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Elections in Uzbekistan

2019 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the elections authorities of Uzbekistan as December 19, 2019, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

The Oliy Majlis, as the legislative branch of government, adopts laws, determines the principles for domestic and foreign policy, proposes amendments to the Constitution, approves the state budget, schedules elections, appoints or confirms certain officials, ratifies and denounces international treaties and exercises certain controls. Both the Legislative Chamber and the Senate are headed by chairs who do not have a term limit. The Oliy Majlis' role as a coequal branch of government has been a focus of the political reforms initiated by President Mirziyoyev. While the executive branch retains the most authority in decision-making, the parliament is expected to take on an increasingly significant role going forward as part of the Development Strategy.

What is the legal framework governing these elections?

The legal framework for parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan consists of a single [Election Code](#) that in 2019 was unified from five separate laws. These laws include: the Constitution of Uzbekistan, the new Election Code adopted in March 2019, the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Financing of Political Parties, the Criminal Code and Code of Administrative Offenses and Central Election Commission (CEC) regulations and provisions. The new Election Code is more concise than previous iterations and largely well structured. It comprises 18 chapters and 100 articles divided into general provisions and those applying to specific types of elections, such as presidential, parliamentary and local. The new Election Code sets out the specific duties and responsibilities of the CEC.

What is the electoral system?

The *Oliy Majlis* (Supreme Council) of Uzbekistan is a bicameral parliament composed of 250 deputies. The Legislative Chamber, or lower house, consists of 150 members directly elected by voters from territorial constituencies. The Senate, or upper house, has 100 members, 84 of whom are elected – six each – from the regions (*Viloyatlar*), the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan and the capital city of Tashkent. An additional 16 deputies are nominated by the president of Uzbekistan. Representatives in both houses are elected for five-year terms. New for the 2019 elections is the removal of a 15-seat quota for the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, meaning that all 150 lower house seats will be directly elected. The Ecological Movement had to register as a political party and will be one of five parties contesting the December 22 elections. The increase by 15 to 150 directly elected mandates has required that electoral districts be redrawn in order to accommodate a roughly equivalent number of voters per each district.

The president of Uzbekistan nominates key personnel in all three branches of government. These appointees include the prime minister, the general prosecutor and the chair of the Central Election Commission, among others. The president also approves the Cabinet of Ministers and has the authority to appoint and dismiss all judges and local executives (*Hokims*).

Deputies of the Legislative Chamber (lower house) are elected from single-mandate majoritarian districts. Independent candidates are now allowed to run for seats to the Legislative Assembly, and only political parties can nominate candidates for this body or local legislatures (*kengashes*). If no candidate

receives a majority of the votes – 50 percent plus one – cast in the first round of voting, a second round between the two leading candidates is scheduled to take place in two weeks' time. The candidate with the highest number of votes in the runoff election prevails. There is a 33 percent minimum voter participation requirement for the first round of voting and no turnout requirement for a second round. Local and regional (*viloyat*) elections will be held concurrently with the parliamentary vote.

Who can run as a candidate?

Candidates running for seats in the Legislative Chamber and to local *kengashes* may only be nominated by one of the five legally registered political parties, which all currently have representation in the parliament: the Ecological Party (15 seats though quota), the Liberal Democratic Party (52 seats), National Revival Democratic Party (36 seats), People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (27 seats) and the Justice Social Democratic Party *Adolat* (20 seats). There is no provision for independent candidates or candidates not nominated by parties to contest the elections. Registered political parties must formally submit documentation including a minimum of 40,000 supporting signatures to be able to nominate candidates representing their parties. Voters may provide signatory support to more than one political party for the purpose of qualifying them to nominate candidates.

To be eligible to contest the parliamentary elections candidates must be 25 years or older and have continually resided in Uzbekistan for the last five years. Among those ineligible to run are active military personnel, persons convicted of having committed grave crimes, clergy and citizens who have been declared by a court to be "incapacitated." Political parties must abide by a quota of at least 30 percent female candidates on their party lists. Of the 750 candidates, 310 are female, representing a 10 percent improvement over the 2014 lower-house elections.¹ Political party coalitions are not allowed under the Election Code.

Local self-governance bodies' ability to nominate candidates to local councils, which was previously enshrined in the law, was removed. The Uzbek authorities discussed the possibility of allowing self-nomination through initiative groups, but this was not approved.

The Election Code mandates that the Central Election Commission (CEC) should verify a minimum of 15 percent of the required number of signatures submitted by each political party and the signatories' information. Further, the provision stipulates that the 15 percent sample of signatures include an equal number of signatures from each territorial or administrative unit, including Karakalpakstan, all *Viloyats* and the city of Tashkent. In cases of falsified signatures, the CEC will deny registration to prospective candidates.

The procedure for the nomination of candidates to district (city) *Kengashes* of people's deputies by self-governing bodies of citizens was abolished. Political parties thus have the exclusive right to nominate candidates for deputies of regional, district and city councils of people's deputies.²

¹ <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-elections-look-livelier-but-choice-still-threadbare>

² <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/48244>

Political parties are allowed to withdraw candidates' nominations up to 15 days before Election Day, including five days before the beginning of the early voting process, which is taking place from December 12-19. Candidates can withdraw their candidacy at any time prior to Election Day on December 22. The Election Code is unclear in how to render ballots that have already been printed with withdrawn candidates' names and that may have been cast through early voting. However, as reported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights observation mission, it appears that should a candidate withdraw from the election, the Central Election Commission would reprint the affected ballots and supply them to the corresponding electoral district as soon as possible.³ However, withdrawn candidates may still appear on ballots already cast through early voting.

What is the campaigning process?

On September 20 the official campaign season was launched under the motto "New Uzbekistan-New elections." Election campaigning began 35 days before Election Day, on November 17, after the period for candidate registration closed. Campaigning is regulated by law and strictly monitored and controlled by the Central Election Commission (CEC). As per the Election Code, each candidate should receive an equal amount of coverage on state television channels and an equal opportunity to campaign on private channels, through outdoor advertising and through meetings with constituents. Campaigning on the day immediately preceding Election Day is prohibited, as this should remain a "quiet day" for all electoral contestants. The Election Code also prohibits the spreading of disinformation or denigrating an opponent; interpretation of this provision is subject to the decision of the electoral authorities.

The campaign has thus far been perceived by the international community as relatively more robust than in past elections, perhaps owing to the general sense of reforms and political renewal felt by voters and candidates. The parties are each focusing on targeted areas of the electorate they consider amendable to their political programs, which emphasize economic reforms and local issues in coordination with local party affiliates and *Mahallas* (local neighborhood councils and informal authorities). Televised candidate debates, public advertising via television, radio and stationary signage and extensive online outreach via social media have been used. The CEC decided to allocate 225 billboards to display campaign material across Uzbekistan at no cost to each political party. Thus far few rallies or other public campaign events have been observed.

What are the rules governing the media?

Uzbekistan has a large number of media sources, including national television and radio broadcasters, with television remaining the most popular source of information. All candidates are provided with the same amount of free airtime via electronic and print state media. Candidates can also purchase additional airtime.

The electoral legislation and Central Election Commission resolutions contain provisions governing media and elections. Mass media should provide equal access to advertising to all contestants free of

³ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 7

charge. Every political party competing in the elections is entitled to 30 minutes of free airtime per week on each of the four state-owned television stations. Further, each competing party has the right to use print media for campaign announcements and advertising.

In addition to the broad possible interpretation of slander, media are held accountable for the reliability of information shared through broadcast networks and online sources. As this responsibility extends to third-party sources, national and traditional media are careful with information that is shared, often self-limiting to basic coverage and information. Online sources of political information have gained importance, particularly among urban youth. All media sources must register with the national communications agency, the Agency for Information and Mass Communications (AIMC), which reports to the president.

Outside of televised debates the majority of campaign coverage has been conducted online via social networks including Telegram and Facebook. However, overall political parties' use of the internet for campaigning and platform advertising has been modest.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

As mentioned, the Election Code provides for equal and free coverage and advertising through state media for all candidates. The candidates may also purchase additional advertising time and space.

All election-related expenses are funded by the state. The exact amount of state funding provided to a political party depends on its approved number of registered candidates. For the elections to the Legislative Chamber, 10 million Uzbek *soms* will be provided, which equals approximately \$1,100 (USD). The Central Election Commission (CEC) has allocated the combined equivalent of \$866,000 to parties to fund their candidates. Per CEC regulations political parties should transfer 30 percent of this amount to their candidates, which equals approximately \$350 per candidate, with the balance retained by the party to cover the cost of other campaign expenses.⁴

Private funding of parties or candidates for campaigning is prohibited, though the CEC may accept donations of funds, which should be distributed equally among the parties and spent during the campaign period. Foreign-sourced donations are prohibited. Likewise, parties are prohibited from providing funding or gifts to voters.

As per the Election Code, political parties must submit a report on their campaign financial expenditures to the CEC within 20 days of the election. Once per year political parties must submit financial reports to the Chamber of Accounts, which, along with the *Oliy Majlis*, is empowered to conduct audits of the parties' finances.

Who administers the election?

The parliamentary elections will be administered by a three-tiered election administration, led by the Central Election Commission (CEC) and complemented by 150 District Election Commissions (DECs) and

⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 7

10,300 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). The CEC is a 21-member body, of which seven are permanent members and the remainder work on a voluntary basis. The CEC itself is appointed by the *Oliy Majlis* for an indefinite term. The president nominates a chairperson, who is confirmed by members of parliament. There are 13 men and seven women members of the CEC. DEC members have between nine and 11 members. PECs are comprised of between five and 19 members. In total there are 1,612 DEC officials and 111,033 PEC officials.⁵

The 150 DECs are formed by the CEC no fewer than 70 days prior to the election based on recommendations of regional and city *kangashes*. PECs are formed by the DECs not less than 40 days ahead of Election Day through nominations provided by nongovernmental organizations and *mahallas*. Party and candidate representatives are not allowed to serve on lower-level election management bodies, nor are other state and local government officials. Members of election commissions must be citizens of Uzbekistan who are at least 21 years old, have a secondary or higher education as well as prior experience in the preparation and conduct of elections.⁶

CEC sessions and meetings of lower-level election commissions are open to the public. Election legislation and CEC regulations will be published in Uzbek and Russian. Ballots will be printed in Uzbek and other languages used locally as per local DEC decision, such as Russian and Karakalpak. The early voting process began on December 12 and will continue through December 19.

Who can vote in these elections?

All citizens of Uzbekistan 18 years or older have the right to vote, with the exception of prisoners serving “serious and grave” crimes⁷ and those who have been declared “incapacitated” by a court decision, including those deemed to have intellectual or psycho-social disabilities. In a change from the past, citizens in pre-trial detention or sentenced to prison for terms not longer than five years are eligible to vote. The authorities consider such voters to not “represent a great public danger.”⁸ Early voting is permitted for voters who will be away from their polling stations on Election Day.

Voting via mobile ballot box will be organized on Election Day, including at locations abroad. Further, all Precinct Election Commissions are to be made accessible for voters who use wheelchairs. Tactile ballot guides are to be provided in each polling station.

Ballots will be printed in the Uzbek language in both the Cyrillic and Latin scripts, along with, as per a District Election Commission decision, Russian and Karakalpak in some jurisdictions. While all political parties are publishing information in all of these languages, Tajik and Kazakh, ballots will not be printed in these latter two languages.

⁵ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 5

⁶ Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Article 23, p. 14.

⁷ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 5

⁸ <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/48244>

What is the voter registration process?

Voter registration in Uzbekistan is passive. For the first time in a national election,⁹ the lists of voters will be developed through the Single Electronic Voter Register (SEVR), which is managed by the Central Election Commission (CEC). SEVR is designed to improve voter registration procedures, streamline voter list logistics in polling stations and combat electoral fraud.¹⁰ The process of compiling the SEVR began in 2017. The CEC reports that there are approximately 20.5 million voters in Uzbekistan. Information for SEVR is transferred from the Information System on Electoral Process Management (ISEPM), which in turn is compiled from information provided by various government authorities including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

While the SEVR is overseen by the CEC, the Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications maintains the ISEPM. SEVR is updated during the election period by a special schedule as determined by the CEC; during non-national election years SEVR is updated annually. While voter registration is to cease 72 hours prior to Election Day, voters may register on Election Day only for this election as a temporary safeguard measure. They must provide proof of residency and proper identification to the local Precinct Election Commission (PEC), which will then be used to subsequently update SEVR.

The reason for this is that SEVR was completed very close to Election Day, and it is possible that some voters were excluded from the system who are eligible to vote.

Voter lists will be extracted from the SEVR and compiled separately for each polling station. Voters residing abroad can cast ballots in the 57 out-of-country polling stations, predominantly at diplomatic locations. All votes cast abroad will be counted toward a specific constituency in Tashkent, as determined by the CEC.¹¹

Voters may confirm their registration information over a two-week period at polling locations or on the CEC website. Mahallas and PECs conduct door-to-door verification and process any corrections through SEVR.

How do voters cast their ballots?

Voters will mark a single ballot – used both for early voting and on Election Day – by marking it with a sign (+, v, x) in the empty box of the ballot, located on the right side of the ballot opposite the name of the candidate for whom he or she is voting. The voter then deposits the paper ballot into a traditional standing ballot box in the Precinct Election Commission or other authorities' voting location. Those voting from home – by prior authorization – will deposit ballots into mobile ballot boxes.

⁹ SEVR was piloted previously for regional elections in Tashkent *Viloyat* in December 2017.

¹⁰ <https://www.eias.org/news/note-of-comment-on-the-2019-parliamentary-elections-in-uzbekistan/>

¹¹ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/428687?download=true>, p. 6

Will there be out-of-country voting?

A total of 55 polling stations will be organized outside of Uzbekistan at embassies and consulates in 38 countries. Results of voting in these locations will be applied to voting results in Tashkent city. The Central Election Commission reported that 1.8 million voters are registered abroad.

Who can observe on Election Day?

International observers are allowed to register for accreditation with the Central Election Commission (CEC) to observe the *Oliy Majlis* elections. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights will send a full observation mission to Uzbekistan and has had a 41-person observation presence since November 25, which will be augmented by approximately 224 short-term Observers.¹² However, the Election Code still does not permit domestic or citizen election observation outside of party- and candidate-affiliated observers.

International observers may be present at the working sessions and meetings of the CEC, District Election Commissions and Precinct Election Commissions, and after voting is complete may receive certified copies of protocols of election results. Candidates running for office may nominate candidate proxies and agents representing their political party, who can be present at polling stations on Election Day and file complaints on their behalf. As per the new Election Code, representatives of *mahallas* will also be able to observe, though officially they must remain nonpartisan. Given the special status of mahallas, they are able to observe as semiofficial representatives of local authority.

Media representatives will also be accredited to observe the elections, though they are not permitted to videotape the voting process.

All accredited observers have the right to monitor all stages of the election process, as guaranteed by law.

How will votes be counted, tabulated and reported?

Votes will be counted and tabulated by hand with the participation of all Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members and in full view of election observers. Results will then be entered into the official protocol of the PEC and signed by all members, after which it will be transmitted electronically to the District Election Commission, and then to the Central Election Commission (CEC). PECs will post result protocols immediately upon completion of counting at the polling premises for public review. The results will be posted for a minimum of two days. The CEC shall adopt a resolution on and announce official elections results within 10 days after Election Day. The resolution shall be published on the CEC website and through other media.¹³

¹² <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 2

¹³ Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Article 94, p. 41

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The resolution of election disputes is regulated by the Election Code and through Central Election Commission (CEC) resolutions. Complaints may be filed by a political party, candidate, candidate's representative or proxy, voter or an election observer to the Precinct Election Commissions and appealed to the District Election Commission and CEC. All complaints must be recorded in a special register, and the election commissions must inform complainants of official decisions. Appeals should be filed within 10 days after a decision is made and can be submitted either to the responsible higher-level election commission or to a court. Courts are required by law to address appeals within three days if the election is scheduled within six days of the filing. Those filing complaints have the right to participate directly in the election commission's complaint review process. Appeals to CEC decisions can be filed with the Supreme Court.¹⁴ Based on the validity of a complaint, the CEC may invalidate an election entirely or in part. The Election Code contains no language permitting contestants to request a recount of ballots. The CEC and the ombudsman will maintain call-in hotlines to receive election-related complaints before, during and after Election Day.

¹⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>, p. 9

Resources

- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) *Needs Assessment Mission Report*, August 28, 2019: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/428687?download=true>
- OSCE Election Observation Mission *Interim Report*, December 13, 2019: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/442093?download=true>
- OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Venice Commission *Joint Opinion on the Draft Election Code*: October 22, 2018: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/401135?download=true>
- Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted by parliament on March 1, 2019. See unofficial translation at: <http://lex.uz/docs/4458857>
- *Uzbekistan Daily*, March 1, 2019: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/48244>
- *Kun.uz*, February 16, 2019: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2019/02/16/changes-to-be-introduced-in-the-electoral-law-of-uzbekistan>
- *Uzbekistan Daily*, August 7, 2018: <http://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/45181>
- European Institute for Asian Studies, November 7, 2019: <https://www.eias.org/news/note-of-comment-on-the-2019-parliamentary-elections-in-uzbekistan/>
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- Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan website: <http://elections.uz/en/lists/news>