

# Kyrgyz Leader Seeks Answer In Bridging Regional Divide

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OSH, Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyzstan's new leader sought to extend his government's reach in the turbulent state on Monday following an election central to deciding who will run Osh, the country's most ethnically divided city.

President Almazbek Atambayev, who took office in December, has sought to bridge the divide with southern regions, where people are traditionally wary of the central government in Bishkek.

In an election to the Osh city council on Sunday, his southern opponents united behind the powerful incumbent mayor, whose party won 47 percent of votes. Short of a majority, they will now need to negotiate with Bishkek.

"The authorities have begun to have some success and might bring the south under control," political analyst Toktogul Kakchikeyev said. "The patience of Atambayev's administration has helped to reach a level of agreement and cooperation."

Osh was the center of ethnic clashes in June 2010, when nearly 500 people were killed and hundreds of thousands fled their homes.

Thousands of protesters rallied in Osh days before the vote in a show of strength designed to ward off attempts by Bishkek to exert more control over the south.

Adakhan Madumarov and Kamchybek Tashiyev, defeated in the last presidential election, have joined forces to unite the southern vote. Both supported the party of Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov in the election.

"Myrzakmatov's party won 47 percent," Kakchikeyev said. "But others won 53 percent, meaning that he must be more circumspect and act with caution toward other parties."

In a sign of simmering tensions, fighting broke out overnight in another town where local polls were held on Sunday.

After polls closed in Karakol, a town at the eastern end of Lake Issyk-Kul, about 80 people armed with sticks and stones broke into the city hall and smashed windows, police said.

Police said voters were angry at the apparent removal of names from the electoral roll and the presence of voters from other regions.

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