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Elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan

2020 Early Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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January 30, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Azerbaijani elections authorities as of January 30, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Early parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan will be held on February 9, 2020.

Why are elections being called? What is at stake in these elections?

After discussions on political reform and the prime minister's resignation, members of Parliament voted to call on President Ilham Aliyev to dissolve the Parliament and call for early parliamentary elections, which he did on December 5, 2019. The leader of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party suggested after the dissolution of Parliament that an overhaul of the current legislature's composition must be undertaken to meet President Aliyev's reform program. The competing parties are campaigning on platforms focused on economic, judicial and social reforms.

What is the campaign timeline?

The campaign began 23 days prior to Election Day, on January 17. No campaign activities can be held for a period of 24 hours before Election Day.

What is the electoral system and what is the election management system?

Members of the unicameral parliament (*Milli Mejlis*, or "National Assembly") are elected for a five-year term by a simple majority from 125 single-mandate constituencies. Azerbaijan has a presidential republic system, with the executive branch exercising wide authority relative to the Parliament. The president appoints ministers, central and regional authorities, and vice presidents. The president also proposes members of various national and regional courts for parliamentary approval and appointing.

The elections will be administered and managed by three levels of commissions: the Central Election Commission (CEC), 125 Constituency Election Commissions and 5,575 Precinct Election Commissions. The CEC is appointed by the Parliament. For all commissions, the parliamentary majority, minority and independent parties should be represented evenly, each with one-third of the seats.

The authorities underlined the country's commitment to conduct elections in line with the principles of openness, transparency and fairness. There have been no recent changes to the Election Code.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Eligible voters who are at least 18 years of age can run for Parliament provided they do not have dual citizenship or obligations in any other countries and have no prior convictions for any serious crimes.¹ Candidates can be self-nominated or nominated by a political party, coalition of parties or group of voters. Prospective candidates are required to support their nominations with signatures of at least 450

¹ The FAQs published on January 30, 2020, incorrectly stated 25 years of age. The minimum age is 18 years. This version was corrected on February 4, 2020.

voters. As of December 2019, 802 nominations were submitted and 447 candidates were registered. As of January 2, 2020, 19 political parties had nominated 457 candidates.²

The outgoing Parliament is composed primarily of pro-government deputies, representing the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) or who are officially independent members who support NAP. A few upstart parties and civic unions are forming election coalitions together with independent candidates. Independent members of Parliament have historically gravitated toward the ruling party, combining to form a large majority over the opposition parties. Several opposition parties and movements have indicated that they plan to boycott these elections.

Who is eligible to vote and how many registered voters are there?

All citizens who are 18 or older by Election Day have the right to vote, except those recognized as “incapacitated” by a court decision. All persons meeting these requirements are automatically registered to vote, though voting is not compulsory. International observers have continually recommended that the court decisions on a citizen’s capacity be removed from the Election Code as this regulation fundamentally contravenes the concept of universal suffrage. Out-of-country voting is not allowed for parliamentary elections.

According to the Central Election Commission, there are approximately 5.2 million voters in Azerbaijan. Voter lists are maintained by Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), updated every year on May 30 and, in election years, 25 days before the election. For the 2020 elections the voter list was open for corrections between January 5-15. For voters who need to update their information for any reason after the correction period, supplementary voter lists are created up to Election Day at each PEC for temporary polling station reassignment.

What percentage of candidates are women?

While the number of registered women candidates has not yet been confirmed, the outgoing Parliament only contains 20 women out of 125 members, of whom two are parliamentary committee chairs. There are no women Cabinet members, and in 2014, women made up only 35 percent of municipal officials. There are three women members in the Central Election Commission; at the Constituency Election Commissions and Precinct Election Commission levels, 17 percent and 37 percent, respectively, are women, who are chairpersons of 2 percent and 25 percent of corresponding commissions. These statistics do not directly correspond with any predicted percentage of women in the new Parliament but are more indicative of the state of Azerbaijani women’s participation in public life.

Are there accessibility provisions for persons with disabilities?

Despite signing and ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Azerbaijan has no detailed provisions for the protection of accessibility of persons with disabilities in its policies or Election Code. The ideal of universal accessibility is enshrined in law, though courts have the ability to declare a citizen “incapacitated”, thus removing their right to vote. This

² <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3172414.html>

provision does not meet the standard set by the CRPD. Individual voters can, on an individual basis, address their own accessibility issues by filing for a temporary change of Precinct Election Commission and enter their name on a supplemental voter list at more accessible polling stations. It is unclear how often this function is used.

Will there be out-of-country voting?

There is no out-of-country voting in these elections, except for certain groups in the military and foreign service. The Election Code provides for out-of-country voting for presidential elections only.

Are there provisions for internally displaced persons?

Polling stations are selected to serve citizens, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). A total of 523 stations will be used to record the votes of the approximately 644,000 IDPs in Azerbaijan, though it is unclear where these designated stations will be located and how broadly they will be utilized. A majority of IDPs are women and girls – thus the lack of clarity on the functionality of these polling stations disproportionately affects these populations.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

Campaign finance regulations are outlined in the Election Code, which states that candidates and political parties can use their own funds and financial resources to fund their election campaigns. This may include donations from individuals and legally registered entities, although foreign donations are prohibited. The campaign spending limits are 500,000 Azeri manats per candidate, or approximately USD \$294,000.³ There is no state funding for election campaigns. The Central Election Commission is tasked with overseeing campaign finance. Candidates self-report on their campaign finances three times in the pre-election process but will not be subject to an audit at any point of the electoral process.

What are the rules governing the media?

Political information is primarily disseminated through TV and online media. TV remains the primary source of political information for Azerbaijani voters, with online and social media playing an increasingly important role. The Election Code dictates that airtime must be given impartially to the various parties and candidates throughout the campaign period. Political parties and blocs with candidates in at least 60 races will be given three hours of free airtime and free space in print media. The Central Election Commission is responsible for oversight over compliance with campaign coverage regulations through a media working group, with the National Television and Radio Council regulating broadcast media.⁴

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Voters, candidates, political parties, blocs and their representatives can file complaints and appeals with election commissions. Observers and election commissions can file complaints as well. Decisions of

³ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/442936?download=true>, page 10.

⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/442936?download=true>, page 11.

election commissions can be appealed to the higher election commission. If no resolution is found at the Central Election Commission (CEC) level, complaints can be registered and resolved in the courts of appeal, with the Supreme Court as the court of last instance.

The Election Code provides for the creation of expert groups to review and resolve complaints filed within the CEC and Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs) and report to the respective commission. The CEC determines the rules of composition for these expert groups with no ConEC, Precinct Election Commission or civilian input.

Who can be an election observer and how are observers registered?

Both local and international observers are allowed to observe elections, in line with the requirements of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Citizens of Azerbaijan and international observers are allowed to apply to the Central Election Commission (CEC) to observe elections. The CEC accredits observers up to 10 days before the election. As of January 27, 2020, 55,492 domestic observers and 409 international observers and have been accredited.⁵

The OSCE is expected to send 350 short-term observers. Azerbaijan has not yet held an election that has met the OSCE's standards. Local elections that took place in late 2019 after the announcement to dissolve Parliament were, according to observers, held in an environment of "restricted fundamental freedoms and rights,"⁶ noting inconsistencies with election administration at the Precinct Election Commission level.

How will the results be calculated and when will they be announced?

In Azerbaijan's simple majoritarian system, votes will be counted for each mandate from within the mandate's district, and the candidate receiving the most votes for that mandate will be declared the winner. Each Precinct Election Commission (PEC) will conduct a vote count after the close of the polls, corroborate the data, complete a final results protocol and pass the protocol to the Constituency Election Commission, which will gather protocols from PECs in its district and deliver these to the CEC. While voter participation numbers will be reported throughout Election Day to the Central Election Commission (CEC), preliminary election results will be published after the CEC receives all protocols, with the final results finalized by February 12, 2020, at the latest.

⁵ <https://www.azernews.az/nation/161074.html>

⁶ European Platform for Democratic Elections Observation Report

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