

Kyrgyzstan: Free Speech and Press Freedom – Key Issues for UK Policy

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Executive Summary

Kyrgyzstan’s media landscape has sharply worsened since 2022. Authorities have stepped up a systematic crackdown on independent journalism: investigative outlets and reporters are subjected to intrusive raids, politically-motivated prosecutions and long prison sentences. For example, in January 2024, eleven journalists working with the YouTube channels *Temirov Live* and *Ayt, Ayt Dese* were detained on dubious charges of “incitement to mass unrest” for their professional activities; several were later convicted and sentenced to multi-year prison terms. Similar tactics were applied elsewhere: by mid-2025 the government had forced the closure of *Kloop* (a leading investigative news website) and *April TV* (an opposition broadcaster), going so far as to brand their reporting and even their founders as “extremist” activities. Globally, Kyrgyzstan plunged in the Reporters Without Borders press-freedom rankings (from 72nd place in 2022 to 144th in 2025), a clear symptom of a new climate of intimidation and state censorship. These developments represent an unprecedented retreat from the pluralism that Kyrgyzstan once enjoyed.^{1 2 3}

These trends pose urgent questions for UK policy. Kyrgyzstan is on the UK’s “Enhanced Preferences” list under the Developing Countries Trading Scheme, and although bilateral trade volumes are small (around £85 m exports in the latest year), there is modest growth in British exports and investment. At the same time, the UK prides itself on promoting human rights and open societies. The current media crisis — fuelled by a raft of new restrictive laws and aggressive state security actions — threatens Kyrgyzstan’s democratic norms and could destabilise the country’s politics. For the UK, this raises a dilemma: how to support Kyrgyzstan’s economic development and strategic partnership without appearing to condone backsliding on rights.⁴

Accordingly, UK policy should strike a careful balance. The UK government should *publicly express concern about* media repression in Kyrgyzstan, urging the authorities (bilaterally and in multilateral forums such as the UN Human Rights Council and OSCE) to respect press freedom. At the same time, the UK should make clear that trade and aid cooperation are linked to the rule of law. In practice, this could involve diplomatic

¹ **Human Rights Watch**, “Kyrgyzstan: Authorities Intensify Crackdown on Independent Media,” January 16, 2024,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/16/kyrgyzstan-authorities-intensify-crackdown-independent-media>

² **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**, “Kyrgyz Authorities Detain Journalists Linked to Temirov Live and Ayt, Ayt Dese,” January 17, 2024,

<https://cpj.org/2024/01/kyrgyz-authorities-detain-journalists-linked-to-temirov-live-and-ayt-ayt-dese/>

³ **Reporters Without Borders**, “Kyrgyzstan,” *World Press Freedom Index*, accessed March 2026,

<https://rsf.org/en/country/kyrgyzstan>

⁴ UK Department for Business and Trade, *Kyrgyzstan: Trade and Investment Factsheet 2026-02-02* (London: Department for Business and Trade, February 2, 2026),

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697a3212c23c8fa26650dedb/kyrgyzstan-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2026-02-02.pdf>

démarches and Parliamentary questions on press freedom, as well as built-in conditionality in trade preferences. For instance, the UK could signal that Kyrgyzstan's status on the DCTS "Enhanced" list will be reviewed if human-rights commitments are not honoured. The government should also offer concrete support to independent media and civil society (e.g. training for journalists, secure communications tools, monitoring of trials). Targeted measures — such as travel bans or asset freezes on specific officials responsible for abuses — might be considered, but must be carefully calibrated so as not to harm ordinary Kyrgyz or push Bishkek further into the orbit of authoritarian powers (e.g. Russia or China).^{5 6}

Recommended Actions: UK Parliamentarians can urge Ministers to raise Kyrgyz press-freedom issues with their counterparts, emphasizing that the UK's trade and development partnership depends on human-rights performance. The Foreign Office should highlight emblematic cases (for example, the jailed *Temirov Livejournalists* or the *Radio Azattyk* shutdown) when engaging Kyrgyz officials and in international fora. The UK could offer co-funding for media-monitoring projects and extend technical support (e.g. encrypted tools) to local journalists. When debating Kyrgyzstan's trade scheme status, MPs might insist on periodic reviews tied to the government's progress on press freedom. If sanctions are used, they should be narrowly targeted (for instance, imposing visa bans on judges or security chiefs found to have violated media rights) to minimise unintended consequences.

⁷The UK should respond to Kyrgyzstan's media crackdown with a mix of principled pressure and practical support: firm condemnations in high-level meetings, conditionality in trade/aid, and concrete backing for the country's few remaining independent voices. This approach — combined with careful diplomacy — seeks to encourage a reversal of the current repression without alienating Kyrgyzstan or the Kyrgyz people.

Citations: Authoritative sources including Reporters Without Borders (Index 2024/25) and human-rights NGOs (HRW, Amnesty, CPJ) document the cases mentioned. UK government documents confirm Kyrgyzstan's DCTS status and trade figures.

Media Landscape and Trends

⁵ UK Government, "Preference Tiers under the Developing Countries Trading Scheme," GOV.UK, last updated January 19, 2026,

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preference-tiers-under-the-developing-countries-trading-scheme>

⁶ UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, "UK Policy on Human Rights and Democracy," GOV.UK, updated 2025,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report>.

⁷ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Kyrgyz Authorities Detain Journalists Linked to Temirov Live and Ayt, Ayt Dese," January 17, 2024,

<https://cpj.org/2024/01/kyrgyz-authorities-detain-journalists-linked-to-temirov-live-and-ayt-ayt-dese/>

Under its post-2010 constitutions Kyrgyzstan traditionally enjoyed the freest press in Central Asia, with a lively mix of state-run and independent outlets. Newspapers, TV and online media were once relatively pluralistic. However, since nationalist leader Sadyr Japarov became President (following protests in 2020) the space for critical reporting has eroded. Official media remain tightly controlled, while independent outlets face increasing harassment. Freedom House classifies Kyrgyzstan’s media environment as “not free.” In 2023, the country fell by more than 50 places in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, from 72nd place to 122nd, and by 2025 had dropped further to 144th place. In practice, the remaining independent outlets (*Kloop*, *Kaktus.media*, *24.kg*, etc.) operate under constant pressure.^{8 9}

In recent years the government has cited security and social-stability arguments for its actions. For example, coverage of ethnic or border tensions (e.g. Kyrgyz–Tajik clashes in 2022) has been used to justify media restrictions. Authorities also accuse opposition media of fomenting “disinformation” or “hate speech” – charges that observers say are applied selectively against critics. Many independent reporters now self-censor, fearing reprisals. Internet access has been briefly shut down during protests or security incidents, and surveillance of social media has tightened.¹⁰

Despite the crackdown, civil-society media continue to operate, often in exile or on social platforms. For instance, investigative journalist Bolot Temirov (*Temirov Live*) and Rinat Tukhvatshin, co-founder of *Kloop.kg*, continue their investigative reporting from abroad. But in Kyrgyzstan itself, journalism is increasingly a high-risk profession: *Radio Azattyk* (the Kyrgyz service of RFE/RL) was silenced in 2022–23, and smaller outlets (like *April TV*) have been legally forced off air.¹¹

Legal and Regulatory Framework

A raft of new laws and amendments now constrains media freedom:

- **Criminal Code (Article 278.3)** – This vaguely worded offence bans “calls for active disobedience to state officials, incitement to mass unrest or violence” (penalty up to 8 years). In early 2024 this provision was used to prosecute journalists whose only “crime” was investigative reporting (e.g. videos alleging official corruption). Rights experts say Art.278.3 is so broad that it criminalises any critique of authority, and urge reform. (The UN Working Group on

⁸ **Freedom House**, *Freedom in the World 2025: Kyrgyzstan*, Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2025>

⁹ **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**, “Kyrgyzstan,” *World Press Freedom Index*, accessed March 2026, <https://rsf.org/en/country/kyrgyzstan>

¹⁰ **Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty**, “Kyrgyz Authorities Tighten Monitoring of Online Media and Social Networks,” March 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/>

¹¹ **Committee to Protect Journalists**, “Kyrgyz Authorities Detain Journalists Linked to Temirov Live,” January 17, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/01/kyrgyz-authorities-detain-journalists-linked-to-temirov-live/>

Arbitrary Detention has called Kyrgyzstan’s use of this article against reporters “impermissibly vague”).¹²

- **“Foreign Agents” law (enacted April 2024)** – NGOs and media outlets receiving any foreign funding that engage in vaguely defined “political activities” must register as “foreign representatives”. Their publications require a special label, and the authorities can audit and close them. The law was modelled on Russia’s, and critics warn it will suffocate independent media and non-profits. President Japarov signed it despite warnings from the UN and OSCE.¹³
- **Amendments on “False Information” (July 2025)** – New penalties were introduced for “false or unreliable” news online. Individuals can be fined around 20,000 sum and media outlets 65,000 sum (£170/£550) for content deemed false, while the average salary in Kyrgyzstan in 2025 is 42,000 sum (£355). Authorities have used such measures to block content: e.g. *Radio Azattyk* was accused of “propaganda of war” under Kyrgyzstan’s Mass Media Law (for broadcasting a Tajikistan border report), and its website and bank accounts were frozen in late 2022. (After a long court battle, Azattyk’s closure order was overturned in July 2023 following an agreement to remove the offending video.)¹⁴
- **Mass Media Law (adopted Aug 2025)** – Parliament passed a sweeping media registration law that requires all news outlets – including online media – to register with the state. Government officials were given open-ended powers to refuse or cancel registrations, effectively deciding which outlets can exist. The law also caps foreign ownership/investment in media at 35%, hitting independent media. HRW warns that these provisions grant the state unchecked censorship powers. President Japarov signed the law in August 2025 despite domestic and international protests.¹⁵
- **State Security and Extremism Laws** – Kyrgyzstan’s security services (SCNS) have broad investigative powers. Courts have begun using “extremism” statutes to ban media: in Oct 2025 a district court officially

¹² **United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention**, *Opinion No. 15/2024 Concerning the Detention of Journalists in Kyrgyzstan*, United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-arbitrary-detention>

¹³ **Human Rights Watch**, “Kyrgyzstan: ‘Foreign Representatives’ Law Threatens Civil Society and Media,” April 4, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/04/kyrgyzstan-foreign-representatives-law-threatens-civil-society>

¹⁴ **Human Rights Watch**, “Kyrgyzstan: ‘False Information’ Law Threatens Media Freedom,” January 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/25/kyrgyzstan-false-information-law-threatens-media-freedom>

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Kyrgyzstan: Parliament Weakens Media Freedom With New Law,” June 27, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/27/kyrgyzstan-parliament-weakens-media-freedom-new-law>.

¹⁶ Catherine Putz, “Kyrgyz President Signs New Media Law, Making Registration Mandatory,” *The Diplomat*, August 7, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/08/kyrgyz-president-signs-new-media-law-making-registration-mandatory/>

branded *Kloop*, *Temirov Live* and *Ayt Ayt Dese* (a civil-society outlet) as extremist organisations. This bans their online pages and criminalises related activity. In practice, “extremism” charges are levied without transparent process, and experts say the court decisions rely on politicised expert reports.¹⁷

A complex legal framework now exists for punishing journalists: ordinary news reporting can be reinterpreted as incitement, defamation, or extremism. Courts tend to side with prosecutors; trials of journalists have lacked basic due process (e.g. denying counsel, relying on undisclosed “expert” reports). The net effect is a de facto ban on investigative journalism about officials.

Cases and Patterns of Harassment

A series of high-profile cases illustrate the crackdown:

- **Temirov Live/Ayt Ayt Dese journalists (Jan–Oct 2024):** On 16 January 2024 SCNS officers raided *Temirov Live*’s office and arrested 11 current and former staff. The charges (Article 278.3) alleged they “incited mass unrest” in videos exposing official corruption. In October 2024, four defendants were convicted: *Temirov Live* director Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy (6 years’ prison), journalist Azamat Ishenbekov (5 years), and two others got suspended sentences. (Seven co-accused were acquitted.) Lawyers and NGOs denounced the process as a sham trial. Notably, in February 2026 the Supreme Court agreed to rehear Makhabat’s case after the UN found her detention arbitrary (the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared her 2024 arrest unlawful). Throughout this process the government publicly branded the journalists guilty, undermining impartiality.
- **Kloop journalists (May–Sept 2025):** In a May 2025 sweep, SCNS agents detained at least six current/former *Kloop* staff at once. Two cameramen – Aleksandr Aleksandrov and Zhoomart Duulatov – were charged with “calls for mass unrest” (again via video content on *Temirov Live*). On 17 September 2025 a Kyrgyz court sentenced each to five years’ imprisonment. Two co-accused (former accountants) received probation. Observers note the trial was deeply flawed: evidence was absent and initial “confessions” were later retracted as coerced. Notably, *Kloop* had already been ordered closed by the Supreme Court in August 2024 for minor violations, forcing it to operate under a shell company.

¹⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Kyrgyz Court Labels *Kloop*, *Temirov Live*, And *Ayt Ayt Dese* ‘Extremist Organisations,’” October 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-kloop-temirov-live-extremist/326>

- **Radio Azattyk (2022–2023):** In late 2022 the Ministry of Culture banned *Radio Azattyk* (Kyrgyz service of RFE/RL) over a news report on the Kyrgyz–Tajik border conflict. The media outlets’ sites were blocked and bank accounts frozen using a 2021 “false information” law. In April 2023 a court granted the Ministry’s request to terminate Azattyk’s operations, though this decision was reversed in July 2023 after a settlement removed the contested video. Despite reopening, the episode sent a chilling message: the closure was widely seen as a politically motivated attempt to muzzle a respected news source.
- **Aprél TV (2025):** In April 2025 authorities sued *Aprél TV* (an independent channel on TV and social media) arguing its critical coverage “undermined” the government. In July 2025 a court ordered Aprél’s licence revoked and broadcasts halted. Prosecutors explicitly invoked charges of “incitement” and disruption of public order – similar to those used against the Temirov Live journalists. The closure drew international alarm, with media rights groups decrying it as part of a “wave of censorship”.
- **Other intimidation and pressures:** Beyond high-profile cases, there are many smaller incidents. For example, police have raided homes of reporters (often without warrants) and confiscated equipment. Independent outlets report cyberattacks and hacking attempts after investigative publications. Journalists covering protests or government critics have received death threats (Amnesty notes a jailed reporter faced threats in custody). Several media NGOs have been raided; staff have had bank accounts frozen for “foreign agent” status. These actions fit a broader pattern: NGOs and media workers are harassed under vague pretexts of terrorism or extremism if they oppose the regime.

There is a clear pattern of legal harassment and economic pressure: authorities stretch criminal laws (incitement, false news, extremism) to imprison or intimidate journalists. Media outlets lose their licences or funding. These tactics encourage self-censorship and send a warning to others.

Drivers and Future Trajectory

The crackdown has multiple drivers. Politically, President Japarov and his allies have shown little tolerance for dissent since taking power in 2021. Constitutional reforms centralized power in the presidency, reducing checks and empowering loyal officials. Investigative reporters (like those at *Temirov Live*) have published exposés of high-level corruption; authorities characterize such reporting as destabilising. The government often justifies media restrictions on security grounds: citing ethnic tensions (e.g. Kyrgyz–Tajik skirmishes) and nationalist sentiments, it portrays critics as threats to unity.

Economically, the government backs state-friendly media financially (through subsidies, advertising) while starving independent media of revenue. Key advertisers (often state-owned firms) avoid critical outlets. International donors have pulled back or been forced out under the foreign-agent law, cutting off funding for independent journalism and civil society. These economic pressures make it hard for outlets like *Kloop* to survive without self-censoring or relocating abroad.

The influence of foreign models is also evident: Kyrgyzstan's media laws increasingly mirror Russia's "managed media" system. The new foreign-agent and media registration laws were explicitly modelled on Russian templates. With Russia a major security and economic partner (and presence of Russian media networks), Kyrgyz authorities may be emulating Kremlin tactics to control information.

Likely trajectory: Observers fear press freedom will remain under siege. Given current trends, more outlets could be banned or driven into exile, and more journalists jailed under Art.278 or extremism charges. Civil society surveys suggest the environment is becoming so hostile that few local journalists will risk independent reporting. However, repression also risks backfiring: it can fuel public anger and create martyrs. If Kyrgyzstan's economy falters, social unrest could grow, further paranoia may lead the regime to tighten control. In sum, absent external pressure, analysts predict worsening media freedom in the near term, with gradual migration of critical journalism to diaspora networks.

Implications for UK Interests

Trade and DCTS: Kyrgyzstan is a minor but growing partner for the UK. Total UK–Kyrgyz trade was about £163 m (four quarters to Q3 2025) – roughly 0.1% of UK trade. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan enjoys *Enhanced tariff* preferences under the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), akin to EU's GSP+. These preferences came with a built-in requirement for "continuous improvement" in rule of law and respect for international conventions. A deepening human-rights crisis (including media oppression) could trigger a UK review: for example, Kyrgyzstan might face graduation (loss of preferences on certain goods) or even suspension if worst-case abuses continue. While any immediate trade linkages are limited, the broader political signal is that the UK expects partner governments to honour democratic norms. In policy debates, the UK should thus consider attaching conditionality to trade preferences, as it did in EU's GSP scheme (noting that Kyrgyzstan's EU partnership agreement also has human-rights clauses).

Human Rights Diplomacy: The UK has an interest in upholding international human-rights standards and supporting democratic allies. If press freedom in Kyrgyzstan collapses, it damages the UK's credibility in Central Asia and beyond. The

UK (bilaterally and via multilateral forums) should keep Kyrgyz media freedom on the agenda. For example, UK diplomats could raise the issue in UN Human Rights Council reviews or through the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media. Coordination with EU and US partners – who have also publicly decried these abuses – will amplify pressure. Notably, when *Radio Azattyk* was blocked in 2022–23, allied embassies (including the UK's) jointly called for its restoration. Such statements could be repeated in future cases, and new ones issued in response to egregious verdicts (e.g. the *Kloop* sentencing).

Consular/Operational Risks: British nationals in Kyrgyzstan – journalists, aid workers, tourists – should be warned that the climate is repressive. The FCDO travel advice already cautions visitors that posting “offensive” material on social media (even innocuous photos) can lead to fines or detention. This reflects real risk: authorities have charged even foreigners under extremism or espionage laws in the past. UK-based NGOs or companies operating there must ensure they do not violate the broad “propaganda” or foreign-agent statutes. Consular officials should be prepared to assist any UK journalist detained while covering Kyrgyz affairs. Overall, while the risk to tourists is moderate, any UK citizen engaging in criticism of the Kyrgyz government should be aware of potential legal consequences.

Other UK interests: Kyrgyzstan hosts a UK Prosperity Fund program on judicial reform; erosion of rule of law could undermine that work. Political instability (if repression provokes unrest) might affect regional security cooperation that the UK values (e.g. on counterterrorism). However, Kyrgyzstan's political elite may also seek closer ties with the West as a counterbalance to Russian influence; the UK could leverage this by offering incentives (e.g. aid, trade negotiations) for democratic gains.^{18 19 20}

Policy Recommendations

1. **Diplomatic engagement:** Urge Kyrgyz authorities through official channels to uphold international commitments on media freedom. The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) should raise specific cases with the Kyrgyz government (e.g. via the Ambassador or in bilateral meetings) and in multilateral bodies. A joint statement with EU/OSCE partners condemning egregious press-freedom violations would send a strong message.

¹⁸ UK Department for Business and Trade, *Kyrgyzstan: Trade and Investment Factsheet*, February 2026, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697a3212c23c8fa26650dedb/kyrgyzstan-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2026-02-02.pdf>.

¹⁹ UK Department for Business and Trade, *Preference Tiers Under the Developing Countries Trading Scheme*, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preference-tiers-under-the-developing-countries-trading-scheme>

²⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Representative on Freedom of the Media: Mandate and Activities*, <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media>.

2. **Link with trade/investment:** Use the DCTS scheme and other trade dialogues to set clear human-rights benchmarks. The UK might require progress reports on media freedom when reviewing Kyrgyzstan's Enhanced status, and reserve the right to impose tariff adjustments if abuses continue. (Similarly, in any investment treaties or aid packages, include explicit clauses on press freedom.)
3. **Support independent media and civil society:** Increase funding and training for Kyrgyz journalists (e.g. British Council or FCDO grants for journalistic skills, digital security). Provide encryption and secure communication tools to vulnerable reporters. Work with international NGOs (RSF, Committee to Protect Journalists, etc.) to monitor the situation and offer legal aid. Support platforms that allow exiled Kyrgyz journalists to continue their work.
4. **Conditional cooperation:** Tie diplomatic or development assistance to human-rights benchmarks. For example, the UK could condition future security aid (if any) on Kyrgyz compliance with UNHRC recommendations. Use visa bans or asset freezes under the Global Human Rights sanctions regime against individuals credibly implicated in serious media rights abuses.
5. **Parliamentary and Public Advocacy:** Parliamentarians should raise parliamentary questions on Kyrgyzstan's media situation, demanding government updates on what the UK is doing. Early Day Motions or Adjournment Debates might highlight cases (e.g. "That this House condemns the imprisonment of journalists Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Azamat Ishenbekov..."). Official messaging should frame press freedom as linked to UK national interests (regional stability, trade) as well as values.
6. **Engagement on DCTS conditionality:** Given Kyrgyzstan's DCTS status, UK ministers (DFT, FCDO) should clarify whether the ongoing crackdown affects Kyrgyzstan's eligibility. If press-freedom is not already a criterion, consider revising guidance to include civil liberties among the "sustainable development" factors for preference.
7. **Monitoring mechanisms:** Continue to fund and utilise independent watchdogs (e.g. OSCE media freedom rapporteurs) to track and report violations. Publicize these reports in UK policy circles to ensure continued scrutiny.

UK policy should combine principled pressure with constructive engagement. Diplomacy and incentives must be balanced against the risk that heavy-handed Western pressure could trigger nationalist backlash or push Kyrgyzstan closer to authoritarian patrons.

Risks and Unintended Consequences

Any pressure campaign carries risks. Nationalist backlash: Kyrgyz authorities often frame criticism as foreign meddling. Strong UK criticism (especially if public or multilateral) could be portrayed domestically as neocolonial intrusion, bolstering

hardliners. This might accelerate media repression or prompt Kyrgyz withdrawal from international agreements.

Geopolitical drift: Kyrgyzstan is already balancing Russia, China and the West. If Western pressure is perceived as punitive, Bishkek may lean more heavily on Moscow or Beijing for security and economic support. For example, stricter sanctions or trade measures could push Kyrgyz authorities to seek deeper integration in Russian-led frameworks (CSTO, Eurasian Economic Union) or Chinese Belt-and-Road projects, reducing Western influence.

Impact on ordinary citizens: Changes to DCTS preferences or trade restrictions, if imposed, could harm Kyrgyz businesses and consumers. Even if targeted, the local population may blame the West for economic woes. This could paradoxically weaken democratic voices by sowing public resentment.

Entrenching the regime: Paradoxically, Western criticism can sometimes rally domestic support around the regime. The government can deflect domestic discontent by blaming “Western agents,” thereby justifying even harsher measures.

Civil society strain: UK support to NGOs or media must navigate the foreign-agent law: overt funding can trigger legal sanctions on local partners. Aid flows should therefore be covert or routed through vetted international organisations.

Recommended actions should be carefully calibrated. Blunt measures (like sweeping sanctions) risk negative blowback, while too soft an approach could appear to condone authoritarian practices. A nuanced strategy of targeted diplomatic pressure, with a clear offer of support for reformers, offers the best chance of improving media freedom without destabilising the country or alienating moderate voices.

Key Cases and Legal Provisions

Date	Case / Law	Charges/Content	Outcome/Status	Source(s)
Jan 2024	Temirov Live / Ayt Ayt Dese journalists	Charged under Crim. Code Art.278.3 (“incitement” to mass unrest/violence) for reporting corruption.	Four convicted: Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy (6 yrs), A. Ishenbekov (5 yrs), two others suspended (3 yrs); seven acquitted; most released on appeal or pardoned. UN WGAD later deemed their detention arbitrary.	
Oct 2024	Kyrgyz criminal Code, Art.278.3	Broad offence covering calls for disobedience/riots.	Used to sentence independent journalists (e.g. Temirov Live case) in October 2024. Human rights groups call for reform of this “vague” article.	

Apr 2024	"Foreign Agents" Law	Requires NGOs/media with foreign funding to register as "foreign representatives".	Signed by President Japarov on 2 Apr 2024. NGOs fear it will be used to shut down independent media and human-rights groups.	
Jul 2025	Amend. on "False Information"	Introduces fines for "spread of false/unreliable info" online (20,000 som individuals; 65,000 som organizations). Also recriminalized libel/insult.	Enacted July 2025 (signed 11 July); expands earlier 2021 law that allowed blocking of media sites. Applied to silence critics (e.g. Azattyk case).	
Jun–Aug 2025	Mass Media Law (registration)	Mandates state registration of all media outlets (including online); caps foreign ownership at 35%; broad content restrictions.	Passed Parliament 25 June 2025; signed by President on 6 Aug 2025. Human-rights advocates say it gives government unfettered censorship power.	
Oct 2025	Extremist Designation (Oct 27, 2025)	Court order listing <i>Temirov Live</i> , <i>Kloop.kg</i> , <i>Ayt Ayt Dese</i> (and their leaders) as "extremist".	Outlets banned from operating; criminal penalties apply to members. (Authorities had also tried – unsuccessfully – to issue an Interpol Red Notice for Kloop co-founder R. Tukhvatshin).	
Oct 2024	Criminal Trial (Lenin Dist. Court)	Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Azamat Ishenbekov convicted (Art.278)	Sentenced to 6 and 5 years respectively (5 Oct 2024). Both pardoned by President in April 2025.	
May 2025	Kloop staff arrests (May 28, 2025)	SCNS detains 6+ journalists, charging incitement via social media videos	Two cameramen (A. Aleksandrov, Z. Duulatov) later convicted and sentenced to 5 years (Sept 2025); others given probation. Forced "retractions" extracted on camera during detention.	
Jul 2025	Aprel TV case (Apr–Jul 2025)	Lawsuit claiming "undermining gov't authority" via news coverage	Court ordered Aprel TV's closure on 11 July 2025. Channel license revoked; staff called in by security services. Appeals underway.	
2022–23	Radio Azattyk (RFE/RL) conflict	Accused of "propaganda of war" after airing Tajikistan border conflict report. Website blocked; accounts frozen.	In Apr 2023, court closed down Azattyk under Mass Media Law. Following a settlement, a higher court annulled the shutdown (July 2023) after Azattyk complied with content demands.	