

## Voters lacked a genuine choice in Uzbekistan's technically well-prepared parliamentary elections

TASHKENT, 28 October 2024 – Uzbekistan's 27 October parliamentary elections took place amid ongoing reforms, including amendments to the Constitution, but the political environment remained constrained, not providing voters with a genuine choice, international observers said in a [preliminary statement](#) released today. Despite the ongoing reforms, fundamental freedoms remain disproportionately limited both by legislation and in practice, the statement says.

"These elections were held under a new mixed electoral system, reflecting significant constitutional amendments and a revised electoral code as part of Uzbekistan's ongoing reform efforts," said Mr. Azay Guliyev, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. "While these reforms represent progress in enhancing human rights provisions, significant challenges remain in the realization of fundamental freedoms, particularly the rights to association, peaceful assembly and freedom of expression."

While the election-related laws have gradually evolved and the elections were technically well-prepared, significant challenges in meeting international standards persist in such areas as political party registration, the right to stand, campaign finance transparency, citizen observation, and the publication of polling station results.

All five registered political parties were able to campaign freely and with legally enforced equal conditions, but their campaigns were low-key and devoid of real challenges to the policies of the ruling party or to each other. Media coverage was limited by restrictions on free expression, resulting in minimal access for voters to diverse viewpoints. Positively, women were well represented among candidates and in election administration.

"In a landscape where the five registered parties share a common support for government policies, voters were not presented with genuine alternatives. This further highlights a need to foster a more dynamic and competitive political environment to truly represent citizens' voices," said Sargis Khandanyan, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "At the same time, the increased gender quota for parliamentary candidates marks a positive development. We are hopeful that this will further boost women's participation in public and political life in line with OSCE commitments."

The changes to election-related laws include a revised electoral system, new party list registration rules, modified rules on election management bodies, and an increased gender quota, but the relatively short timeframe for implementing these changes raised questions about compliance with international good practices.

The country's media-related laws contain broad and insufficiently defined provisions, including on religious extremism, disturbances of public order and false information and, as such, do not provide legal clarity and unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression. Defamation and insult remain criminalized, while imprisonment is still foreseen for public slander and insulting the president. In addition, undue external interference on media editorial freedom and a limited advertising market stifle open discussion and independent journalism, and result in reported widespread self-censorship. State-owned broadcast and print media provided free airtime and space for contestants in line with

the law. Private television channels organized election debates, but provided only limited news coverage and virtually no analysis of the campaign.

Election preparations at all levels were administered efficiently, and the Central Election Commission held regular live-streamed sessions and swiftly published its decisions, contributing to transparency. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, the independence of lower-level election commissions remained negatively affected by the prominent role of *Mahallas*, which are local self-governing bodies closely aligned with state and local administration in various aspects of the electoral process.

Election day was calm and orderly, but marred by numerous cases of identified violations and malfeasance, as well as procedural and technical problems. Important safeguards were repeatedly disregarded during voting, counting and tabulation, challenging the integrity of the process and undermining transparency.

“Uzbekistan’s authorities have partially addressed some prior ODIHR recommendations through recent legislative changes,” said Douglas Wake, Head of the Election Observation Mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Nevertheless, given the problems that our observers identified in yesterday’s voting, counting and tabulation, much more must be done to enhance transparency and confidence in the officially announced turnout and results. ODIHR looks forward to further co-operation with Uzbekistan’s authorities, including on the recommendations that will come in our final report.”

A total of 875 candidates were registered from the five registered political parties. The laws retain burdensome requirements for party registration, as well as broad legal grounds for denying registration and the suspension of party activities. The legal framework also does not allow for independent candidates, thus limiting pluralism and political competition.

For these elections, the gender quota for women was increased from 30 to 40 per cent. Women hold 47 of the 150 seats in the outgoing Legislative Chamber and comprised 45 per cent of candidates. Furthermore, the Speaker of the Senate, one of seven Deputy Speakers of the Legislative Chamber, and one of four Deputy Prime Ministers are women. Despite ongoing efforts to increase women’s participation in public and political life, however, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions. Only two out of 27 ministers and three out of 12 members of the Supreme Judicial Council are women. All regional governors (*Hokims*) are men.

The regulations for campaign finance lack clarity and do not facilitate transparency, not providing for effective oversight and public scrutiny. Funding for campaign purposes is allocated exclusively from the state budget, and only to registered political parties with an approved list of candidates.

International organizations, political parties, *Mahallas* and accredited media are entitled to observe elections. The CEC registered 851 international observers. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, the legislation does not contain provisions for citizen election observers.

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