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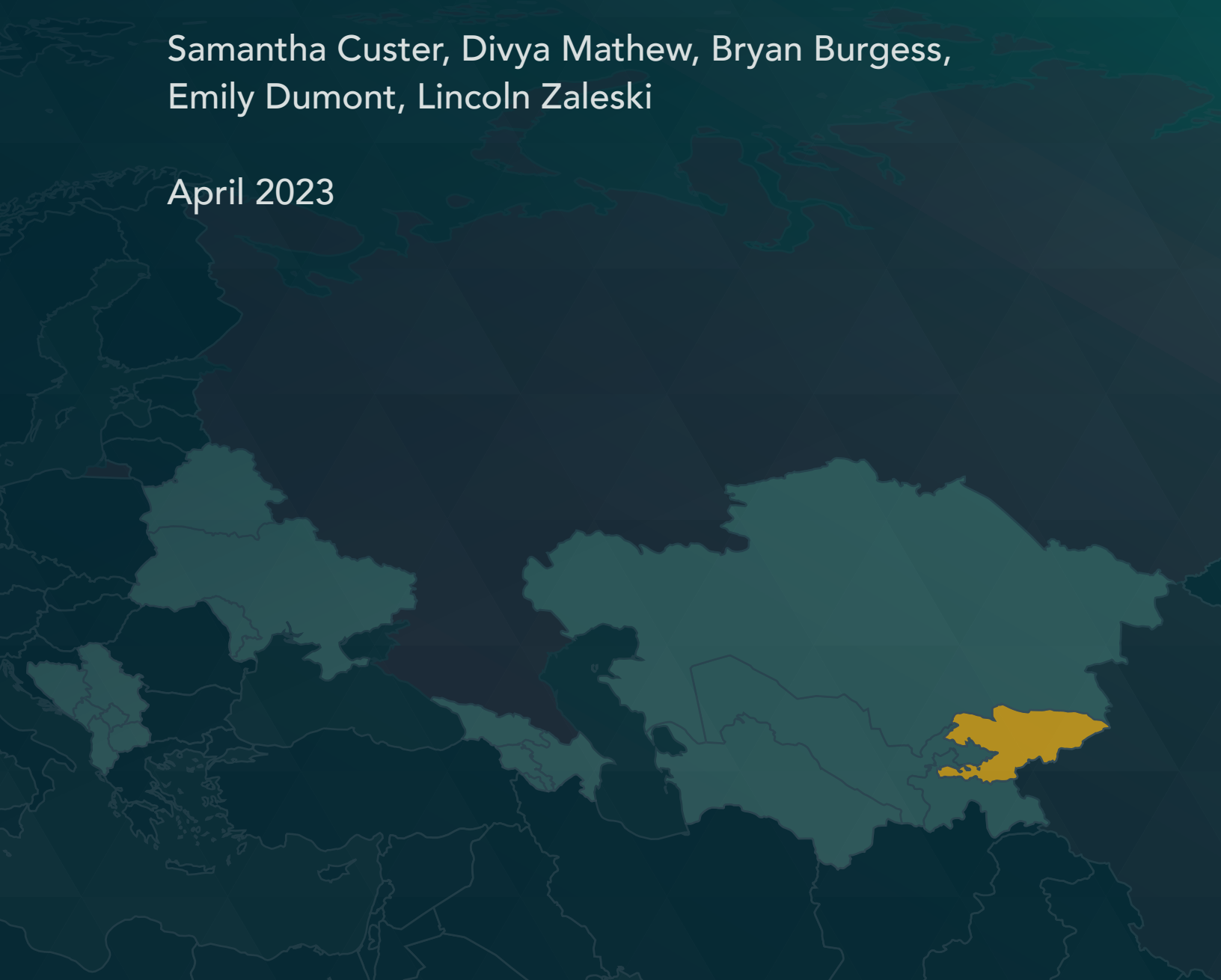
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

# **Kyrgyzstan:** Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and Russian influence

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# Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of the Kyrgyz Republic's civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin's influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in the Kyrgyz Republic to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions.

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Kyrgyz civic space actors were the targets of 172 restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021. Fifty-eight percent of these restrictions involved harassment or violence, followed by state-backed legal cases (27 percent), and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (15 percent). Two-thirds of restrictions were recorded in 2017 and 2020 alone, coinciding with Kyrgyz presidential and parliamentary elections. Journalists were most frequently targeted (49 percent) and the Kyrgyz government the primary initiator. Two restrictions involved Kyrgyz authorities working at the behest of the Kazakh and Uzbek governments to extradite activists.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Kyrgyz citizens' interest in politics plummeted by -35 percentage points between 2011 and 2020, while confidence in political parties and parliament dropped by 18-19 percentage points. Membership in voluntary organizations declined by 10

percentage points on average by 2020, with substantial drop-offs in political parties and labor unions. More Kyrgyz respondents signed petitions, but fewer joined demonstrations, and the majority were unlikely to participate in future political activity. Kyrgyz citizens were open to less political forms of civic participation such as membership in sport and recreational organizations or religious organizations. They were also more confident in these less political institutions on average. In 2021, 65 percent of Kyrgyz citizens helped a stranger, 44 percent donated to charities, and 23 percent volunteered.

- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** The Kremlin supported 80 Kyrgyz civic organizations via 165 projects between January 2015 and August 2021. Projects emphasized youth education, promotion of Russian linguistic and cultural ties with Cossack and Tatar communities, and commemorations of “The Great Patriotic War.” Metropolitan areas attracted the lion’s share of the Kremlin’s attention, particularly Bishkek and Osh. Formal Kyrgyz civil society organizations, most notably Russian compatriot organizations, received most of the Kremlin’s support (89 percent). Although 21 Kremlin-affiliated agencies were involved, Rossotrudnichestvo was most prolific, supporting 75 organizations via 157 projects.
- **Russian State-run Media:** Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced Kyrgyz civic actors 85 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Political parties were the most frequently mentioned domestic actors followed by other community organizations. The overall tone of mentions was largely neutral (93 percent); negative mentions were predominantly directed to protesters during the 2020 Kyrgyz protests and NGOs labeled as “pro-U.S.” or “Western-funded.”

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## A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are de facto authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the de facto authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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# 1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in the Kyrgyz Republic? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in the Kyrgyz Republic to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).<sup>1</sup> In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to the Kyrgyz Republic from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.<sup>3</sup> Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org) which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Kyrgyz civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

<sup>3</sup> This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in the Kyrgyz Republic and the broader E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three



respects. By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin’s patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action. Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2017–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors</li> <li>● Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution</li> <li>● Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism</li> </ul>
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2009–2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers)</li> <li>● Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions</li> </ul>
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country</li> </ul>

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<p>Russian state media mentions of civic space actors (January 2015–March 2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in the Kyrgyz Republic by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in the Kyrgyz Republic by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in the Kyrgyz Republic by Russian state-owned media</li> <li>• Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in the Kyrgyz Republic by Russian state-owned media</li> </ul>
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*Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of the Kyrgyz Republic’s domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.*

## 2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in the Kyrgyz Republic

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (*de jure*) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (*de facto*). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in the Kyrgyz Republic over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Kyrgyz engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in the Kyrgyz Republic: Targets, Initiators, and Trends Over Time

Kyrgyz civic space actors experienced 172 known restrictions between January 2017 and March 2021 (see Table 2). These restrictions were weighted toward instances of harassment or violence (58 percent). There were fewer instances of state-backed legal cases (27 percent) and newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (15 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available

information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5).<sup>4</sup>

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Kyrgyz Civic Space Actors

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	36	7	23	33	1	100
Restrictive Legislation	2	2	8	13	1	26
State-backed Legal Cases	19	3	13	10	1	46
Total	57	12	44	56	3	172

*Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, disaggregated by type (i.e., harassment/violence, restrictive legislation or state-backed legal cases) and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Instances of restrictions of Kyrgyz civic space actors were unevenly distributed across this time period (Figure 1). Two-thirds of cases were recorded in 2017 and 2020 alone, coinciding with Kyrgyz presidential and parliamentary elections, respectively. Both elections saw protesters take to the streets, demanding free and fair elections.<sup>5</sup> There were only 3 restrictions recorded in the first quarter of 2021. Journalists and other members of the media were the most frequent targets of violence and harassment, accounting for 49 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 2), followed by formal civil society and non-governmental organizations (CSOs and NGOs), and the political opposition.

The Kyrgyz government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 75 recorded mentions. The majority of restrictions involved police actions to shut down media outlets, deport foreign journalists, and detain political opposition (Figure 3). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 14 restrictions and there was a large number of

<sup>4</sup> Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

<sup>5</sup> Violence broke out following the 2020 Parliamentary elections as the results were declared invalid by the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Kyrgyzstan. Sadyr Zhaparov, a nationalist politician and convicted kidnapper, broke out of prison with the help of his supporters and was installed as Prime Minister by the Parliament.

incidents involving unidentified assailants (27 mentions). By virtue of the way that the indicator was defined, the initiators of state-backed legal cases are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official).

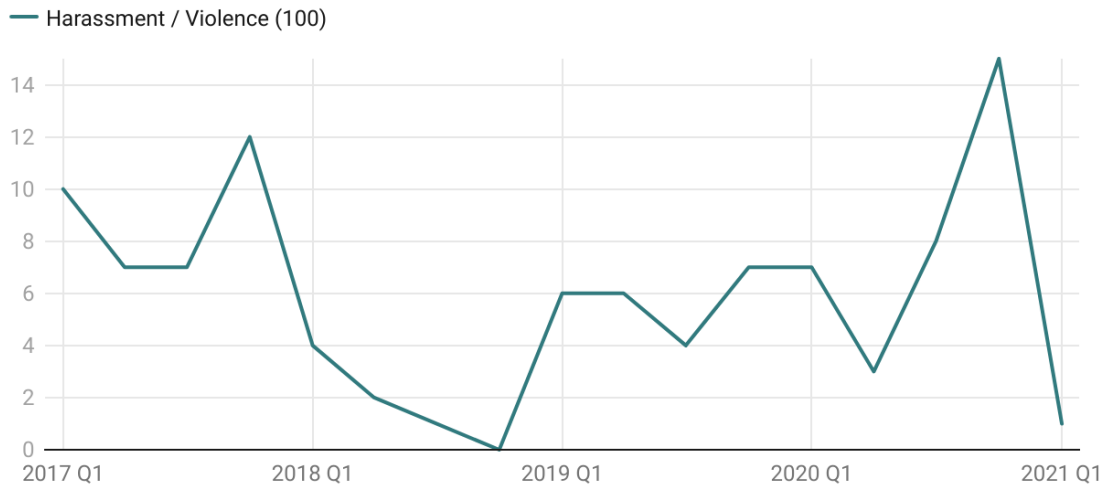
There were two recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors during this period where the Kyrgyz government acted at the behest of a foreign government:

- In June 2018, Kazakh civil society activist Murat Tungishbaev was extradited to Kazakhstan following his arrest the previous month by the Kyrgyz State Committee for National Security. Tungishbaev was detained on suspicion of having links with a banned political opposition movement, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, and extradited at the request of Almaty City Court in Kazakhstan. Tungishbaev claimed that the authorities of Kazakhstan were persecuting him in retaliation for his blogs which reported on violations of human rights, restrictions of freedom of speech and political persecution in Kazakhstan.
- In August 2020, the Kyrgyz Republic extradited Uzbek journalist, Bobomurod Abdullayev, back to Uzbekistan. Abdullayev had originally been detained by Kyrgyz authorities for unspecified crimes at the request of the Uzbek government. International human rights groups raised concerns that Abdullayev could be tortured and persecuted upon his return to Uzbekistan.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Kyrgyzstan

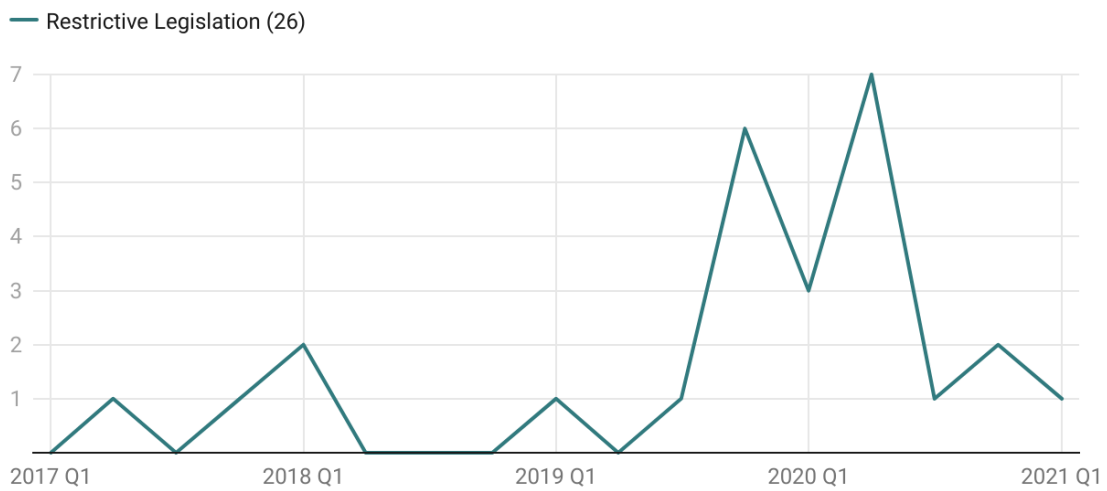
Number of Instances Recorded

*Harassment/Violence*



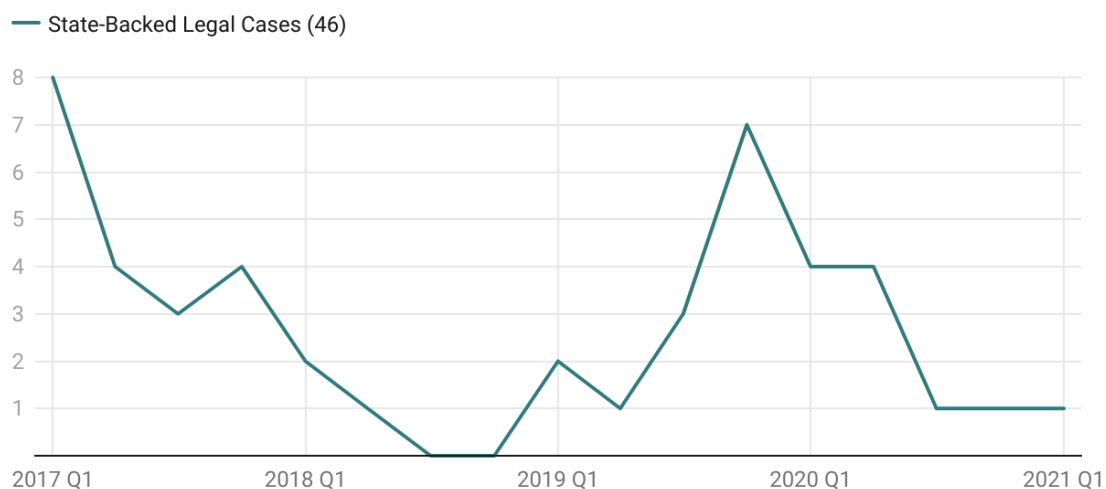
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*Restrictive Legislation*



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## State-backed Legal Cases



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## Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in the Kyrgyz Republic

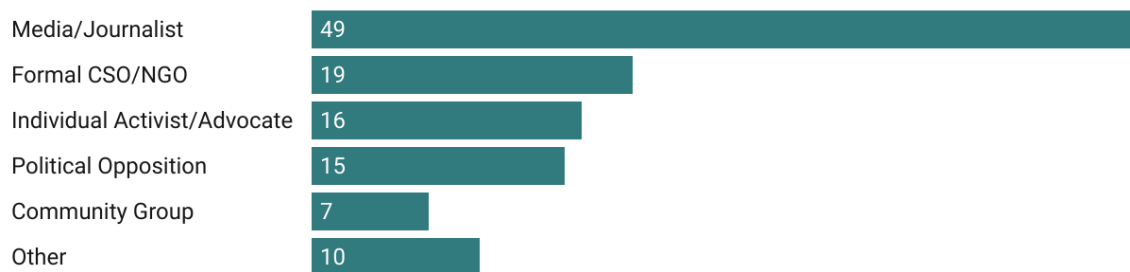
February 2017	Hundreds protest after authorities detain a prominent opposition leader, Omurbek Tekebayev, on fraud and corruption charges that his supporters say are politically motivated.
September 2017	Over a thousand people joined a rally in Bishkek organized by activists, protesting against election-campaign abuses and demanding fair elections.
October 2017	Presidential elections are held, with a close runoff between two pro-Russian candidates. Sooronbai Jeenbekov, a protege of the outgoing president, wins with 55% of the vote.
April 2018	President Jeenbekov fires Prime Minister Sapar Isakov and the government following a vote of no confidence. The parliament names Mukhammedkaliy Abylgazyev as Isakov's replacement.
March 2019	A draft law equating NGOs with "foreign agents," rejected in 2016, resurfaces in Parliament calling for increased control over NGOs.
August 2019	Security forces launch a second raid on the house of former president Almazbek Atambayev, after a failed attempt to arrest him the previous day led to violent clashes with his followers. Police detain Atambayev for questioning over a corruption case.
March 2020	Police used tear gas, stun grenades, and water cannons to disperse thousands of anti-government protesters in Bishkek who demand the release of Sadyr Zhaparov, a former adviser to ex-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev.
June 2020	The Parliament approves Kubatbek Boronov as the new Prime Minister. Former PM Abylgazyev resigned over a scandal alleging the government illegally sold radio frequencies.

October 2020	The Central Election Commission declares parliamentary election results invalid, sparking mass protests. President Jeenbekov declares a state of emergency in Bishkek as opposition groups occupy Parliament, violence escalates, and political leaders are shot at. Parliament installs Sadyr Zhaparov, a convicted kidnapper, as the country's new PM, less than a week after protesters broke him out of prison. Mr Zhaparov immediately calls for the President to resign.
February 2021	Vladimir Putin hosts Sadyr Zhaparov, elected President of Kyrgyzstan with a 79% victory, voicing hope for political stability in the nation that recently saw a violent change of government for the third time in 15 years.

*Notes: These charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in the Kyrgyz Republic, categorized as: harassment/violence, restrictive legislation, or state-backed legal cases. Instances are disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of the Kyrgyz Republic from January 2017 through March 2021. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## Figure 2. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Kyrgyzstan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021



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*Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*



Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Kyrgyzstan

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

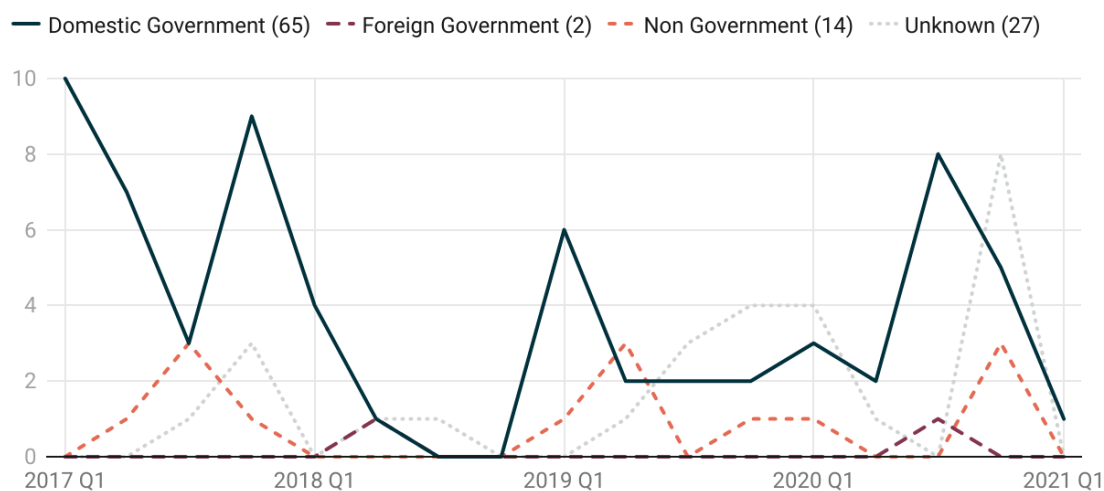
Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	25
Political Opposition	8
Formal CSO/NGO	10
Individual Activist/Advocate	3
Other Community Group	2
Other	5

Notes: Table of the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other).

Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 3. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Kyrgyzstan by Initiator

Number of Instances Recorded



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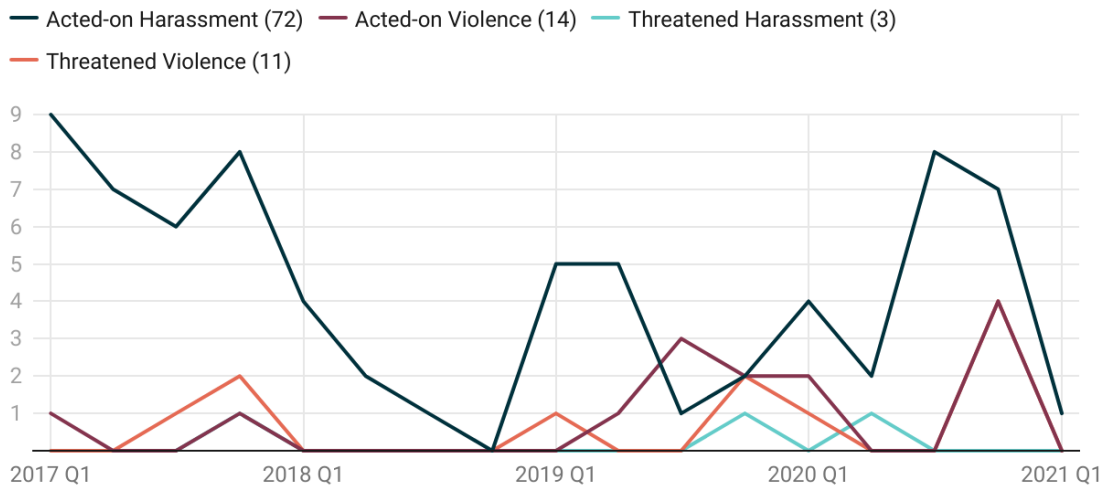
Notes: The figure visualizes recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, categorized by the initiator: domestic government, non-government, foreign government, and unknown. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan

### 2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (3 threatened, 72 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (11 threatened, 14 acted upon) during the period. The vast majority of these restrictions (86 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 4). Of the 100 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (72 percent).

Figure 4. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence Against Civic Space Actors in Kyrgyzstan

Number of Instances Recorded



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Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment of or violence against civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, categorized by the type of harassment or violence (threatened or acted-on). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (26) in the Kyrgyz Republic are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

A close look at instances of restrictive legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic highlights two themes of regulation: (i) increased control over the activities of NGOs; and (ii) greater regulation of information, particularly on social media. A bill equating NGOs with foreign agents, similar to one that was enacted in Russia in 2012, was proposed and deliberated by the Kyrgyz parliament on several occasions between 2017 and 2021. Such a law would undermine the credibility of NGOs and restrict their ability to receive funding from abroad. Similarly, a “Manipulation of Information” law was drafted in May 2020, that required the owners of internet sites to ensure that their platform would not be used to disseminate false information. This legislation was widely criticized, especially by media organizations who feared selective enforcement of the law against those who publish information unfavorable to those in power.

Another trend that emerged was the cooperation between the Permovaisky District Court in Bishkek and the city administration in restricting public gatherings and peaceful protests. We recorded 4 instances, between September and December 2019, when the Court prohibited public assemblies at the request of the district police and administration. These bans on public gatherings typically lasted two weeks and had vague justifications like the city hosting football World Cup qualification games<sup>6</sup> and installing New Year’s decorations<sup>7</sup>. While a law explicitly prohibiting peaceful protests would be

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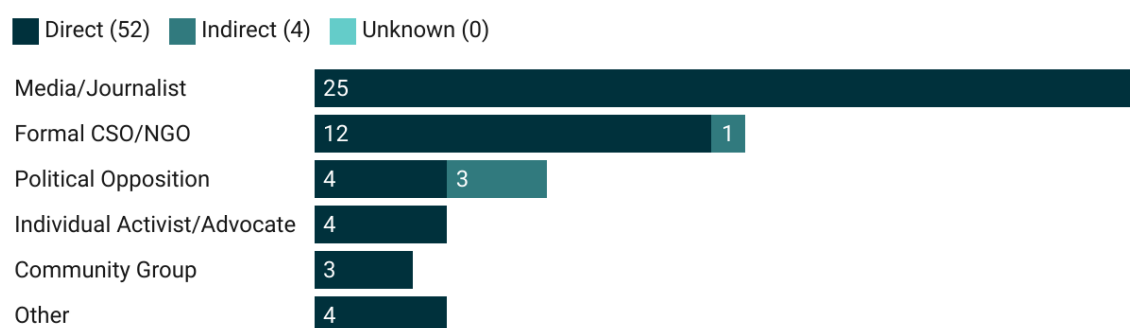
<sup>6</sup> CIVICUS Monitor. 6 February 2020. "CORRUPTION FINDINGS RESULT IN PRESSURE ON MEDIA, INTIMIDATION OF ACTIVISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY PROTEST".

<sup>7</sup><https://www.iphronline.org/kyrgyzstan-corruption-findings-result-in-pressure-on-media-intimidation-of-activists-and-civil-society-protests.html>

unconstitutional, the authorities concocted creative excuses with the Court to de facto do just that.

Civic space actors were the targets of 46 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2017 and March 2021. The highest concentration of these cases (19) occurred in 2017. Most frequently Kyrgyz authorities pursued cases against journalists and media outlets being sued for defamation after publishing investigative reports on corruption in the government. As shown in Figure 5, charges in these cases were most often directly (92 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly.) There were fewer indirect nuisance charges (8 percent), such as abuse of power or forgery, intended to discredit the reputations of civic space actors.

Figure 5. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Kyrgyzstan



Created with Datawrapper

### Number of Instances Recorded, January 2017–March 2021

*Notes: This figure shows the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, disaggregated by the group targeted (i.e., political opposition, individual activist/advocate, media/journalist, other community group, formal CSO/NGO or other) and the nature of the charge (i.e., direct or indirect). Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Kyrgyzstan and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

## 2.2 Attitudes Toward Civic Space in Kyrgyz Republic

Kyrgyz citizens' trust in institutions and interest in politics plummeted between 2011 and 2020. There was a similar decline in other aspects of civic life, most notably membership in political parties and labor unions, as well as reduced

political action. Citizens instead turned to religious institutions and issue-oriented groups as preferred outlets for civic engagement. The COVID-19 crisis and October 2020 protests may have temporarily reversed these trends, as there was an uptick in Kyrgyz supporting their neighbors and engaging in social and political movements. In this section, we take a closer look at Kyrgyz citizens' interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Kyrgyz involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1 Interest in Politics and Willingness to Act as Barometers of Kyrgyz Civic Space

Nearly two-thirds of Kyrgyz respondents to the 2011 World Values Survey (WVS) expressed an interest in politics (65 percent), outstripping the regional average<sup>8</sup> by 24 percentage points (Figure 6). But this interest did not translate into a willingness to engage in political action: the vast majority of respondents reported that they “would never” take part in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, or strikes (Figure 7). Of these four forms of political action, Kyrgyz respondents most frequently reported having engaged in demonstrations (13 percent), exceeding the regional mean by 5 percentage points (Figure 8). A further 12 percent indicated that they would consider joining demonstrations in the future. Comparatively, a mere 2-4 percent of Kyrgyz respondents reported engaging in petitions, boycotts, or strikes previously and were fairly hesitant to get involved in these actions in future.

Political activism may have been muted, but Kyrgyz citizens were more active in their membership across a variety of voluntary organizations in 2011 (Figure 9). On average, 18 percent of Kyrgyz respondents to the 2011 WVS were members of each category of voluntary organization, surpassing the regional mean by 7 percentage points. The most popular organizations—sports or recreational associations, labor unions, associations related to art, music or education, and political parties—counted at least 20 percent of Kyrgyz respondents among their members (Table 4). Kyrgyz citizens charted substantially higher levels of

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<sup>8</sup> The WVS 6 regional means are calculated from the seven E&E region countries included in the WVS Wave 6 (2010–2014), which were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine.

participation in three classes of voluntary organizations than their regional peers: sports groups (+17 percentage points), humanitarian or charitable organizations (+14 percentage points), and political parties (+13 percentage points).

Public trust in institutions was also relatively high in 2011 (Table 5): over half of respondents to the WVS said they were confident in their country's institutions on average and gave high marks to the military (64 percent)<sup>9</sup> and civil service (62 percent).<sup>10</sup> Kyrgyz citizens were somewhat less confident in political parties (51 percent), though still 10 percentage points ahead of the regional average. Respondents from the Kyrgyz Republic were more confident in labor unions (+12 percentage points) than those from other countries in the region, unsurprising given their high rate of membership in these institutions. Comparatively, though 52 percent of Kyrgyz respondents were confident in churches and religious institutions, they notably trailed their regional peers by 18 percentage points.

By January 2020, the share of Kyrgyz respondents<sup>11</sup> expressing interest in politics plummeted to 30 percent (-35 percentage points) on the WVS (Figure 6). Although there was lower reported interest in politics across the region, the shift in attitudes was more pronounced in the Kyrgyz Republic, which trailed regional peers by 6 percentage points in 2020 from a sizable lead in 2011.<sup>12</sup> In terms of political activity, the majority of citizens still reported that they would never engage in petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, or strikes (Figure 7). Consistent with broader regional trends<sup>13</sup> and perhaps indicative of technology lowering the barriers to entry, 9 percent of Kyrgyz respondents reported joining petitions in 2020 (+5 percentage points). However, the level of Kyrgyz participation in

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<sup>9</sup> Despite these high marks, Kyrgyz respondents were 11 percentage points less confident in their military than regional peers.

<sup>10</sup> The World Values Survey confidence question includes a general option for "government" in addition to specific branches such as the civil service, courts, parliament, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the 2020 WVS wave here and throughout the profile refers to the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017–2020 (EVS/WVS Wave 2017–2020) which is the most recent wave of WVS data. For more information, see Section 5.

<sup>12</sup> The Joint EVS/WVS regional means are calculated from the seven E&E region countries included in the WVS Wave 6 (2017–2020), which were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

<sup>13</sup> On average, respondents across the region reported a 13-percentage point higher rate of participation in petitions in 2020 than 2011.

demonstrations declined relative to 2011 (-7 percentage points), while only 2 percent of respondents each said they joined strikes and boycotts<sup>14</sup> (Figure 7).

Consistent with the story of political action, Kyrgyz membership in voluntary organizations also declined to 8 percent (-10 percentage points) on average by 2020 (Table 4). Kyrgyz respondents to the 2020 WVS were most likely to be members of sport and recreational organizations (17 percent), but religious organizations replaced labor unions as the second-most popular outlet for membership. Comparatively, there was a substantial drop-off in membership of political parties and labor unions, by 18 and 15 percentage points respectively, between 2011 and 2020.<sup>15</sup> A greater percentage of Kyrgyz citizens reported membership in sport organizations and humanitarian groups than their regional peers by +7 and +4 percentage points, respectively (Figure 9).

Public trust in political institutions across the board also dropped in 2020. Approximately one-third of Kyrgyz respondents to the WVS were confident in their political parties or parliament in 2020, a decline of 19 and 18 percentage points, respectively (Table 5). In parallel, confidence in domestic media fell from 56 percent to 43 percent between 2011 and 2020, though additional surveys conducted in the region indicate that the level of public trust may vary by media modality.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Kyrgyz citizens appeared to gain confidence in institutions that were less directly connected to election politics, namely religious institutions (+26 percentage points), the military (+6 percentage points), and environmental groups (+7 percentage points). The sixty-two percent of Kyrgyz respondents expressing confidence in environmental groups in 2020 (+18 percentage points ahead of their regional peers) is intriguing as it stands in stark contrast to relatively low rates of participation in these institutions (3 percent).

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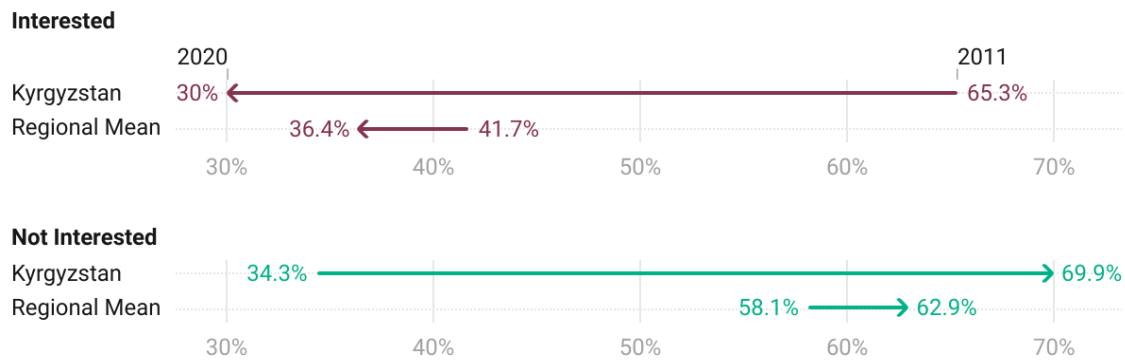
<sup>14</sup> This is likely influenced by the continued prohibition on strikes in most sectors of the Kyrgyz Republic, as opposed to a mere preference on the part of respondents.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2019>

<sup>15</sup> Kyrgyz membership in political parties and labor unions trailed the regional mean in 2020 by -5 and -3 percentage points, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> The Central Asia Barometer, waves 2 through 4, conducted between November 2017 and December 2018, highlights that approximately three-quarters of Kyrgyz citizens trusted information from television, compared to 58 percent for radio, and 49 percent for newspapers.

Figure 6. Interest in Politics: Kyrgyz Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020



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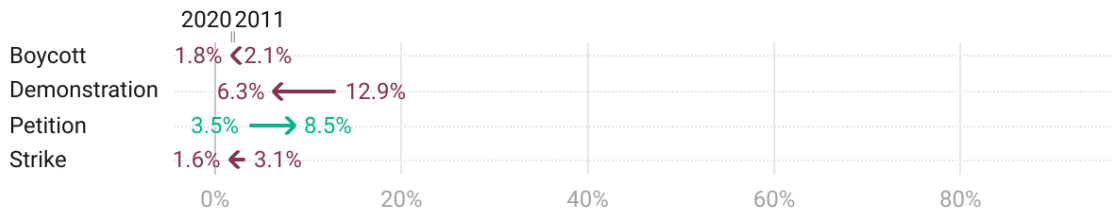
Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kyrgyz respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2011 and 2020, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.



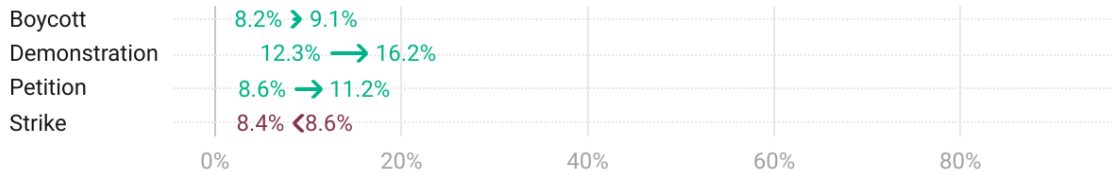
Figure 7. Political Action: Kyrgyz Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents

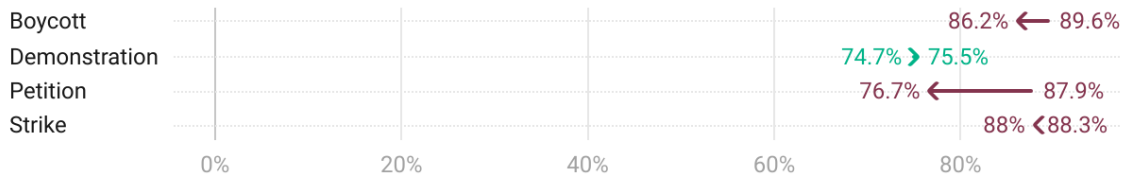
**Have done**



**Might do**



**Would never do**



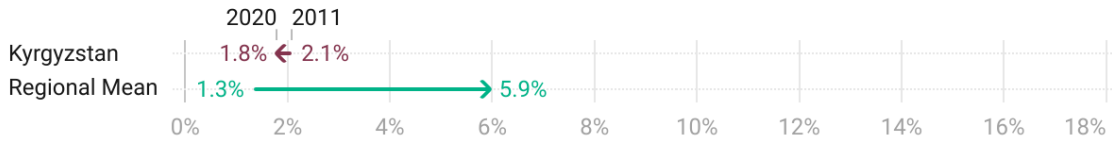
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Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kyrgyz respondents that reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott, demonstration, and strike—as well as their future willingness to do so. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

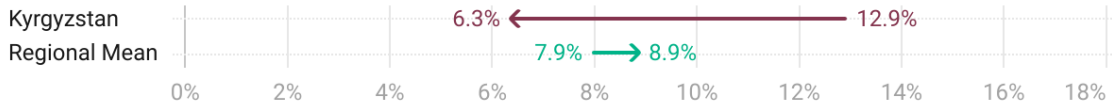
Figure 8. Political Action: Participation by Kyrgyz Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”

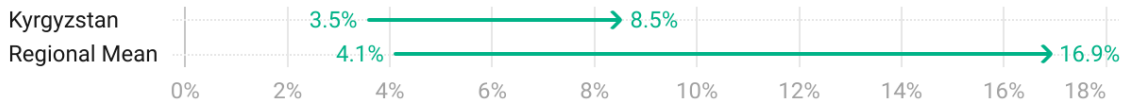
**Boycott**



**Demonstration**



**Petition**



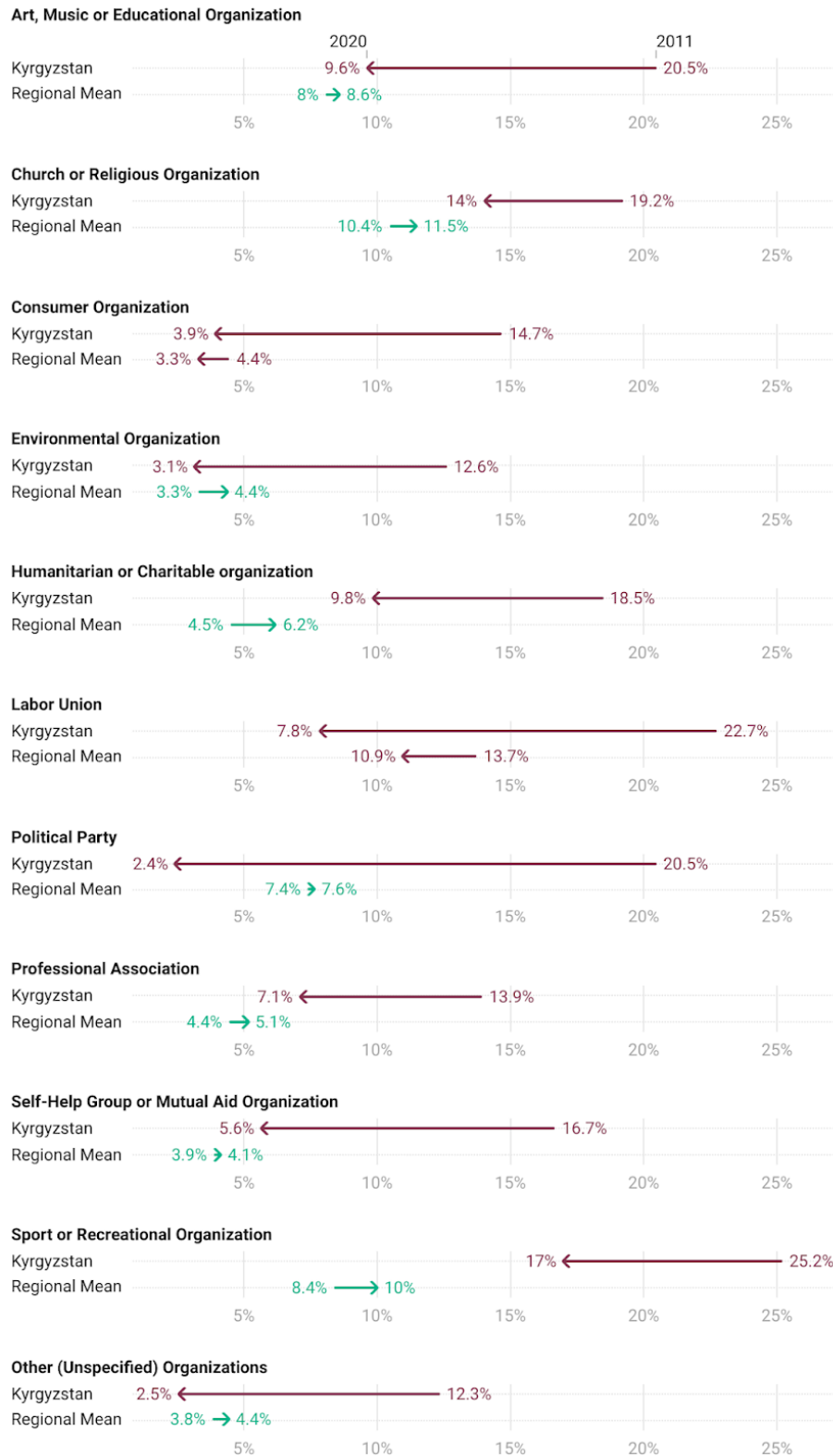
**Strike**



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Kyrgyz respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action in 2011, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Voluntary Organization Membership: Kyrgyz Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2020



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for the Kyrgyz Republic. "Other community group" is the mean of responses for the following responses: "Art, music or educational organization," "Labor Union," "Environmental organization," "Professional association," "Humanitarian or charitable organization," "Consumer organization," "Self-help group, mutual aid group," "Other organization." Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 3. Kyrgyz Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2020

Voluntary Organization	Kyrgyz Membership, 2011	Kyrgyz Membership, 2020	Percentage Point Difference
Church or Religious Organization	19.2%	14.0%	-5.2
Sport or Recreational Organization	25.2%	17.0%	-8.2
Art, Music or Educational Organization	20.5%	9.6%	-10.9
Labor Union	22.7%	7.8%	-14.9
Political Party	20.5%	2.4%	-18.1
Environmental Organization	12.6%	3.1%	-9.5
Professional Association	13.9%	7.1%	-6.9
Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	18.5%	9.8%	-8.6
Consumer Organization	14.7%	3.9%	-10.7
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	16.7%	5.6%	-11.0
Other Organization	12.3%	2.5%	-9.8

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Kyrgyz respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2011 and 2020. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 4. Kyrgyz Citizens' Confidence in Key Institutions, 2011 and 2020

Institution	Kyrgyz Confidence, 2011	Kyrgyz Confidence, 2020	Percentage Point Difference
Churches	51.3%	77.6%	+26.3
Military	63.7%	69.7%	+6.0
Press	56.1%	43.5%	-12.6

Labor Unions	53.0%	45.2%	-7.8
Police	54.9%	48.4%	-6.5
Courts	50.1%	39.1%	-11.0
Government	57.7%	52.2%	-5.5
Political Parties	50.9%	32.2%	-18.6
Parliament	55.1%	36.8%	-18.2
Civil Service	61.9%	59.9%	-2.0
Environmental Organizations	55.1%	62.0%	+6.9

*Notes: This table shows the percentage of Kyrgyz respondents that reported confidence in various categories of institutions in 2011 and 2020. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.*

## 2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll’s (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Kyrgyz citizens’ attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2021. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the Kyrgyz Republic charted the highest civic engagement scores on the index in 2014, 2018, and 2021, with corresponding lows in 2016 and 2019.

The Kyrgyz Republic surpassed its regional peers by approximately 10 points each year from 2014 to 2018—39 versus 29 points respectively (Figure 10). During this five year period, 43 percent of Kyrgyz respondents on average reportedly gave money to charity, 22 percent volunteered at an organization, and 52 percent helped a stranger.<sup>18</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic’s civic engagement scores peaked again in 2020-2021 period, consistent with broader regional trends, though likely spurred by the wave of mass protests against President Jenbenkov and perceived interference in the October 2020 elections.<sup>19</sup> By 2021,

<sup>17</sup> The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month?, Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a “yes” answer. The country values are then calculated from the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

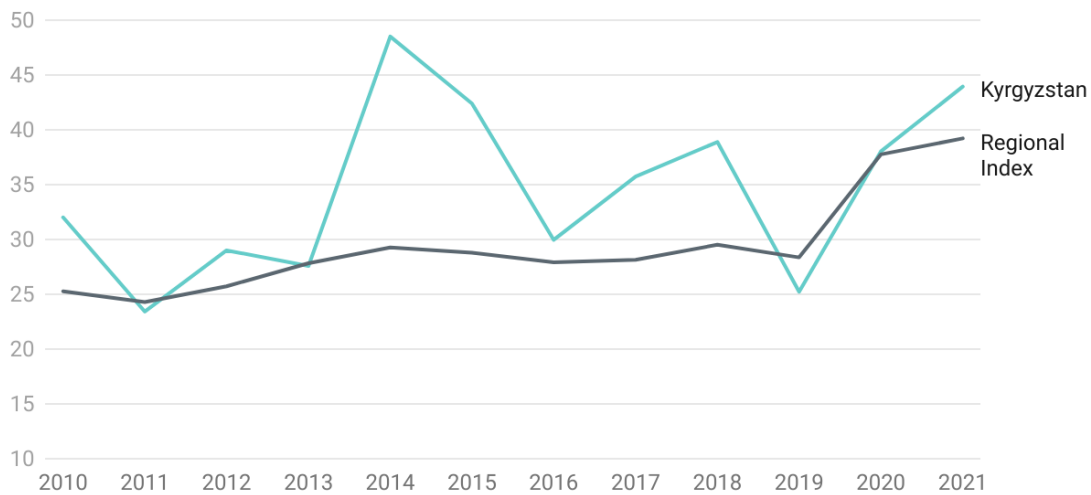
<sup>18</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic was roughly equal with the regional mean for volunteering between 2016–2018 but led the regional mean for helping strangers and donating to charity by an average of 7 and 12 percent, respectively, which bolstered its overall Civic Engagement Index scores.

<sup>19</sup> The 2020 wave of the GWP in the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted in October and November.

Kyrgyz citizens reported helping a stranger (65 percent) and donating to charity (44 percent) at much higher levels than previously, with volunteerism holding steady (23 percent).

Donating to charity and helping strangers were the two key index components driving this variability,<sup>20</sup> and appeared to be weakly and positively correlated with the overall performance of the economy.<sup>21</sup> When the economy performed better, Kyrgyz citizens may have had more money to donate to charitable causes and felt more secure in supporting their neighbors with their time and effort. The exception to this rule may have been the COVID-19 crisis which saw a sizable increase (+20 percentage points between 2019 and 2020) in Kyrgyz citizens donating to charities, even in the face of the pandemic-induced economic stress.

Figure 10. Civic Engagement Index: Kyrgyzstan versus Regional Peers



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph shows how scores for the Kyrgyz Republic varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2020, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2021.

<sup>20</sup> Charity correlates with the index overall with 0.928\*\*\* at p=0.000, helping strangers has a correlation value of 0.861\*\*\* at p=0.001, while volunteering appears to move counter to the index, 0.113 at p=1.000.

<sup>21</sup> Charity correlates with GDP (constant Kyrgyz Som) at 0.750\*, p = 0.012, while helping a stranger correlates with GDP at 0.747\*, p = 0.012.

### 3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in the Kyrgyz Republic

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in the Kyrgyz Republic (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

#### 3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Kyrgyz Civic Space

The Kremlin supported 80 known Kyrgyz civic organizations via 165 civic space-relevant projects in the Kyrgyz Republic during the period of January 2015 to August 2021. Moscow prefers to directly engage and build relationships with individual civic actors, as opposed to investing in broader-based institutional development, which accounted for less than one percent of its overtures in the Kyrgyz Republic. The country attracted the second-largest volume of Russian civic space activities, trailing only Kazakhstan in the number of projects and recipient organizations.<sup>22</sup>

In line with its strategy elsewhere, the Kremlin emphasized promoting Russian linguistic and cultural ties, outreach to Russian compatriots, and commemorations of “The Great Patriotic War” (World War II). There was a high concentration of activity in 2017 through 2019, before a slight downturn in 2020 and 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 11).

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<sup>22</sup> Together, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic received over 400 Kremlin-backed civic space projects over the past six years.

## Figure 11. Russian Projects Supporting Kyrgyz Civic Space Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

Year	CSO Support (164)	Institutional Development (1)
2015	7	0
2016	7	0
2017	37	0
2018	27	0
2019	49	0
2020	27	0
2021	10	1

Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

The Kremlin routed its engagement in the Kyrgyz Republic through 21 different channels (Figure 12), including government ministries, language and culture-focused funds, charitable foundations, territorial directorates, and the Russian Embassy in Bishkek. The stated missions of these Russian government entities tend to emphasize themes such as education and culture promotion, public diplomacy, and outreach to compatriots living abroad. However, not all of these Russian state organs were equally important. Rossotrudnichestvo<sup>23</sup>—an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a mandate to promote political and economic cooperation abroad—supplied over 95 percent of all known Kremlin-backed support (75 organizations via 157 projects).

Rossotrudnichestvo was the main conduit for projects, with other Russian organizations serving in a secondary role. Rossotrudnichestvo's two most

<sup>23</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.



common collaborators were the Embassy in Bishkek (29 joint projects) and the Consulate General in Osh (7 projects). For one-off activities, Rossotrudnichestvo also brought in organizations such as the Fund for Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, which organized a legal clinic for Russian compatriots, the Pushkin Center for Russian Language Education, and the Moscow Center for International Cooperation.

Several organizations also conducted their own projects independently including the Embassy in Bishkek, the Charitable Foundation for the Support and Development of Educational and Social Projects (PSP Fund), the Gorchakov Fund, the Committee for External Relations of St. Petersburg, and Russkiy Mir. The Embassy in Bishkek in particular is an instructive example. After years of piggybacking on projects with Rossotrudnichestvo, in January 2020 the Embassy partnered with the Bishkek Mayor's Office and the Kyrgyz Society of the Siege of Leningrad (KOBL) to host a commemoration of the liberation of Leningrad in WWII. It appears that Rossotrudnichestvo established the original connection point with KOBL, co-hosting an art festival "Blagovest" in November 2017 and two additional events in 2019. The Russian Embassy was then able to use this relationship to organize directly with KOBL in 2020.

Often on the forefront of the Kremlin's engagement in other countries, Gorchakov Fund<sup>24</sup> and Russkiy Mir<sup>25</sup> were less prolific in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Gorchakov Fund hosted one event, alongside the St. Petersburg-based Charitable Foundation for the Support and Development of Educational and Social Projects (also known as the PSP Fund). This May 2021 roundtable did not directly partner with a formal civic organization in the Kyrgyz Republic but was

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<sup>24</sup> Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs. Although the Gorchakov Fund is frequently on par with Rossotrudnichestvo in both number of civic space-relevant projects and partner organizations in other E&E countries, its engagement in the Kyrgyz Republic was far more limited.

<sup>25</sup> Formally the Russian World Foundation, founded in 2007 to promote Russian language and the notion of "Russian World" ideology through education projects. Notes: This is a separate organization than the Kara-Balta based "Russian World Compatriot Union" (also known as the Union of Russian Compatriots of Zhaiyl District and the City of Kara-Balta "Russian World"), which is independently registered with the Ministry of Justice:  
<https://chui.turmush.kg/ru/news:1246503/?from=turmush&place=oid>

open to citizens to promote Eurasian integration and migration to Russia.<sup>26</sup> This departure from the Gorchakov Fund's modus operandi of writing grants to local civic organizations to host similar roundtables may reflect the Kyrgyz government's restrictions of foreign funding for non-governmental organizations. In this respect, Rossotrudnichestvo's approach of emphasizing fuzzier contributions via in-kind (rather than grant-based) support may be more feasible.

In a departure from their standard approach of Russian language promotion elsewhere in the region,<sup>27</sup> Russkiy Mir's activities in the Kyrgyz Republic were instead related to organizing protests outside the U.S. embassy following the announcement that Richard Miles would serve as charge d'affaires, as reported by Interfax and Kloop.<sup>28</sup> The protests held in February 2015 were the result of a Russkiy Mir collaboration with the Communist Party of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Pure Opposition Movement.<sup>29</sup> The protests featured activists using racist rhetoric against then U.S. President Barack Obama and calling on the Kyrgyz Republic to "get up like Donetsk and Luhansk" in opposition to the United States.<sup>30</sup> Rossotrudnichestvo, not Russkiy Mir, took point on the vast majority of Russian language-related projects and partnering with Russian compatriots in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.gorchakovfund.ru/news/eksperty-iz-stran-tsentralnoy-azii-obsudili-voprosy-regulirovaniya-migratsionnykh-potokov/>

<sup>27</sup> Russkiy Mir typically focuses on promoting Russian language, often through opening up language centers, akin to Germany's Goethe-Instituts or China's Confucius Centers in other countries throughout the E&E region.

<sup>28</sup> Interfax, "Bishkek hosts protest over arrival of U.S. 'colored revolutions' diplomat" 27 February 2015, via Factiva.

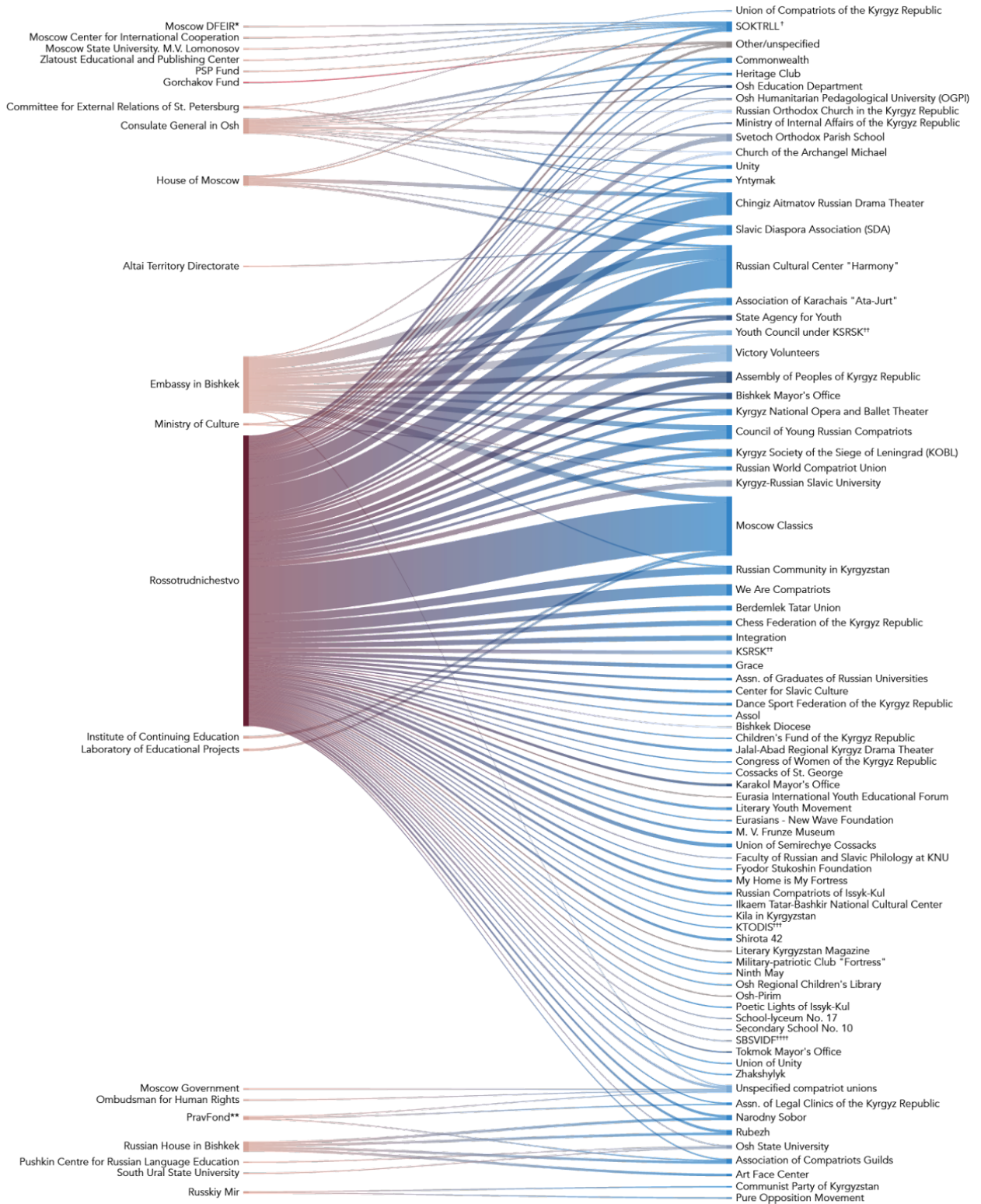
<https://kloop.kg/blog/2015/02/27/live-live-miting-russkogo-mira-protiv-novogo-diplomata-ssha-v-kyrgyzstane/>

<sup>29</sup> That said, the relative absence of Russkiy Mir at the forefront of civic space engagement in the country following this event could indicate that perhaps that the protests proved too extreme, either for Kyrgyz authorities or for the Kremlin, such that the agency had to pull back and the Kremlin instead oriented its overtures through the more moderately positioned Rossotrudnichestvo.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

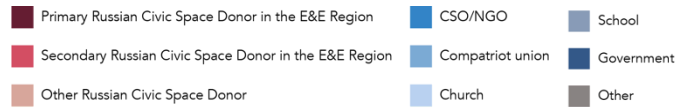
# Figure 12. Kremlin-affiliated Support to Kyrgyz Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



\*Department of Foreign Economic and International Relations of Moscow  
 \*\*Fund for Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad

<sup>†</sup>Society of Kyrgyz Teachers of Russian Language and Literature  
<sup>††</sup>Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of Kyrgyzstan  
<sup>†††</sup>Kyrgyz-Tatar Society for Friendship and Cooperation  
<sup>††††</sup>Specialized Boarding School for Visually Impaired and Deaf Children



*Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects such that thicker lines represent a larger volume of projects and thinner lines a smaller volume. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. [Color Key TK] Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Kyrgyz Civic Space

Civic society organizations (CSOs) are not the only type of civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic, but they were the most common beneficiaries of Russian state-backed overtures, named in 89 percent of identified projects (147 projects). Other non-governmental recipients of the Kremlin’s attention included churches and compatriot unions for the Russian diaspora. The profile of compatriot organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic is somewhat distinct as compared to elsewhere in the region. Kyrgyz compatriot unions are more likely to be formally registered organizations and less reliant on Kremlin funding or Embassy coordination than their regional peers. For this reason, we recorded the majority of Kyrgyz compatriot organizations as formalized CSOs, regardless of the frequent use of “compatriot union” in their names.

The majority of Russian projects were directed to member organizations of the Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots in the Kyrgyz Republic (SORSK)<sup>31</sup>—an umbrella entity for organizations focused on outreach to the broadly constructed population of “Russian compatriots.”<sup>32</sup> The SORSK serves

<sup>31</sup> The full list of 63 member organizations can be found here: <https://rwp.agency/news/858/>.

<sup>32</sup> Russia has centered compatriot unions within their soft power toolkit since 2013, with these unions funded by Russian agencies and with the Embassy coordinating and approving membership. Through these groups, the Kremlin aims to “organise and coordinate the Russian diaspora living in foreign countries to support the objectives and interests of Russian foreign policy under the direction of Russian departments... to influence decisions taken in the host countries, by guiding the Russian-speaking population, and by using influence operations inherited from the KGB, and also by simply financing various activities.” Estonian Internal Security Service, 2013. pp. 5-6 <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

as a connection point between these organizations and the Russian Embassy and Rossotrudnichestvo, helping facilitate their programs. Likely due to the government's foreign funding restrictions, the Kremlin supplies in-kind support for organizing and hosting events, rather than financing, to Kyrgyz compatriot organizations. Examples include the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of the Kyrgyz Republic (KSRSK)—the leadership of the SORSK—and the Victory Volunteers, which is a volunteer network coordinated by Russian agencies.<sup>33</sup>

Between 2015 and 2021, the two most prominent CSOs receiving Russian support were both focused on promoting Russian language and culture among compatriots. This includes the Russian Cultural Center "Harmony," founded in 2005,<sup>34</sup> and Moscow Classics, which registered as a public foundation in 2014<sup>35</sup>. Both of these organizations primarily cooperate with Rossotrudnichestvo to host public-facing events, either cultural performances or specific outreach to schoolchildren. For example, in January 2019, Rossotrudnichestvo supported the Moscow Classics foundation in organizing a quiz for high school students on the liberation of Leningrad in WWII. Russian Cultural Center "Harmony" also organized patriotic commemorations of Russian heroes, like the August 2018 concert dedicated to the 85th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's birth, co-hosted with Rossotrudnichestvo and the Chingiz Aitmatov Russian Drama Theater.

Several government bodies conducted civic space-relevant projects with the support of Russian organizations. The Assembly of Peoples of the Kyrgyz Republic partnered with the Russian Embassy in Bishkek and Rossotrudnichestvo on five separate occasions. This organization oversees all the NGOs dedicated to specific national cultures,<sup>36</sup> including the Russian Cultural Center "Harmony," Association of Karachais "Ata-Jurt," and the Slavic Diaspora Association. As a parent organization for groups of different nationalities, the Assembly of Peoples is an important partner as Russian organizations seek to access Kyrgyz civic

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<sup>33</sup> <https://ru.sputnik.kg/20220104/volontery-pobedy-slet-rabota-1060930456.html>,  
<https://rwp.agency/news/858/>

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<https://knews.kg/2012/08/01/aleksandr-stepanyuk-strana-s-naseleniem-v-5-millionov-chelovek-n-e-imeet-prava-znat-tolko-odin-yazyik/>

<sup>35</sup> The exact founding date of Moscow Classics is unclear, though registration date serves a reasonable proxy: <https://www.osoo.kg/inn/01311201410182/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Kyrgyz.html>

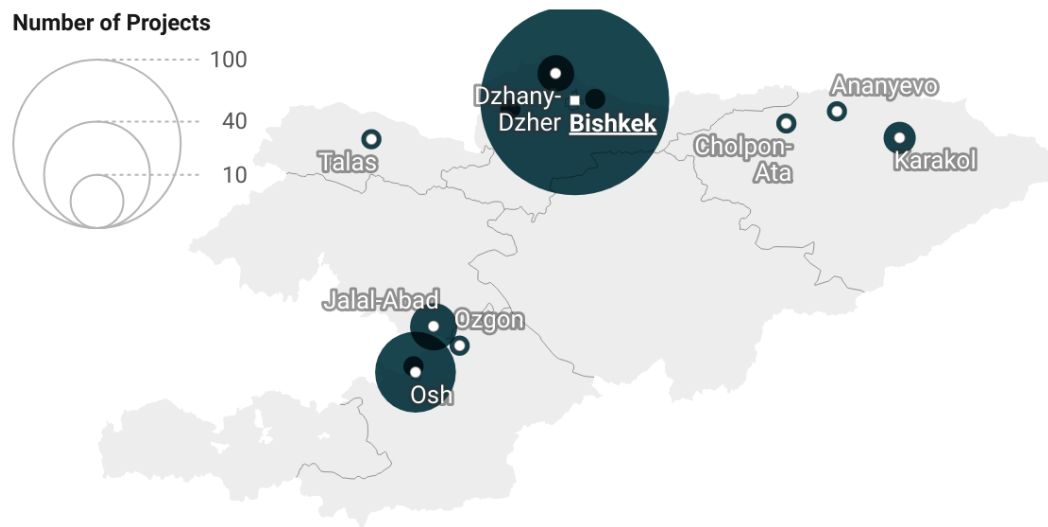
space. This is similar to the case in neighboring Kazakhstan, where regional bodies under the Assembly of Peoples are also among the top partners for Russian projects.

Rossotrudnichestvo and the Embassy frequently partnered with local Mayor's offices when coordinating events with Kyrgyz CSOs. These include the Bishkek Mayor's Office (5 projects), Karakol Mayor's Office (2 projects), and the Tokmok Mayor's Office (1 project). These projects were fairly large-scale and open to the public, and included a Maslenitsa celebration in Bishkek, a celebration of A.S. Pushkin's birthday, a Russian literary festival, and a youth vocal concert. The State Agency for Youth, Physical Culture, and Sports similarly partnered with Rossotrudnichestvo to host two intellectual game nights for youth. Finally, the Embassy in Bishkek gave \$5.2 million and additional technical assistance to the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry's Service for Drug Trafficking Combat in 2021. Since drug-related charges are a popular tool of governments across the region to harass political opposition figures and activists, it is plausible that Kyrgyz authorities could weaponize this additional capacity to constrain civic space.

Russian projects were primarily directed to the capital of Bishkek, which alone accounted for 77 percent of all Kremlin activity (127 projects). This was followed by Osh (13 percent, 22 projects), and Jalal-Abad (4 percent, 7 projects). Additional projects took place in areas close to these two metropolitan areas, including the villages of Dzhany-Dzher and Kant in the north of the country, and Nurdar in the south. The Kremlin's preference for concentrating activity in populous urban areas is consistent with its approach elsewhere; however, there appears to be less of an emphasis on specific enclaves of ethnic Russians or break-away regions in the Kyrgyz Republic, as compared to other countries with autonomous or separatist areas.

Figure 13. Locations of Russian Support to Kyrgyz Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Kyrgyz Republic. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Kyrgyz Civic Space

The vast majority of Russian state-backed projects to the Kyrgyz Republic’s civic space promoted education and culture, with several key themes within that programming. These included projects partnering with Kyrgyz CSOs for youth engagement, projects with Cossack and Tatar unions promoting their distinct cultures, and an emphasis on “The Great Patriotic War.”

Projects specifically focused on youth made up 44 percent of the total Russian engagement with Kyrgyz civic space (72 projects). Many of these events were straightforward educational quiz evenings, such as the February 2018 trivia session hosted by Rossotrudnichestvo and Moscow Classics on famous Soviet and Russian athletes to commemorate the opening of the Winter Olympics. Events also frequently emphasized traditional songs and folk tales, like Rossotrudnichestvo’s August 2017 partnership with the Chingiz Aitmatov Russian

Drama Theater to host 200 children from boarding schools for an event of “songs, dances, [and] contests for the knowledge of Russian folk tales.”<sup>37</sup>

Many youth projects, however, tended toward “military-patriotic” events. These included events for secondary school students, like the round table “Youth Against Terrorism” Rossotrudnichestvo and the Integration public fund hosted in November 2019, which had presentations by students and law enforcement on terrorism and extremism. Others commemorated WWII with discussions or role-playing games, like the event “World War II. Epilogue,” organized by the Embassy in Bishkek, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the compatriot Victory Volunteers. “World War II. Epilogue” had secondary school students revisit the events of the Nuremberg military tribunal and find the saboteurs trying to halt the process of justice.<sup>38</sup> One event, the “lessons of courage” organized by the Kyrgyz organization Narodny Sobor (also known as People’s Cathedral) and Rubezh with the support of Rossotrudnichestvo was dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the siege of Leningrad and to the memory of Major Andrei Velko, a Russian commando who died in the operation to free hostages during the Beslan school siege.<sup>39</sup>

Rossotrudnichestvo also supported various projects with Tatar and Cossack groups. The Russian center partnered with three Tatar organizations between 2015 and 2021: the Bedemlek Tatar Union, the Ilkaem Tatar-Bashkir National Cultural Center, and the Kyrgyz-Tatar Society for Friendship and Cooperation. Notably, only two of the six projects specifically focused on unique Tatar identity. The first was a June 2017 Tatar poetry competition, and the second was a July 2017 seminar on the Tatar language, both hosted at the Rossotrudnichestvo facilities. The other four projects focused on Russian culture or celebrations of “mother languages” more generally. Similarly, Rossotrudnichestvo partnered with both the Cossacks of St. George and the Union of Semirechye Cossacks to host four celebrations of traditional Cossack sports, including demonstrations of swordsmanship, wrestling, and horseback riding. Crucially, it is worth noting that Russia appears to view both the Tatars and Cossacks as a category of Russian compatriots, as all five of

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<sup>37</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20170913084155/http://kgz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/16428>

<sup>38</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200215125011/http://kgz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/55523>

<sup>39</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20210525033252/https://kgz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/86249>



Rossotrudnichestvo's above-mentioned partner organizations are also members of the Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots in the Kyrgyz Republic (SORSK).<sup>40</sup>

The theme of religion was notably absent from the vast majority of Russian projects in the Kyrgyz Republic, with only 2 percent of projects (4 projects) co-hosted with religious organizations. Three of these events occurred in Osh, in partnership with the Church of the Archangel Michael. These included a June 2017 procession with relics to commemorate martyrs, a celebration of the "Savior of the Honey" feast day in August 2018, and February 2020 Maslenitsa celebrations. Given that 90 percent of the Kyrgyz Republic is Muslim, it makes strategic sense why the Kremlin has downplayed its typical emphasis on the orthodox church to cement cultural ties in other parts of the E&E region.

Yet, the heavier focus on youth, shared history, and Cossack and Tatar identity over religion in the Kyrgyz Republic parallels the Kremlin's tactics in Belarus (which is majority Eastern Orthodox) during this same time period. One commonality between Kyrgyz Republic and Belarus is the widespread use of the Russian language. This pre-existing familiarity with the Russian language may plausibly shift the focus of Kremlin support from basic language lessons to more substantive layered activities which blend language promotion and historical lessons, like the April 2020 "Everything that was not with me, I remember ..." essay competition, which had secondary school students write on the importance of preserving the memory of WWII.<sup>41</sup>

"The Great Patriotic War" frequently features in projects targeting youth in stand-alone roundtables but also layered into concerts or language programs. WWII commemoration is an important theme of Russia's civic space activity in the Kyrgyz Republic, despite accounting for only fifteen percent of total projects (25 projects). The Kremlin's efforts to portray its enemies as contemporary Nazis creates a pretext for future Russian intervention. Celebrating the heroism of Soviet forces against Nazi Germany primes counterpart audiences to accept that anti-Kremlin forces are fascists and cultivate public sympathy for future Russian actions. Comparatively few of Russia's projects sought to foster a broader sense

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<sup>40</sup> [http://korsovet.kg/spravochnik\\_organizacii](http://korsovet.kg/spravochnik_organizacii)

<sup>41</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200429020048/https://kgz.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/66344>

of Eurasian integration, despite the Kyrgyz Republic being a full member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Indeed, one of only three projects to explicitly mention “integration”<sup>42</sup> was the March 2015 compatriot conference “The Legacy of the Great Victory and Eurasian Integration.”

## 3.2 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Kyrgyz civic actors a total of 68 times from January 2015 to March 2021. The majority of these mentions (54 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining portion (14 instances) consisted of mentions of foreign and intergovernmental civic space actors. Russian state media covered a broad swath of civic actors, mentioning 20 organizations by name as well as 14 informal groups operating in the Kyrgyz civic space. In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Kyrgyz citizens, we also analyzed 46 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with the Kyrgyz Republic: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West. In this section, we examine Russian state media coverage of domestic and external civic space actors, how this has evolved over time, and the portrayal of democratic institutions and Western powers to Kyrgyz audiences.

### 3.2.1 Russian State Media’s Characterization of Domestic Kyrgyz Civic Space Actors

Roughly half (56 percent) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in the Kyrgyz Republic’s civic space referred to specific groups by name. The 11 named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from community organizations to media outlets. Political parties are the most frequently mentioned organization type (23 mentions), followed by other community organizations (4 mentions). Political parties were largely mentioned in conjunction with the 2015 parliamentary elections, with Russian state media speculation which parties would win the election.

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<sup>42</sup> Notes: This count does not include the NGO “Integration”, which is instead focused on aiding children with disabilities.

Russian state media mentions of specific Kyrgyz civic space actors were overwhelmingly neutral (93 percent) in tone. The remaining mentions of domestic civic actors were “somewhat positive” (2 instances). Both positive mentions were for the Kyrgyz branch of the Immortal Regiment, an international organization that plans local annual Victory Day celebrations of the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 24 generalized mentions of 10 informal groups, local media, and political parties during the same period. The sentiment varied, with 46 percent of mentions receiving “extremely negative” or “somewhat negative” coverage (11 mentions), 42 percent of mentions receiving neutral coverage (10 instances), and 12 percent of mentions receiving “extremely positive” or “somewhat positive” coverage (3 instances).

The neutral generalized mentions for domestic civic actors are primarily for local media organizations and election observers. The negative mentions were mostly oriented towards protesters and other supporting organizations during the 2020 Kyrgyz protests. All six “somewhat negative” and 2 out of 5 “extremely negative” mentions referred to the opposition or to protesters during these protests. Russian state-owned media portrayed opposition supporters and protesters as aggressors, for example stating, “While clashes raged on between the protesters and the security forces, supporters of opposition parties seized the parliament building.”<sup>43</sup> This negative coverage of the 2020 Kyrgyz protests is consistent with Russian state-owned media coverage of protests in other former Soviet states, as large-scale protests against Russian-sympathetic regimes draw criticism from Moscow.

The remaining three “extremely negative” mentions were directed to “pro-U.S. NGOs” (1 extremely negative mention) and “Western-funded NGOs” (2 extremely negative mentions). Russian state-owned media covered Western-style NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic extremely negatively, in one case stating “Western-funded NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic concentrate on

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<sup>43</sup> “RPT: YEAR IN REVIEW - Tale of 3 Protests: Ex-Soviet Republics Swept by Unrest With Mixed Outcome.” Sputnik News Service. Published January 6, 2021.

pressuring politicians in the country rather than protecting human rights.”<sup>44</sup> This trend is not new, as Russian state-owned media frequently accuse liberal and opposition organizations of being instruments of Western influence. Negative coverage of the U.S. in the Kyrgyz Republic was reinforced by positive mentions of anti-U.S. movements, such as during 2015 protests when “Bishkek City Police told a TASS correspondent that demonstrators near the U.S. Embassy did not disturb public order.”<sup>45</sup> This favorable coverage of anti-U.S. protesters in the Kyrgyz Republic is a stark contrast with less favorable coverage of the 2020 Kyrgyz protests, reinforcing the Kremlin’s message that protests are only positive if they promote Russian regional interests.

When looking at the domestic civic actors in the Kyrgyz Republic as a whole, most mentions occur around elections and the 2020 Kyrgyz Protests. Political parties from the 2015 and 2020 parliamentary elections, as well as protesters and opposition supporters make up the majority of top mentions of domestic actors. Russian state media coverage of Kyrgyz elections was largely neutral in mentions of political parties and media organizations; however, protesters and opposition supporters received negative coverage for protesting election fraud in the 2020 parliamentary election.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Kyrgyzstan by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Actor	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
Ata-Meken Party	0	0	5	0	0	5
Bir Bol Party	0	0	5	0	0	5
Social Democratic Party	0	0	5	0	0	5
Kyrgyz Media	0	0	5	0	0	5
Protesters	0	3	1	1	0	5
Opposition Supporters	2	2	0	0	0	4
Onuguu-Progress Party	0	0	4	0	0	4

<sup>44</sup> “US Influencing Kyrgyz Political Climate Despite Scrapped Deal - Politician.” Sputnik News Service. Published October 1, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> “Demonstrators gather in Kyrgyz capital to protest against new U.S. charge d’affaires.” ITAR-TASS. February 27, 2015.

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.2 Russian State Media’s Characterization of External Actors in Kyrgyz Civic Space

Russian state media dedicated the remaining mentions (14 instances) to external actors in the Kyrgyz civic space. TASS and Sputnik mentioned 4 intergovernmental organizations (4 mentions) and 5 foreign organizations (6 mentions) by name, as well as 4 general foreign actors (4 mentions). Intergovernmental organizations monitoring elections in the Kyrgyz Republic and foreign media outlets reporting on the election dominated the external mentions.

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Kyrgyzstan by Sentiment

External Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
RIA Novosti	0	0	2	0	0	2

*Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Kyrgyzstan between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Only RIA Novosti makes up the top mentions, as no other external civic actors were mentioned more than once. Russian state media mentions of external civic space actors in the Kyrgyz Republic were overwhelmingly neutral (71 percent) in tone. The remaining mentions were split evenly, with 2 “somewhat negative” and 2 “somewhat positive” mentions. “U.S. aid workers” and “Foreign NGOs” received largely negative coverage and were accused of being “tools of the West’s soft power.”<sup>46</sup> The one exception to this rule appears to be when the

<sup>46</sup> “Russian Press Review - TASS World Service.” ITAR-TASS. Published February 27, 2020.

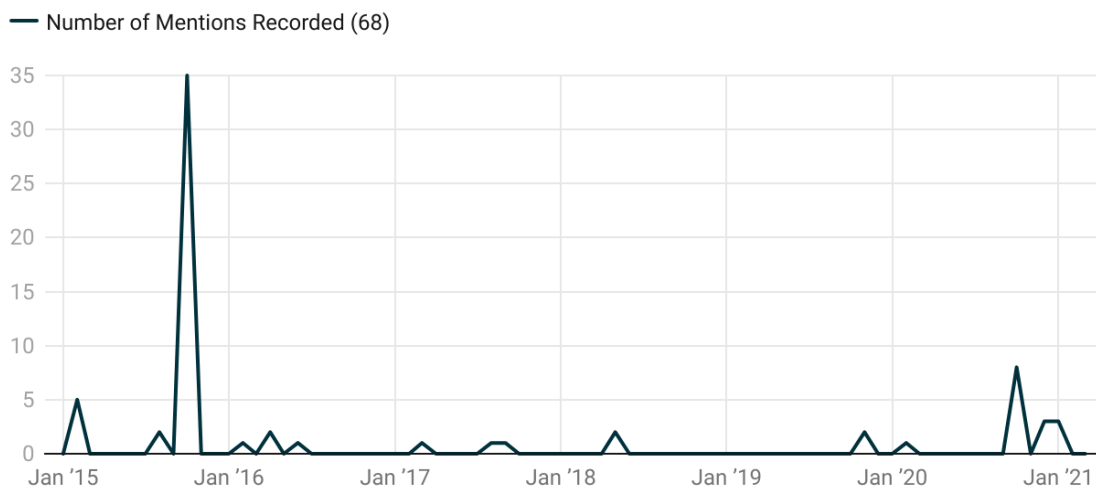
Kremlin's interests converge with those of the West, such as when Russian NGOs and media organizations were caught up with their U.S. counterparts in crackdowns by the Kyrgyz government on foreign organizations.

### 3.2.3 Russian State Media's Focus on Kyrgyz Civic Space over Time

Elsewhere in the region, Russian state media mentions of civic space actors spike around major events and tend to show up in clusters. This remains true in the Kyrgyz Republic, as the preponderance of media mentions (66 percent) concentrated around three events: the Kyrgyz parliamentary elections in October 2015 and October 2020, and the subsequent October 2020 Kyrgyz protests. The elections received overwhelmingly neutral coverage (93 percent neutral mentions) by Russian media, while the 2020 Kyrgyz protests split between neutral (53 percent) and negative coverage (47 percent). Negative coverage of the 2020 Kyrgyz protests, in contrast to the positive coverage of anti-U.S. protests in Bishkek, highlights that the Kremlin uses coverage of civic actors to fulfill a political agenda. When protests threaten Russian interests, state media covers the protesters negatively, but when Russian objectives in the Kyrgyz Republic are met by local protests, state media offers positive coverage.

Figure 14. Russian State Media Mentions of Kyrgyz Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Created with Datawrapper

*Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Kyrgyz Republic civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

### 3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Kyrgyz citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>47</sup> Between January 2015 and March 2021, two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced these keywords a total of 46 times with regard to the Kyrgyz Republic. This included: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (11 instances), the European Union (5 instances), the United States (16 instances), democracy (6 instances), and the “West” (8 instances).

Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Grand Total
NATO	0	0	11	0	11
European Union	0	1	1	3	5
United States	7	5	3	1	16
Democracy	0	2	0	4	6
West	2	6	0	0	8

*Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, Democracy, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Kyrgyzstan. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.*

Russian state media covered NATO in the Kyrgyz Republic neutrally. The mentions of NATO either included references to the former U.S. air base in

<sup>47</sup> These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

Manas, which supported NATO forces in Afghanistan and closed in 2014, or to NATO military code names for aircraft and military equipment. Comparatively, the European Union received mostly “somewhat positive” coverage, with only 1 neutral mention and 1 “somewhat negative” mention.<sup>48</sup> The Kremlin appeared to support ties between the EU and the Kyrgyz Republic, making a point of highlighting that “new President Sooronbai Jeenbekov said that Russia was the country's strategic partner, but signaled that he would seek the balanced ties with Moscow, Beijing and the European Union during his six-year term.”<sup>49</sup> Russian state media also directed “somewhat negative” coverage to the EU by implying the organization was directly involved in color revolutions in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Armenia, and that the Kyrgyz Republic was possibly a future target.<sup>50</sup>

The United States was the most mentioned keyword and received overwhelmingly negative coverage. Russian state media accused the United States of using NGOs and other democratic organizations as political tools for influence in the Kyrgyz Republic. These claims continue, with Russia going as far as to claim that “The U.S.-led anti-terror mission aimed to make terrorism in Central Asia a political tool rather than to uproot it...blaming Washington for the Tulip Revolution in the Kyrgyz Republic.”<sup>51</sup> Russian state media sought to cast the U.S. engagement in the Kyrgyz Republic as American imperialism, chiding American military missions, U.S. aid deployment, NGO funding, and other forms of support. Russian state media also accused “the West” of meddling in the Kyrgyz Republic’s civic space via a grand conspiracy to control the Kyrgyz Republic through a network of Western media and NGOs.<sup>52</sup>

The term “democracy” received 4 “somewhat positive” mentions and 2 “somewhat negative” mentions, largely depending upon the extent to which the coverage was related to U.S. involvement in the Kyrgyz Republic. For comparison, Russian state media cast a negative spin on the “U.S.’s overt

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<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Russian state media reported on the negotiations for a bilateral deal between the European Union and the Kyrgyz Republic with “somewhat positive” coverage.

<sup>49</sup> “EU, Kyrgyzstan Start Talks on New Bilateral Agreement - Statement.” Sputnik News Service. Published December 19, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> “Russian Press Review - TASS World Service.” ITAR-TASS. Published February 27, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> “US Used Afghan Anti-Terror Mission As Pretext for Regional Influence - Ex-Kyrgyz President.” Sputnik News Service. Published September 15, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> “NGOs Aim to Form Pro-Western Elites, Influence Authorities in Kyrgyzstan – Communist Party.” Sputnik News Service. Published October 1, 2015.



concern with the 'development of democracy'...that led to Bishkek's unilateral denunciation of its agreement with Washington,"<sup>53</sup> but spoke more positively about the fact that "Moscow noted that the Kyrgyz Republic's democratic development should be a priority."<sup>54</sup> As noted before, Russian state media promotes democratic norms only when the democratic norms play to Russian interests in the Kyrgyz Republic

In sum, the Kremlin uses its state-owned media to promote a narrative of Western imperialism, in an effort to undermine Kyrgyz civic space, reduce the appeal of Western democratic ideals, and isolate the country from the U.S. In both mentions of Western institutions and mentions of civic space actors, Russian state media intentionally divided the line between pro-democracy and pro-Kremlin protesters, between U.S. and non-U.S. NGOs, and between U.S. and Russian visions of democracy.

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<sup>53</sup> "US's Loss of Kyrgyzstan Means Losing Its Foothold in Central Asia - Expert." Sputnik News Service. Published August 20, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> "Russian Foreign Ministry Hopes for Swift Peaceful Solution of Crisis in Kyrgyzstan." Sputnik News Service. Published October 6, 2020.

## 4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia's appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Kyrgyz Republic and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Kyrgyz Republic and discredit voices wary of its regional ambitions.

The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in mutually reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S., as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy. Kyrgyz Republic attracted a noticeably large concentration of the Kremlin's cultural and language programming to bolster ties with Cossack and Tatar communities, and promote its role in the "Great Patriotic War." In parallel, Russian state media sought to detract from protesters and NGOs during the 2020 Kyrgyz protests by labeling them as pro-U.S. or Western-funded.

Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

## 5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on [aiddata.org](http://aiddata.org).

### 5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from two primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for the Kyrgyz Republic; and (ii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions.

Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2017 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

These survey data were collected from four sources: the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 6, the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017/2020, the Gallup World Poll, and the Central Asia Barometer Waves 2 through 4. These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the three surveys and exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 6 in the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted in Kyrgyz and Russian languages between November and December 2011 with a nationally representative sample of 1500 randomly selected adults residing in

private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>55</sup> Research team provided an estimated error rate of 2.6%. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases."<sup>56</sup> The E&E region countries included in WVS Wave 6, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question "How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries.

Regional means for the WVS Wave 6 question "Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes" were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 6 could select whether they were an "Active member," "Inactive member," or "Don't belong." The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the "Other community group" cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in "Art, music or educational organizations," "Environmental organizations," "Professional associations," "Church or other religious organizations," "Consumer organizations," "Sport or recreational associations," "Self-help or mutual aid groups," and "Other organizations."

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<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>  
<sup>56</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.70110>

The confidence indicator uses responses to an WVS Wave 6 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to WVS 6 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>57</sup>

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 7 in the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted in Kyrgyz and Russian languages between December 2019 and January 2020 with a nationally representative sample of 1200 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.<sup>58</sup> The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable “computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases.”<sup>59</sup>

The E&E region countries included in EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested you have been in politics over the last 2 years?” were first collapsed from “Very interested,” “Somewhat interested,” “Not very interested,” and “Not at all interested” into the two categories: “Interested” and “Not interested.” Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

Regional means for the EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would

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<sup>57</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

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<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>

<sup>59</sup> European Values Study (EVS). (2020). European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.70110>

never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 7 could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. We collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to an EVS Wave 5 and WVS Wave 7 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to EVS 5 and WVS 7 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.<sup>60</sup>

The Central Asia Barometer Wave 2 was conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic between October and November 2017, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. Central Asia Barometer Wave 4 was

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<sup>60</sup> For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic between November and December 2018, with 1500 random, nationally representative respondents aged 18 and up. The Central Asia Barometer trust indicator uses the question “In general, how strongly do you trust or distrust (Insert Item) media? Would you say you...” with respondents provided the following choices: “Strongly trust,” “Trust somewhat,” “Distrust somewhat,” “Strongly distrust,” “Refused,” and “Don’t Know/Not sure” for Television, Newspaper, and the Radio<sup>61</sup>.

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2009-2021, except for the countries that did not complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. In 2019, the survey was conducted with 1,080 individuals, rather than 1,000. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The survey in the Kyrgyz Republic was conducted in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek every year except for 2020, which was only conducted in Kyrgyz and Russian.

The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens’ willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn’t know who needed help? The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. The Kyrgyz Republic’s country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores. The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World

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<sup>61</sup> For full documentation of Central Asia Barometer survey waves, see: <https://ca-barometer.org/en/cab-database>

Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

### 5.3 Russian Projectized Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources.

While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). In the initial phase of inquiry, these will be recorded as such without a monetary valuation. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

### 5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from three Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS, Russia Today, and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData, during an initial round of pilot coding, was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in the Kyrgyz Republic. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news.



Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. These numbers and the sentiment distribution are subject to change as AidData refines its methodology. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.