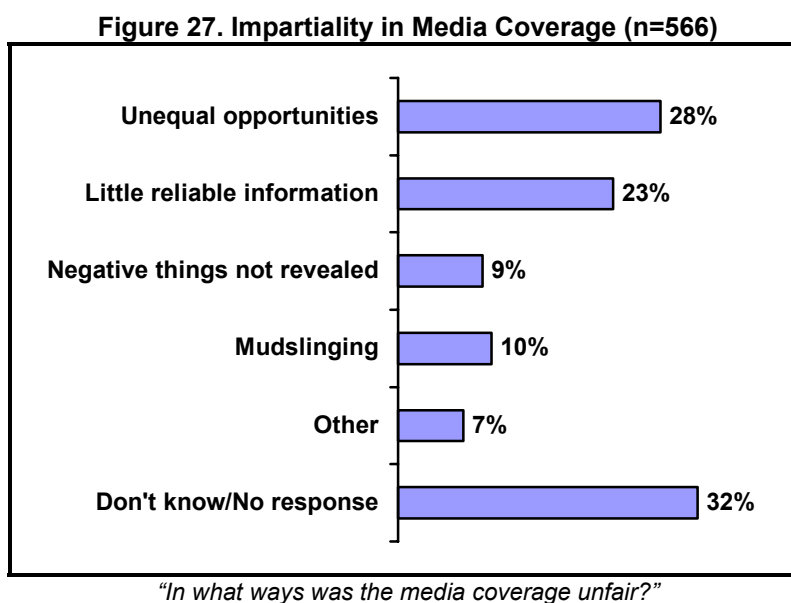
For the national sample, there are significant variations by oblast on the issue of fairness during this election. Respondents in Talas (61%), Osh (61%), and Batken (53%) oblasts are much more dissatisfied than respondents in other oblasts with the fairness of the election process. There were many irregularities reported in Talas oblast before and during the election process and Batken has had a fundamentalist insurgency for the past few years.

Respondents in Talas and Osh oblasts are also more critical than others of the overall organization of the election. Nationally, 49% of respondents feel that the organization of the election was either 'very good' or 'somewhat good', 30% feel that it was 'average', and 11% feel that it was 'bad' or 'very bad'. Respondents in Talas and Osh oblasts are more critical (19% and 17% bad, respectively).

Respondents were also asked about the impartiality of the media's coverage of the various candidates during the election process. A plurality (42%) of respondents felt that the media was impartial in its coverage of the candidates. However, 16% felt that the media was only somewhat impartial in its coverage and 19% felt it was biased in its coverage, a total of 35% who felt that there was some degree of favoritism in the coverage. Perceptions of media bias go up with the level of education. The ODIHR identified this problem quite specifically:

"The media environment was characterized by an overwhelming tendency of State-owned public media and government-oriented private media to exhibit an overt bias in favour of the incumbent. Opposition candidates, when mentioned, were portrayed predominantly in negative terms. The State-owned media failed to comply with its legal obligation to provide balanced and objective reporting on candidates."²¹

Respondents who felt there was bias in the media's coverage during the election identified some of these same issues in an open-ended response (figure 27).



The unequal opportunities available to candidates was the most frequently mentioned reason for the partiality of the coverage. Many also did not find the coverage to be reliable.

IFES, Public Association "Journalists", and Internews, all of which monitored the Presidential election in October 2001, indicated Bishkek television channels Pyramida, NBT, VOSST, KOORT and KTR presented significant one sided reporting of the candidates, with the following results:

1. One channel aired only three candidates running for presidency giving the incumbent president over 98% of the coverage (over 80% positive) and considerable additional positive coverage to the government.

²¹ *Kyrgyz Republic Presidential Elections, October 29 2000, OSCE/ODIHR Final Report.* Page 9. Warsaw: OSCE.

2. A second channel provided coverage on five candidates, with the incumbent president receiving over 86% of the coverage (over 92% positive) while the other candidates were reported in neutral or negative tones. In addition, significant air time was also provided to the government.
3. A third channel aired only two candidates, with the incumbent president receiving 99.9% of the airtime (all of which was positive or neutral). They also provided significant air time to the government.
4. A fourth channel aired five candidates, with the incumbent president receiving over 93% of the airtime. They provided significant air time to the government.
5. The fifth channel (the government channel) aired all candidates, with the incumbent president receiving over 95% of air time (over 98% positive). In addition, they provided significant air time to the government.

According to the monitoring report, throughout the whole monitoring period all Bishkek television channels dedicated most of the airtime to President Akayev in their political news.

Regional television channels: Osh-TV (city of Osh), EMTV (city of Kara – Kol), Osh-3000 (city of Osh), Keremet (city of Osh), Pyramid-Osh (city of Osh), Ayan TV (city of Naryn) and regional branches of KTR also presented significantly one-sided reporting of the candidates with the following results:

1. One channel provided coverage only on the incumbent president, all of which was positive or neutral. In addition, they provided significant time to the government.
2. A second channel also aired only one candidate; this time NOT the incumbent president; candidate Atambayev being the only to receive air time.
3. A third channel aired only two candidates; the incumbent president receiving over 99% of free air time (all of which was either positive or neutral). In addition, they too provided some time to the government.
4. A fourth channel only aired one candidate; the incumbent president receiving only a minimum amount of free air time.
5. A fifth channel only aired one candidate, with the incumbent president receiving only a minimum amount of airtime. In addition they provided a minimum amount of time to the government.
6. A sixth channel aired four candidates; the incumbent president receiving 67% of a minimum amount (all positive) of airtime, while the other candidates received mainly negative reporting.
7. The seventh channel (regional government TV) aired only one candidate; the incumbent president receiving significant free airtime, all of which was positive or neutral. In addition they too provided some time to the government.

In time proportion, the monitoring project found that President Akayev received the most air time on each regional channel.

Finally, respondents were asked whether there had been any pressure put on them to vote for a certain candidate, or any reward offered for their voting a certain way. Fourteen percent of respondents reported being pressured to vote a certain way and nine percent reported being offered rewards for their vote. The OSCE/ODIHR election observation report listed many

instances of state employees being pressured by their employers to vote a certain way, as well as students at state universities being pressured to do the same.

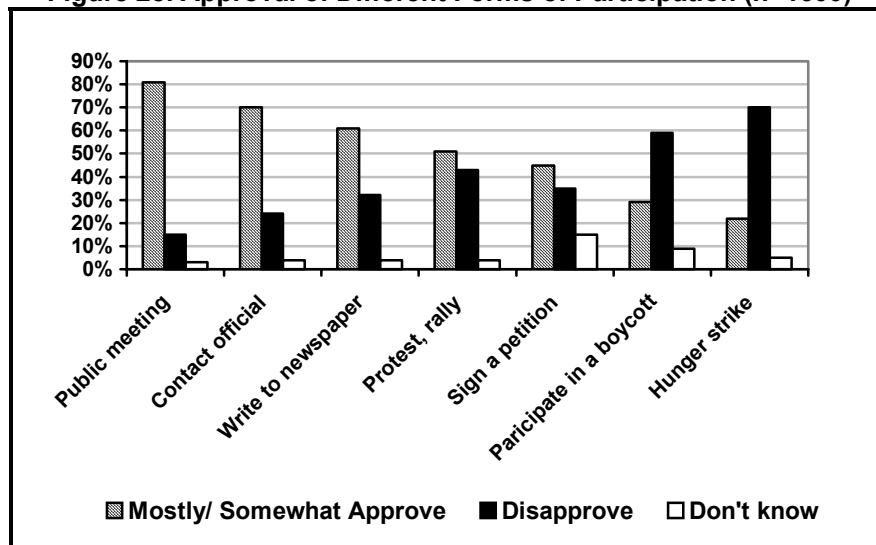
Other Forms of Participation

Voting is the most visible and popular form of participation in a democracy. But for a society to be truly democratic, citizens must have initiative to participate in other types of democratic practices and contribute to the vitality that most democracies demonstrate. Respondents on this survey were asked whether they approved of several types of actions:

- A. Signing a petition
- B. Going on a hunger strike
- C. Participate in a boycott
- D. Participating in a protest demonstration or rally
- E. Participating in a public meeting
- F. Writing to a newspaper
- G. Contacting an elected official

The data on this question is presented below.

Figure 28. Approval of Different Forms of Participation (n=1600)



"Please look at this list of kinds of actions that people sometimes take to make their own views known and to influence others. For each, please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of this activity?"

Generally, the less confrontational an action, the more likely respondents are to support it. Respondents give overwhelming approval to citizens attending public meetings (81%) and contacting officials about problems (70%, although as evidenced by the discussion earlier, they don't practice this greatly). A solid majority approves of writing to newspapers (61%) and a slight majority approves attending protests or rallies (51%). A plurality approves of signing a petition (45%). On the other hand, solid majorities disapprove of participating in boycotts (59%) and holding a hunger strike (70%).

Even though a majority or a near-majority of all subgroups disapprove of these actions, attitudes on the three most contentious items does reveal that those dissatisfied with the overall situation

in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to approve of direct action than those satisfied with the situation. Those dissatisfied are more likely to approve of hunger strikes (26%), boycotts (33%), and petitions (52%) than those satisfied with the situation (17%, 23%, and 40%, respectively). This pattern also shows up when talking about writing to newspapers and attending protests or rallies. Frustration with the present situation may be a key jumping-off point for contemplation of radical participatory actions on the part of respondents.

Some other subgroup differences on these items:

- Ethnic Russians are far more likely to approve of these actions (except hunger strikes and going to public meetings) than ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks
- Except in the case of hunger strikes and boycotts, university-educated respondents are the most likely to approve of these actions.

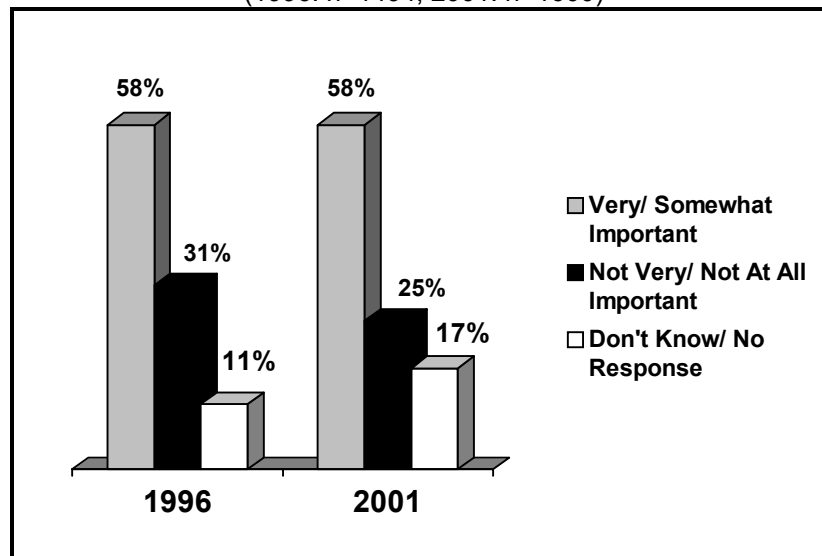
Local Democracy

Kyrgyzstanis are overwhelmingly supportive of elections for *Akims* at various levels. For the city, oblast, and rayon level, 77% of the national sample is supportive of elections for each of these positions. Traditionally, *Akims* at this level have been appointed by the central government.

Political Parties

A majority of respondents (57%) feel that it is important to have at least two parties competing in an election in Kyrgyzstan, a percentage virtually unchanged since the 1996 IFES survey in Kyrgyzstan (figure 29).

Figure 29. Importance of Multi-Party System in Kyrgyzstan
(1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



"How important do you think it is for Kyrgyzstan to have at least two competing political parties in an election?"

Not surprisingly, attitudes toward a multi-party system are tied to attitudes toward democracy in general. Those who feel that a democracy is preferable to other forms of government are much more supportive of a multi-party system (68% important) than those who feel that in certain

situations a non-democracy is preferable (61% important) or those who feel that it does not matter what system of government Kyrgyzstan has (37% important). Ethnic Kyrgyz are the least likely of the three major ethnic groups to feel that a multi-party system is important (53% vs. 62% ethnic Russians and 63% ethnic Uzbeks).

Even though a majority of respondents feel that a multi-party system is important, many of them do not feel that there are clear differences between parties in Kyrgyzstan. Overall, a plurality (43%) feels that there are clear differences between parties in Kyrgyzstan, while 29% feel that there are no clear differences. Twenty-two percent reply "Don't know". In fact, attitudes on the importance of a multi-party system are strongly related to the perceived difference between parties. Those who feel that there are differences between parties are much more likely to say that a multi-party system is important (80%) than those who feel that there are no differences between political parties in Kyrgyzstan (53%). A more effective job by political parties in outlining why they are different from other political parties in terms of issues would go a long way toward increasing the perceived importance of a multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan.

Only 44 respondents (3%) report being members of a political party. Ten respondents are members of the Communist party; 7 are members of Ar-Namys, Ata Meken, and Bei Bacharlar, respectively; and 3 are members of My Country.

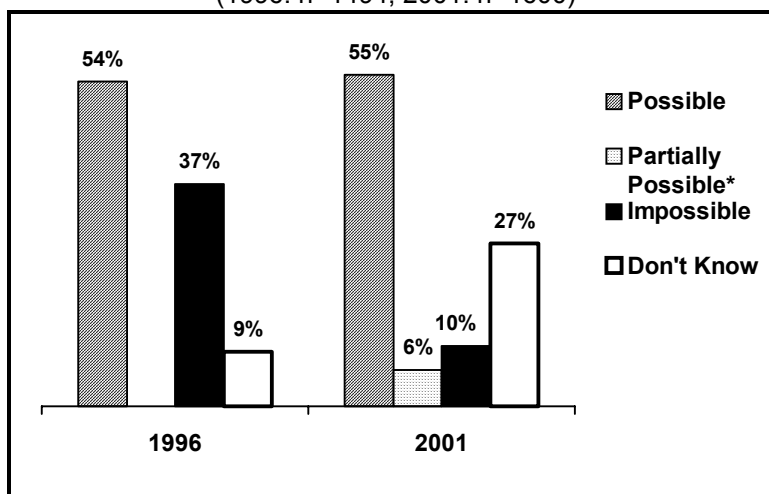
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

In comparison to its Central Asian neighbors, Kyrgyzstan has a fairly liberal civil society environment. The government has generally allowed civil society organizations to function unencumbered by state interference in NGO matters. In fact, in October 1999 the *Jogorku Kenesh* passed, and President Akaev signed into law a bill that solidified the status of NGOs as non-commercial organizations. The International Center for Not-For-Profit Laws called this law, "...one of the most progressive of its kind in the FSU (Former Soviet Union)."²² Perhaps this is why the majority of respondents to this survey are fairly positive about the possibility and necessity of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan.

A majority of respondents on the survey feel that it is either possible (55%) or partially possible (6%) for citizens of Kyrgyzstan to freely unite into groups without the participation of the government. Ten percent feel it is impossible for citizens to unite into NGOs and 28% reply "Don't know". If one compares this survey's findings to those in 1996 (figure 30), there is a marked change in two categories.

²² *Kyrgyzstan Parliament Adopts Progressive New NGO Laws*, ICNL News Release, Nov. 11, 1999.
< <http://www.icnl.org/press/03.htm> >

Figure 30. Possibility of Citizens Forming NGOs, Trend Data
 (1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



"In your opinion, is it possible for citizens of Kyrgyzstan to participate freely in non-government organizations (NGO), that is, groups or associations, without the involvement of the government?"

*Partially Possible not an option in 1996

The percentage of respondents who feel that citizen formation of NGOs is impossible has fallen from 37% in 1996 to 10% in 2001. On the other hand, those who reply "Don't know" have increased from 9% in 1996 to 27% in 2001. While far fewer people than in 1996 believe that it is impossible to form NGOs, the percentage saying that it is possible to form NGOs has stayed virtually the same since the 1996 survey.

Findings are similar when respondents are asked about the necessity of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. A majority of respondents feel that NGOs are either essential (26%) or very necessary (33%). A minority feels that NGOs are not very necessary (11%) or not at all necessary (5%). Twenty-three percent reply, "Don't know". The percentage that feels that NGOs are essential has increased substantially since 1996 (13% in 1996) and the percentage that feels they are not necessary has decreased significantly (41% in 1996). The process of NGO establishment began in 1994-95, and it is conceivable that at the time of the 1996 IFES survey in Kyrgyzstan, most people did not know about active NGOs. However, the attention paid to the NGO sector because of the legal reform and the NGO role in monitoring the 2000 elections has probably increased NGO visibility among Kyrgyzstanis.

The belief in the possibility and necessity of NGOs increases with education and is also related to political efficacy. The average political efficacy score (discussed in Chapter 3) of those who believe that NGOs are possible and necessary is significantly higher than those who don't think NGOs are necessary or that it is possible for citizens to form NGOs in Kyrgyzstan.

Respondents were also asked whether they believe that NGOs could deliver some social services more effectively than state institutions. A majority either replied, "Don't know" (49%) or did not answer (3%). But among those who did give an opinion on this subject, more said that NGOs could deliver social services more effectively than state institutions (58%) than not (42%).

Ethnic Russians were much more likely to stress the efficiency of NGOs (42% yes, 21% no) than ethnic Kyrgyz (28%, 22%) or ethnic Uzbeks (16%, 13%). In fact, if the net differential between "yes" (that NGOs could deliver more effectively) and "no" responses is calculated,

ethnic Russians are the only major ethnic group to substantially put more faith in NGOs delivering social services, a reflection of greater ethnic Russian skepticism toward the overall situation in the country as well as their general dissatisfaction with government performance and institutions.

Not surprisingly, those who are dissatisfied with the overall situation in the country are more enthusiastic about NGOs (33%) than those who are satisfied (23%). For many of the dissatisfied, NGOs represent a point of hope in functions that they perceive state institutions to have mishandled. Perceptions of corruption are also important. Those who feel that corruption is common in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to feel that NGOs are more efficient (33%) than those who believe that corruption is not common (18%).

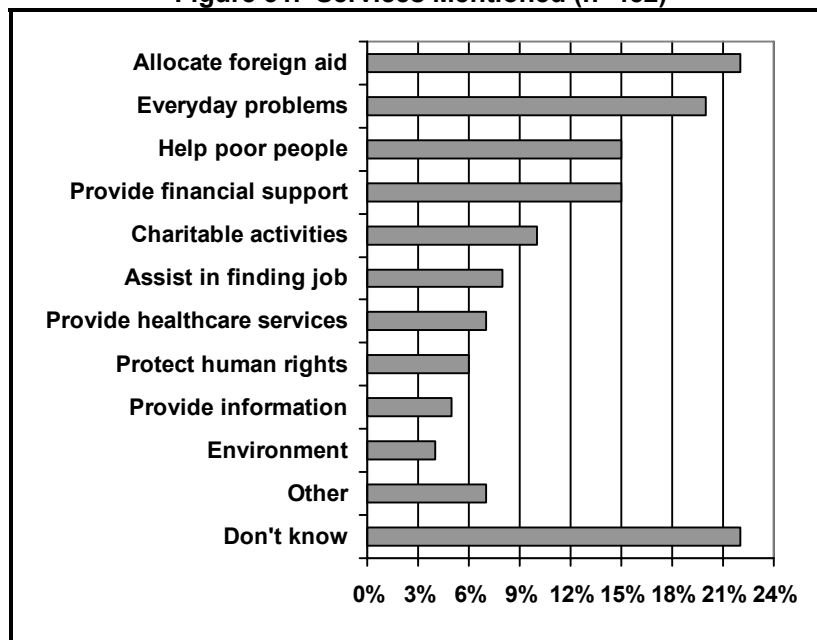
If the responses to the previous three questions are combined, and those who profess that NGOs are possible, necessary, and more efficient than state institutions are separated out (call this the pro-NGO group), some interesting sub-group differences emerge:

- Twenty-two percent of respondents fall into the consistently pro-NGO group;
- Ethnic Russians are more likely to be pro-NGO (31%) than ethnic Kyrgyz (22%) or ethnic Uzbeks (13%);
- Pro-NGO attitudes increase with the level of education, with university-educated respondents being the most pro-NGO (37%);
- Residents of Bishkek are much more pro-NGO (31%) than other places (21%); and
- Those who are dissatisfied with the overall situation are more pro-NGO (25%) than those who are satisfied (19%).

This last point is encouraging since most of those who are dissatisfied have not benefited over the past few years and they can see the value that NGOs can bring to society.

Those who feel that NGOs can deliver some services more effectively than state institutions were asked which services these were. The most frequently mentioned are listed in figure 29 (next page).

Figure 31. Services Mentioned (n=452)



If respondents replied 'Yes' to the question asking whether NGOs could deliver some services more effectively than state institutions, they were asked: "Which services?"

It is interesting that one of the largest individual response is "Don't know." This implies that even if respondent's don't have an idea of what type of services an NGO might deliver, these respondents still think the NGO would be more effective than state institutions.

The positive space for NGOs in Kyrgyzstani society implied by the set of findings above is not realized when respondents are asked about their *actual* experience with NGOs. Membership in NGOs, awareness of NGOs in the community, and effect of NGOs on respondents' lives are all very low. The data on these questions are presented in figure 32 below.

Figure 32. Experience with NGOs (n=1600)

Have you been a member of any NGO?	
Yes	2%
No, but have heard about them	51%
No, have not heard	43%
Don't know	3%
Have you been affected by NGOs?	
Yes, positively	7%
Yes, negatively	1%
Both positive and negative	3%
No	85%
Are you aware of any non-government organizations that are active in your community (your city, town)?	
Yes	14%
No	53%
Don't know	32%

Only 2% are members of a NGO and 11% have been affected by the work of NGOs. On a positive note, many more have been affected positively than negatively by NGOs.

The low membership in NGOs is disappointing and could be the result of many factors, one of which may be the economic situation in the country. As a recent briefing paper on civil society development in Kyrgyzstan argues:

“Despite common assumptions that economic differentiation will lead to a stronger civil society, the impact of economic reform in Kyrgyzstan has been as ambiguous here as in other successor states. In particular, it might be argued that the mass impoverishment that has accompanied change has militated against the prospect of social self-organization, as most people are more concerned with the struggle for survival. Moreover, this very need has tended to reinforce traditional patronage networks that can offer greater security to those involved than more modern forms of associational activity.”²³

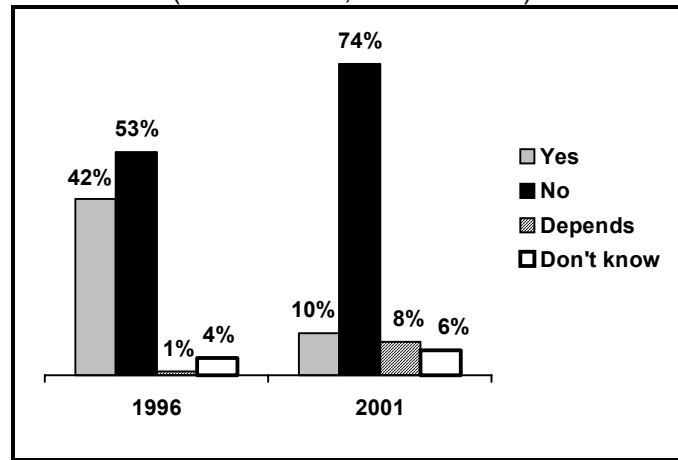
The report has previously discussed the relationship between the economic situation, overall dissatisfaction and attitudes toward democracy. It seems that activism in civil society may also be negatively impacted by the economic situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Awareness of NGOs in the community has dropped since 1996, when 33% knew of such organizations in their communities. Those who are aware of NGOs in the community are more likely to be highly-educated and reside in Bishkek and other large cities. Overall attitudes toward NGOs also play a part. The pro-NGO group outlined earlier is about five times more likely to be aware of NGOs in the community (36%) than those who don't fall into this group (8%). Membership is also related to this grouping. Although the result isn't statistically significant, it is important to note that 7% of the pro-NGO group are members of NGOs while only 0.5% of those who don't fall into this group are.

A rather sobering finding is that only 10% of respondents unequivocally state that they would volunteer to work for a NGO. Seventy-four percent of respondents state they would not be willing to volunteer for a non-governmental organization and eight percent say that it would depend on the situation. As figure 33 (next page) illustrates, these opinions are very different from 1996.

²³ Anderson, John, *The Politics of Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs. <<http://www.riia.org/Research/rep/bp18.htm>>

Figure 33. Volunteering for NGOs
(1996: n=1494; 2001: n=1600)



"Would you agree to give your time to work for a non-governmental organization without being paid?"

In the 2001 survey, a solid majority of all sub-groups in society would not be willing to volunteer for NGOs. The reason for the dramatic shift in opinions on this question is not clear. Certainly, as the citation on the previous page implies, economic conditions and Kyrgyzstanis' day-to-day struggle for survival might have something to do with diminished propensity to volunteer. However, it is still surprising that a sector that is valued by a solid majority of the population attracts such little operational support from those who would benefit from its activities. For NGOs to thrive and make a difference in Kyrgyzstan, it is imperative that they be able to translate the 'idealistic' support for the sector among the population into support on the grass-roots level.

CONCLUSION

This survey report has highlighted the attitudes and opinions of the Kyrgyzstani electorate on many facets of its socio-political environment. This survey was fielded at a tenuous time in Kyrgyzstan's short democratic history, and the opinions expressed by the respondents reflects general disquiet about the current status and future direction of the Kyrgyzstani state. Years of poor economic performance and increasingly repressive governance have had a markedly disheartening effect on the popular mood in Kyrgyzstan. This is indicated by opinions on both economic and political matters in the survey.

- Fifty percent of respondents who say that changes since independence had had an effect on their lives believe this effect to have been negative. Most of the discontent stems from the generally difficult economic conditions prevalent for most respondents to the survey. A majority of respondents feel that economic conditions are bad and that they are likely to stay the same or get worse. Perhaps because of the general resignation with current economic conditions, however, a higher percentage of respondents than in 1996 want to quicken the pace of economic reforms in Kyrgyzstan.
- There is a distinct lack of political efficacy among the majority of respondents in the survey. A small majority professes little or no interest in political affairs (51%) and a larger majority finds politics too complicated (56%). The majority of respondents seem to have little confidence in expecting accountability from their elected leaders: 62% feel that people like them have no influence on how things are run in Kyrgyzstan and 57% feel that they cannot get their elected representatives to listen to them. Only 41% feel that voting influences decision-making in Kyrgyzstan, a decrease from the 53% who felt this way in 1996.
- Confidence in democracy has fallen. A majority of respondents (62%) feel that democracy benefits only some people in society and a sizable percentage (42%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy is practiced in Kyrgyzstan. While 45% feel that democracy is preferable to any other form of governance, a statistically equal percentage (48%) is willing to contemplate other types of governance. This extends to human rights: a majority (55%) is willing to limit rights in order to maintain order in society, and 44% are willing to endure a dictatorship in order to maintain order.
- Official corruption is believed to be a major problem with more than 8 out of 10 respondents stating that it is both common and serious. Corruption is felt to be ever-present: from the classroom to the hospital to the police station. There is little confidence in state institutions and almost 9 out of 10 respondents have never contacted an elected official to help resolve problems.

These opinions portray a large segment of the Kyrgyzstani public that is dissatisfied with the economic and political status enough to consider anti-liberal tradeoffs for security. Clearly, economic reform that is effective and filters down to the larger population is a fundamental necessity for the Kyrgyzstani state today. This development could help alleviate some of the dissatisfaction with the economic situation in the short and long term. However, attitudes toward economic conditions are not highly related to political efficacy.

For a democracy to function effectively and provide good governance to everyone in society, one prerequisite is the ability of citizens to effectively influence official decisions. This does not seem to be the case in Kyrgyzstan. While 80% report having voted in the last presidential

election, a minority believes that voting influences decision-making. The low level of political efficacy outlined above further contributes to dissatisfaction and alienation from the political process. These conditions in turn lead to a loss of confidence in democracy.

This is, of course, not a good harbinger for the further development and strengthening of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. The analysis and findings in the report do indicate, however, that there are some areas where effective assistance can help to reverse or at least slow down this trend in Kyrgyzstani society.

The first area of emphasis for an assistance strategy must be information provision. Only about a quarter of respondents on the survey report having satisfactory levels of information on political and economic developments in Kyrgyzstan. Part of the reason for this may be that domestic media sources are felt to be less objective than foreign sources. The lack of information has implications for attitudes on other societal issues. Those who profess to having at least a 'fair amount' of information are more likely than those with little information to...:

- ...display interest in politics
- ...believe that voting influences decision-making;
- ...think that politics is not too complicated;
- ...expect that they can get their representatives to listen to them;
- ...value democracy as a system of governance;
- ...be slightly more satisfied with democracy;
- ...feel that various rights are important;
- ...disagree with limiting rights to maintain order;
- ...cite the importance of multi-party elections;
- ...believe in the necessity and possibility of forming NGOs; and
- ...be aware of NGOs in their community.

In sum, those more informed are more likely to have the liberal attitudes associated with democracy than those lacking information. This is despite the fact that those who are informed are just as likely to be dissatisfied with the overall situation and direction since independence as those with little information. Hence, it is critical that information levels be increased in Kyrgyzstan. Since the media does not seem to be doing an adequate task of disseminating information to the public, it is essential that the programs emphasize civic education and development of an independent media be given importance by bilateral and multilateral organizations.

A second area of importance is the development of the non-governmental sector in Kyrgyzstan. A majority of respondents to the survey believe that NGOs are necessary for Kyrgyzstan and that it is possible for citizens to form NGOs. Even more believe that NGOs can deliver some services more effectively than state institutions. The services mentioned are charitable and assistance activities that are non-controversial (at least from the government's point of view) and within the capacity of an effective NGO sector. Yet, there is very little on-the-ground experience with NGOs and little passion for volunteering for these organizations. One suspects that lack of resources and administrative ability might play a large part in making most local NGOs and their activities invisible to the ordinary Kyrgyzstani.

Because the overwhelming majority of respondents have little confidence in state institutions, and because there is evidence that respondents view NGOs as an attractive alternative to state institutions, it is imperative that assistance be provided to this sector. Of particular importance

is the necessity of capacity-building assistance to local NGOs that emphasizes outreach activities linking these organizations to their constituents and government offices. Such an approach may help to make these organizations more visible and effective, and in turn solidify the sector in the eyes of the Kyrgyzstani public.

Although a majority of respondents feel that multi-party elections are important, there is very little real support for political parties in Kyrgyzstan. Only 3% of respondents are members of political parties and only a small minority feels that there are discernible differences between the various political parties that exist in Kyrgyzstan. While it is difficult to embark on an image-building exercise when most prominent political parties are under siege by the state apparatus, it is nonetheless important for political parties to start projecting images of themselves that are readily identifiable by most Kyrgyzstanis. This is another area where international assistance can play a large part.

APPENDIX: YOUTH (18-25) ATTITUDES

The youngest age group in Kyrgyzstan (18-25) was of particular interest to IFES in the design of this survey. So, an oversample of 100 respondents aged 18-25 was included in this survey to better gauge youth attitudes in Kyrgyzstan.

What is remarkable about youth attitudes vs. adult attitudes in Kyrgyzstan is that there is not much difference between the two groups on most of the important issues facing the country. Normally, and based on IFES survey data from other countries, one would expect the youngest segment of the adult population to have a more liberal attitude towards political, social, and economic affairs in a country. While it is true that the 18-25 group in Kyrgyzstan is definitely more liberal than the 45 and above group, the distinctions start to dissipate once all respondents 25 and over are used as the basis for analysis. However, the differences between the two groups occur on issues that give hope that those 18-25 can still be a generation that serves as a vanguard for democratic reform in Kyrgyzstan.

Another constant between the 18-25 group and those above 25 is the distinct difference in opinions between subgroups of the population on most issues of importance. The relative pessimism of the ethnic Russian community identified in the main text of this report is repeated in the analysis of 18-25 year olds, as are the significant differences between those with higher education and those at the lower end of educational attainment.

Differences in opinions, or lack thereof, between those 18-25 and those aged above 25 are presented for some important issues below. For simplicity of language, the 18-25 group is referred to as youth below, and those above 25 are referred to as adults.

- Kyrgyzstani youth profess having slightly a lesser amount of information than those over 25 on both economic developments (20% for youth vs. 25% for those over 25) and political developments (23% vs. 27%). Ethnic Russian youth are the least likely to have information on economic and political developments. According to those aged 18-25, there has been a slight decrease in information on economic developments since 1996 (25% had at least a fair amount of information in 1996, compared with 20% in 2001). Since information levels were identified as a key indicator of liberal attitudes in the main text, it is imperative that special efforts be made to increase the access to, and availability of, information on economic and political developments for the youngest segments of the population.
- A similar percentage of those aged 18-25 are dissatisfied with the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan (63%) as those over 25 (65%). The trend in youth opinion is the same for youth as for the overall population: ethnic Uzbeks are most satisfied (51%), followed by ethnic Kyrgyz (39%) and ethnic Russians (23%). Those aged 18-25 are more likely to say that they are satisfied with the situation (38%) in the 2001 survey than in the 1996 survey (28%).
- Youth are about as likely as adults to say that the effect of changes in Kyrgyzstan since independence has been major (30% versus 33% for adults), and are slightly more likely to say that the changes have had a small effect (44% versus 39%). However, members of the 18-25 group are more positive when evaluating the changes. Fifty-nine percent of youth who say that the changes have an effect feel that this effect has been mostly or somewhat positive. This compares to 50% of adults who express the same sentiment.

- When it comes to the economic situation, youth are more optimistic than adults. Thirty-six percent of youth feel that the current economic situation is good or very good, compared to 31% of adults. And, 32% of youth feel that the economic situation will improve over the next year, compared to 26% of adults. Eighteen percent of youth feel the economic situation will get worse, compared to 29% of adults.
- There is no difference in the percentage expressing an interest in politics among both youth and adults (48% each). And even more strikingly, there has not been any change in interest in politics among youth since 1996 (48% in both 1996 and 2001). In a country where most indicators have a negative trend, this might be one positive to build upon. Youth are also likely to discuss politics at virtually the same rate as adults (50% versus 52%), although adults are more likely to discuss politics 'often' (23% adults, 11% youth).
- Younger respondents are as likely to say that they can influence others in discussions about politics and government (66%) as adults (64%). A majority of both groups also believe that government is too complicated to understand (57% youth, 55% adults), and that they can't make their representatives listen to them (58% youth, 56% adults). Somewhat surprisingly, among youth, those with a post-secondary education (but less than a university degree) are the most likely to say that government is too complicated.
- Young respondents are more optimistic about the effect of voting on decision-making than adults. Forty-nine percent of youth do agree that voting influences decision-making, while 42% of adults feel the same. However, youth belief in the influence of voting has declined since 1996 (57% in 1996 compared to 49% in 2001). Ethnic Kyrgyz youth (66% in 1996, 52% in 2001) and ethnic Russian youth (42%; 30%) have suffered a decline in the percentage that believe that voting can influence decision-making. On the other hand, ethnic Uzbek youth are actually more likely to believe that voting influences decision-making (52% in 1996 compared to 60%). This is consistent with the generally positive assessment of various facets of Kyrgyzstani life by ethnic Uzbeks in this survey.
- When it comes to the type of government that Kyrgyzstan should have, the youth are just as likely to go with a non-democratic type of government (50%) as they are to favor democracy (46%). The discounting of a democratic form of government is especially strong among ethnic Russian youth (35% democracy, 64% non-democracy), the most disappointed and dissatisfied ethnic group in this survey. As for the type of system that Kyrgyzstan does have right now, most youth think that it is either partially democratic (52%) or not democratic at all (14%). Twenty-eight percent of youth think that at present Kyrgyzstan is a full democracy, thus making them more optimistic about the current system than adults (22% full democracy). Still, it is encouraging to note that a majority of youth has reservations about calling Kyrgyzstan a full democracy.
- Youth are slightly more satisfied than adults with the way democracy works in Kyrgyzstan (55% youth, 50% adults), and they are slightly more likely than adults to feel that democracy benefits most people (26% youth, 22% adults). Once again, ethnic Russian youth differ markedly from ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbek youths on these issues. Ethnic Russians are much more dissatisfied with democracy than the other two groups, and they are much more likely to say that democracy only benefits a few people or no one.
- The reluctance of Kyrgyzstani youth to fully embrace democracy (at least as it is practiced in Kyrgyzstan) is indicated by the fact that a majority (54%) are willing to limit rights to ensure

order. This percentage has not changed much since the 1996 survey (53% agreed with limiting rights) and neither has the pattern of support among different ethnicities. In both surveys, a majority of ethnic Russian youth is unwilling to agree to the suspension of rights (58% in 1996, 57% in 2001). On the other hand, majorities of both ethnic Kyrgyz (57% in 1996, 56% in 2001) and ethnic Uzbeks (51% in 1996, 66% in 2001) agree that rights could be suspended.

- When the suspension of rights is taken a step further to a dictatorship, a smaller percentage of youth support this alternative (40%) than adults (46%). However, the percentage of youth agreeing with a dictatorship to ensure order has increased since 1996 (31%). Surprisingly, this is so even in the case of Russian youth (21% in 1996 to 33% in 2001). A decade of social and economic stagnation is even pulling the youth of Kyrgyzstan, generally the most liberal members of society, in an authoritarian direction.
- Youth are more likely to feel that NGOs are essential or necessary for Kyrgyzstani society (63%) than adults (57%). The percentage among youth that feels that NGOs are essential has increased significantly since 1996 (16% in 1996 to 26% in 2001). Among youth, ethnic Russians (67%) and ethnic Uzbeks (66%) are more likely to have this opinion than ethnic Kyrgyz respondents (61%). A majority of both adults and youth feel that it is possible for citizens to form NGOs in Kyrgyzstan (54% adults, 57% youth). Among youth, once again ethnic Uzbeks (64%) and ethnic Russians (62%) are more likely to voice this opinion than ethnic Kyrgyz (53%).
- Perhaps because they, more than other ethnic groups, have lost faith in the state and its institutions, ethnic Russian youth are much different than ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks when evaluating whether NGOs can deliver some services more effectively than state institutions. Forty-nine percent of ethnic Russian youth believe that NGOs can deliver services more efficiently, compared to 27% of ethnic Kyrgyz youth and 19% of ethnic Uzbek youth.