

The eyes of the world, and notably of Central Asian states, are upon events that have unfolded in Kyrgyzstan after parliamentary elections on October 4. Editors of CABAR.asia analytical platform interviewed regional political experts on how the public reacted to events in the neighboring country and how they could possibly echo in other countries.

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Protesters take over the White House building in Bishkek on the morning of October 6. Photo: Ermek Baisalov / CABAR.asia

CABAR.asia: How do public and state view the events unfolding in Kyrgyzstan?

Baurzhan Tolegenov, political analyst (Kazakhstan):



Baurzhan Tolegenov

We do not observe prevailing judgment in public discourse. This is clearly conveyed in how people label the current social unrest in Kyrgyzstan. While the events of 2005 and 2010 were unambiguously deemed a revolution, now it ranges from a revolution to a coup. Some observers use a neutral wording - events in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, enthusiasm dwindles as the political crisis unfolds and aggravates. To many, it may appear as if Kyrgyzstan is losing its image of an “island of democracy in Central Asia” and is now perceived as the country experiencing political turmoil and crisis of statehood. But civic activists in any case support the events in Kyrgyzstan, wherein it’s more of a lesson for the elites that demonstrates growing weary of the Establishment.

Parviz Mullojanov, political scientist (Tajikistan):

The attitude is not entirely clear as even experts and political analysts did not seem to have a clear understanding of what has happened in the neighboring country. Tajik society is yet to decide how they feel about recent events. As for the Tajik government, it has adopted a wait-and-see attitude in attempts to grasp the nature of Bishkek events. Tajik authorities traditionally discourage all manifestations of “street democracy” in the post-Soviet space, but refrain from commenting on the political developments in neighboring countries.



Parviz Mullojanov

Yuriy Sarukhanyan, international relations specialist (Uzbekistan):



Yuriy Sarukhanyan

The Uzbek authorities' reaction to the events in Kyrgyzstan makes sense in Tashkent's attempts to modify its foreign policy behaviors. Past Uzbekistan would have preferred to silently wait out such events in neighboring states or regions. Now the country promptly releases official statements, at least at the Foreign Ministry level, on a given matter that is relevant to the international agenda. Speaking of the Foreign Ministry, the very next day after the riots in Bishkek, it stated "Uzbekistan is seriously concerned" and called for a peaceful settlement within a legal framework.

Another interesting thing is that Mirziyoyev, Rakhmon, and Tokayev held a phone call yesterday to discuss the events in the neighboring country. Neighbors are undoubtedly concerned about stability in Kyrgyzstan. This is essential for border security per se and prevention of escalations in border regions (notably along Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan and Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan borders). The political crisis in Kyrgyzstan also concerns neighbors in the light of the scheduled meeting of the heads of the Central Asian state in Bishkek. If the turmoil lasts, the meeting might get postponed for an indefinite period.

It is also suggestive that Tashkent, at least formally, did not support either side. For comparison, Uzbekistan was one of the first countries to congratulate Lukashenko on his controversial victory in the presidential elections. A more restrained reaction is also facilitated by Kyrgyz CEC declaring the election results null and void, and the current situation, in fact of anarchic power transition.

Will the situation in Kyrgyzstan echo your country? Are there any authorities' apprehension?

Baurzhan Tolegenov, political analyst (Kazakhstan):

Over the past few months, Kyrgyzstan has become the second country where elections have triggered protests and the ensuing political crisis. And as Kazakhstan's social and political life anticipates parliamentary campaign season, the events in Kyrgyzstan will undeniably impact both public sentiment and the state actions. The protests that once unfolded in the post-Soviet space proved that the authorities in Kazakhstan do not ignore such events; instead, they analyze and draw conclusions. They need it primarily to identify and work on their weaknesses. It is adaptive, in this respect. Besides, the events in Belarus are of greater interest to the Kazakh authorities since the countries share greater similarities of a political system. In any case, the protests in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan allow for the mobilization and

consolidation of power in Kazakhstan. Those in power, most certainly, use these events to enhance their political messages in the public consciousness. This is anticipated and instinctive. But while in 2005 and 2010 the state had a certain monopoly on the transmission and interpretation of pictures from Kyrgyzstan, now with social media that bolsters individual access to information, it appears to be difficult to control the information.

Parviz Mullojanov, political analyst (Tajikistan):

The influence can be twofold. On the one hand, a significant part of the Tajik population parallels “street democracy” to the events of the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997). This part of Tajik society, characterized by the “post-war syndrome”, having seen Bishkek events, would therefore be reminded of how undesirable the street protests are. On the other hand, for the more critical part of the public, mainly the political opposition, the events in the neighboring country can provide an additional argument in favor of the possible changes in the country “below”.

Yuriy Sarukhanyan, international relations specialist (Uzbekistan):

The situation in Kyrgyzstan is unlikely to seriously disturb the events in Uzbekistan. Do not forget that our countries have different political systems, different governance styles, different levels of civic activism, and media freedom. Besides, Kyrgyzstan has already been through 2 revolutions that did not echo in neighboring countries.

As there is nothing to worry about in the domestic arena, we need to shift our focus to the potential danger of interethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan. Radicals, as a rule, try to take advantage of political crises and, particularly, anarchy. Uzbekistan and other countries of the region vividly remember how the Kyrgyz revolution of 2010 ended. It is no coincidence that Tashkent has restricted the travel of its citizens to Kyrgyzstan. We, therefore, should expect an increased control along Uzbekistan’s border regions and, notably, in the exclaves.

It is also crucial for the Uzbek authorities to monitor public sentiment. The Uzbek people, for the most part, are rather restrained in their reaction to the events in the neighboring country. Kyrgyzstan has an established image of a revolutionary country, so the regular rallies post-elections surprised only a few. At the same time, a hypothetical escalation of interethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzstan can generate a sharp in anti-Kyrgyz sentiments. The

emphatically friendly rhetoric of Tashkent's official statements regarding Bishkek is aimed, among other things, at averting possible provocations inside Uzbekistan if the situation spirals out of control.

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