



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

**Election FAQs: Kazakhstan**  
*Parliamentary and Local Elections*  
*March 19, 2023*

Europe & Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Election Snapshot

- Election Day: March 19, 2023
- Registered voters: 12,032,550
- Polling stations: 10,223
- Seats
  - 98 in the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*)
  - 3,749 on local councils (*maslikhats*)
- Candidate lists: Seven parties are submitting candidate lists for seats in the *Majilis*
- Candidates
  - 281 candidates are running for the *Majilis* on party lists
  - 435 candidates are running for the *Majilis* in single-member constituencies
- Campaign expenditure and donation limits
  - No individual donation cap
  - Total fundraising limited to KZT 425 million from private sources and KZT 212.5 million from party sources.
- Domestic and international observers
  - 662 from international organizations
  - 131 from foreign states
  - 211 domestic organizations

## When is Election Day?

Snap elections for the Kazakhstan lower house of the federal Parliament (*Majilis*) and local councils (*maslikhats*) will be held March 19, 2023 (the most recent Senate election took place on January 14, 2023). Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time.

## Why are this year's snap legislative elections important?

President Kassym-Jomart Toqaev announced in a September 2022 address that he would call for snap legislative elections in 2023.<sup>1</sup> On January 19, Toqaev formally dismissed the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*) and set March 19 as Election Day.<sup>2</sup> This year's *Majilis* elections will be the first held since the mass protests that rocked Kazakhstan throughout January 2022 and the reforms championed by Toqaev and approved by voters in a June 5, 2022, national referendum. Most significantly, the reforms curtailed former President Nursultan Nazarbayev's continued influence over Kazakh politics, restricted President Toqaev's ability to override the decisions of lower executive offices, and shifted legislative power from the upper house of Parliament—the Senate—to the *Majilis*. The reforms also altered the electoral structure of the *Majilis*, with roughly one-third of its members to be elected from single-member districts rather than from party lists. These changes were met with guarded optimism from the international community, which cautiously recognized the reforms as a positive step. However, analysts and journalists within and

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<sup>1</sup> [State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Toqaev](#). September 1, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> ["Kazakh president calls early parliamentary election for March."](#) Reuters. January 19, 2023.

outside Kazakhstan look towards this year's elections with some skepticism that the reforms will result in meaningful progress toward a more open, democratic Kazakhstan.

The 2023 snap legislative elections will test President Toqaev's structural and political reforms in the aftermath of last year's referendum and presidential election, and the extent to which they will facilitate the creation of a "New Kazakhstan" following the three-decade rule of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev. This year's *Majilis* and local council (*maslikhat*) elections will be an important indicator of Kazakhstan's political trajectory over the next several years in terms of political pluralism and public engagement in the decision-making process.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

A total of 3,749 deputies of local councils (*maslikhats*) will be elected—2,130 in regional councils and 617 in city councils.<sup>3</sup> In the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*), 98 deputies will be elected under the mixed electoral system that was introduced following the 2022 constitutional referendum.<sup>4</sup> Sixty-nine of the 98 deputies will be elected from party lists and 29 as candidates of single-member constituencies.<sup>5</sup> A total of 609 candidates are running in single-member constituencies, with 84 nominated by parties and public associations and 525 self-nominated candidates.<sup>6</sup>

As of February 24, 281 candidates from seven registered political parties were running for seats in the *Majilis* on party lists.<sup>7</sup> Seven parties submitted candidate lists for the *Majilis* elections; the candidates, their parties, and the number of seats each won in the 2021 parliamentary elections are shown below.

- Amanat, formerly Nur Otan, Kazakhstan's ruling party (76 seats)
- Aq Jol Democratic Party (12 seats)
- People's Party of Kazakhstan (10 seats)
- People's Democratic Patriotic Party, or *Auyl* (0 seats)
- All-National Social Democratic Party (boycotted the 2021 elections)
- Respublica (a new party that did not participate in the 2021 elections)
- Green Party of Kazakhstan, or *Baytaq* (a new party that did not participate in the 2021 elections)

Of the parties running candidates in the upcoming elections, only the Nationwide Social Democratic Party has declared opposition to the ruling government.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ["On January 21, a meeting of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan was held."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. January 21, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> 1995 Constitutional Law on Elections, Article 9, as amended by popular referendum in 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ["On the results of nomination of candidates and accreditation of international observers."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. February 9, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> ["On the results of the registration of party lists, the draw procedure, accreditation of foreign observers and pre-election campaigning."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. February 18, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32252094.html>

## What is the electoral system?

Kazakhstan is a presidential republic, with the president elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The president nominates the prime minister, who heads the government and is the second-highest ranking official in the country. Parliament must confirm the prime minister. Parliament consists of the lower house (*Majilis*) and the Senate. The 98 members of the *Majilis* are elected to five-year terms; the last election took place in 2021. In comparison, the 50 members of the Senate are elected to six-year terms via secret ballot by delegates from the 17 provinces and three national cities. The most recent Senate election took place January 14, 2023.

This will be Kazakhstan's first parliamentary election following the introduction of a mixed party list and single-member electoral system for the lower house of Parliament. Under this system, 69 of the 98 members of the *Majilis* will be elected proportionally based on party lists, with the remaining 29 elected directly from single-member constituencies.

## What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Kazakhstan's electoral system is organized and conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the 1995 Constitutional Law on Elections, often referred to as the Election Law. The two laws provide the overall framework for elections. A number of other laws—including the Law on Communications, the Law on Peaceful Assemblies, and the Law on Political Parties—regulate specific aspects of Kazakhstani elections. The country's Central Election Commission is responsible for implementing those laws and for issuing regulations to supplement them as needed.

The Election Law, as Kazakhstan's most fundamental legal framework for elections, has been amended every year since 2017. Recent amendments include the introduction of quotas in candidate party lists for marginalized communities and measures to make polling stations more accessible to voters with disabilities.

## Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

To run for a seat in the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*), a candidate must be a citizen at least 25 years of age who has lived in Kazakhstan for 10 years prior to Election Day.<sup>9</sup> Candidates may qualify in one of three ways:

- A party may nominate them to run either on a party list or for a single-seat constituency;
- A qualifying public association may nominate them to run for a single-seat constituency;
- or
- They may self-nominate to run for a single-seat constituency.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 41.

<sup>10</sup> ["On the meeting of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. January 20, 2023.

By comparison, a candidate running for a local council (*maslikhat*) must be at least 20 years old, with no time-of-residency requirement. Candidates for *maslikhat* seats may self-nominate or be nominated by a political party.<sup>11</sup>

Election campaigning began formally began at 6 p.m. on February 18 and will continue until midnight on the night before March 18. The day before the election is a day of silence during which no campaigning will take place.

## **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?**

A quota specifies that 30 percent of candidates running on party lists for the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*) collectively must be women, youth (under age 29), and persons with disabilities.<sup>12</sup> With the registration of candidates having closed on February 18, representation of those three groups on party lists stands at 38 percent; however, women comprise only 28.5 percent of party list candidates.<sup>13</sup> Notably, just 20 percent of registered candidates for single-member constituencies are women, and those seats have no gender quota.

## **What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?**

Kazakhstan's campaign finance regulations are enshrined mainly in the 1995 Election Law and the Law on Political Parties. As described in those laws, parties may fund their campaign activities by private donations of up to KZT 425 million (approximately \$946,057) or funds allocated by a nominating public association up to KZT 212.5 million (approximately \$474,122).<sup>14</sup> The Central Election Commission (CEC) opens dedicated bank accounts for party campaign income and expenditures upon the registration of party lists. The CEC publishes campaign incomes and itemized expenditures as required by August 2015 amendments to the CEC charter, although it does not disclose the identities of donors or the amounts each gives. There is no cap on individual donations to parties, but any donations that exceed the private or public association limits must be returned to the donors.

The 1995 Election Law permits "voluntary donations by citizens and organizations of the Republic."<sup>15</sup> State organizations, charities, religious groups, and legal entities with foreign stock in their charter capital are expressly forbidden from making contributions. Anonymous donations, or those originating from foreign sources, are also prohibited.<sup>16</sup>

## **What is Kazakhstan's election management body? What are its powers?**

Kazakhstan's elections are managed under a three-tiered system comprising an election management body, with 234 territorial election commissions and 10,012 precinct election

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 89.

<sup>13</sup> ["On the results of the registration of party lists, the draw procedure, accreditation of foreign observers and pre-election campaigning."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. February 18, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 92-1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Article 34.

<sup>16</sup> [Constitutional Law on Political Parties](#), Article 18.

commissions operating under the authority of the Central Election Commission (CEC). The seven-member CEC controls the implementation of electoral legislation, organizes parliamentary and presidential elections, and oversees lower election commissions. The president appoints three members, including the chair, and the Senate and lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*) each appoint two. The precinct and territorial commissions assist in implementing electoral legislation at their respective levels of government; the precinct commissions in particular play key roles in notifying voters of the time and place of voting, administering the vote at polling stations, and conducting vote counts.<sup>17</sup>

Other bodies involved in managing the electoral process include district courts, which may consider election-related complaints and disputes, and the seven-member Constitutional Council, appointed by the president and the Parliament, which conducts final reviews of appeals of election results.<sup>18</sup>

## Who can vote in these elections?

According to Kazakhstan's Election Law, citizens over the age of 18 are automatically registered to vote. However, any citizen serving a prison sentence for any crime, or whom a court has found incompetent due to disability, cannot vote. Registration is based on the state population register maintained by the Ministry of the Interior, and city governments compile voter lists based on place of residence.<sup>19</sup>

Voters who wish to vote away from their place of residence may request an absentee voting certificate at their original polling station up to one day before the election.<sup>20</sup>

## How many registered voters are there?

As of February 26, 2023, Kazakhstan had 12,032,550 registered voters. Of those, approximately 12,841 live outside of the country and have applied to vote abroad.<sup>21</sup> Citizens will be able to access voter lists no later than March 4 (15 days before Election Day), either through the website or call center of their city hall, to verify their registration status.

## What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups?

A quota requires that 30 percent of candidates running on a party's list must be women, youth (under age 29), or people with disabilities. However, the proportion of women running on party lists falls well short of 30 percent, and women currently hold only 28 of the 98 seats in the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*). Because the Central Election Commission (CEC) does not publish

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<sup>17</sup> ["The structure of election bodies in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the principles of their formation."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission.

<sup>18</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 100.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 41.

<sup>21</sup> ["On January 23, a meeting of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan was held."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. January 23, 2023.

the ages of candidates, neither citizens nor international observers can verify compliance with the youth quotas.

The government and the CEC have adopted several measures to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in the upcoming snap elections. These include the use of braille and sign language interpreters, the provision of taxi services for disabled voters, and the active involvement of representatives of public associations that advocate for persons with disabilities in ensuring the accessibility of the electoral infrastructure. However, citizens whom a court has declared incapacitated due to intellectual or psychosocial disability continue to be prohibited from voting.<sup>22</sup>

## **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Yes. In accordance with Kazakhstan election law, polling stations will be open at representative offices of the Republic of Kazakhstan in foreign states, and all citizens either residing abroad or traveling for an extended period may present a valid passport and apply to vote at an overseas polling station.<sup>23</sup>

## **Who can observe on Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

International observers may apply for accreditation by the Central Election Commission (CEC). The CEC, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can invite international and interparliamentary organizations, as well as foreign central election bodies, to observe elections. The CEC sets the term of and start date for accreditation prior to each election. By law, the accreditation of observers must conclude by 6 p.m. local time five days prior to Election Day.<sup>24</sup> As of March 14, 2023, 131 observers from 41 foreign states and 662 observers from 12 international organizations were accredited; 211 domestic organizations have also been accredited.<sup>25</sup>

Under the 1995 Election Law, political parties, public associations, and designated nonprofit organizations are also permitted to act as observers; they may be present at CEC meetings, observe voting, and appeal decisions made by any of the tiered election commissions.<sup>26</sup>

## **Where are vote counting and tabulation held?**

Precinct election commissioners are responsible for counting votes and tabulating the results at polling stations. The counting of votes begins at 8 p.m. local time on Election Day, and the 1995 Election Law specifies that counting shall not exceed 12 hours, finishing no later than 8 a.m. on March 20.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ["About field workshop-meetings in the North Kazakhstan and Akmola regions."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. February 22, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> ["On January 23, a meeting of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan was held."](#) Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. January 23, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 20-2.4.

<sup>25</sup> "Press release on accreditation of international and domestic observers." Kazakhstan Central Election Commission. March 13, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 20-1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 43.



## **When will official results be announced?**

In accordance with the 1995 Election Law, the Central Election Commission must announce the results of the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*) election within seven days after Election Day, or no later than March 26.<sup>28</sup>

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

Various articles of the 1995 Election Law, the Law on Administrative Procedures, and the Law on Procedures for Consideration of Petitions address the adjudication of election disputes and complaints. Those laws set out timetables for the submission and consideration of complaints. Any citizen may file a complaint with either the courts or the election commissions within 10 days of the subject incident; the commission or court has five days to consider the complaint, but it must immediately consider complaints received on or within five days before Election Day. Complaints are forwarded to the appropriate precinct or territorial commission, and they may then be appealed to the Central Election Commission (CEC), specialized administrative courts, and the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan. The Supreme Court's decision on any electoral complaint or appeal is final and cannot be appealed further.<sup>29</sup>

Only the president, the prime minister, the speaker of the lower house of Parliament (*Majilis*) or the Senate, or one-fifth of all members of Parliament may appeal the final results of the election as announced by the CEC. The appeal must be made within 10 days of the announcement of the results, and the Constitutional Council considers all such appeals.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Article 97.

<sup>29</sup> [Constitutional Law on Administrative Procedures](#), Chapter 24.

<sup>30</sup> [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#), Article 100.

## Resources

- [Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#)
- [1995 Constitutional Law on Elections](#)
- [Law on Communications](#)
- [Constitutional Law on Political Parties](#)
- [Constitutional Law on Administrative Procedures](#)
- [Kazakhstan Central Election Commission](#)
- [IFES Kazakhstan Election Guide](#)

## About IFES in Kazakhstan

Since 1987, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked in over 145 countries to advance good governance and democratic rights. IFES conducted programming in Kazakhstan from 1994 through 2007, providing technical assistance to the Central Election Commission and lower-level election management bodies, supporting domestic civil society organizations, conducting national surveys of democracy indicators, and providing nationwide civic education opportunities for secondary school students.

## Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Central Election Commission as of March 15, 2023, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.