



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Uzbekistan

Presidential Election

October 24, 2021

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day
 - October 24, 2021
 - 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Registered voters
 - 21,249,921 voters
 - 880,155 first-time voters
- Polling stations
 - 10,760 polling stations
- Physical distancing
 - 1.5 to 2 meters
- Seats
 - 1 (President)
- Candidates
 - Bahram Abusalimov, Justice Social Democratic Party
 - Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party, the incumbent
 - Narzullo Oblomurov, Ecological Party
 - Alisher Qodirov, Milliy Tiklanish
 - Maqsuda Varisova, People's Democratic Party
- Campaign expenditure
 - 300 billion Uzbek sum - maximum amount of funds allocated for this election
- Domestic and international observers
 - 54 stationary polling stations at embassies and consulates in 38 countries
 - 1.8 million voters registered abroad

When is Election Day?

Uzbekistan's 2021 presidential election will be held on Sunday, October 24, 2021. The election date was moved from December as a result of a bill signed by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and approved by Parliament on February 8. Voting will take place on Election Day from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at 10,760 polling stations.

Voters who are unable to be at their place of residence on Election Day have the right to vote early. Early voting begins 10 days prior to Election Day, starting on October 14, and ends four days before Election Day, i.e., at the end of the day on October 20. Voters can exercise the early voting right by submitting an application stating the reasons for absence or inability to vote at their designated polling station on Election Day (vacation, business trip, travel abroad, etc.).

Why are these elections important?

The president of Uzbekistan plays a key role in influencing the country's political orientation and domestic and foreign policy. As head of state and the executive authority, the president is instrumental in setting economic policy and determining priorities in trade, defense and foreign relations, supported by ministers and in consultation with the prime minister and Parliament.

The winning candidate in the 2021 presidential election will be elected for a five-year term, through 2026. The current legislation includes a constitutional limit of two consecutive presidential terms, for a total of 10 years. This will be the second presidential election since the death of Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, in 2016. The election can be seen as a referendum on the policies of incumbent president Shavkat Mirziyoyev since succeeding Karimov five years ago. While significant challenges persist, the State Development Program (2017–2021) ushered in by President Mirziyoyev underpins tremendous changes in the government's relationship with its citizens, bringing about greater openness, reform at all levels of administration, public accountability and greater access to information.

Voters will have an opportunity to affirm their support for the ongoing transition under the current administration in Uzbekistan by giving another five-year mandate to the incumbent, or by choosing a different path for the country, when they cast their ballots on October 24.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

On Election Day, citizens will be voting for the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Central Election Commission has officially registered five candidates. One woman, Maqsuda Varisova, will be included on the ballot—a first in Uzbekistan's history. The five candidates are¹:

- Bahram Abuhalimov, Justice Social Democratic Party
- Shavat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan Liberal Democratic Party, the incumbent
- Narzullo Oblomurov, Ecological Party
- Alisher Qodirov, Milliy Tiklanish
- Maqsuda Varisova, People's Democratic Party

All candidates running in the election were nominated as representatives of Uzbekistan's five officially registered political parties. The current election law does not allow for independent candidates.

What is the electoral system?

The [President of Uzbekistan](#) is directly elected using a [two-round system](#). If no candidate receives an absolute majority of the votes (50 percent plus one) in the first round, a run-off election will be held between the two candidates receiving the largest number of votes within one month of the first round. There has been no instance of second-round or runoff presidential elections in Uzbekistan, as leading candidates since the first direct election in 1991 have received the vast majority of votes (over 85 percent in each of the five previous presidential election cycles).

To be valid, the first round must produce a voter turnout of at least 33 percent of all voters included on the voter list. There is no voter turnout requirement for the second round.

¹ See information on candidates <https://saylov2021.uz/en/category/partiya-nomzodlari-haqida-malumat>

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The legal framework for parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan consists of a single Election Code that was unified in 2019 from five separate documents: 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; it is composed of 18 chapters and 103 articles divided into general provisions applying to specific types of elections (presidential, parliamentary and local). The Election Code sets out the specific duties and responsibilities of the CEC. Election legislation and CEC regulations will be published in Uzbek and Russian and displayed within each polling location.

Uzbekistan is party to several international legal frameworks, including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2003 Convention against Corruption and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Uzbekistan ratified in June 2021.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Citizens of Uzbekistan who are at least 35 years old, have resided in Uzbekistan for at least 10 years and are fluent in the Uzbek language are eligible to run as candidates for the presidential elections.

Current legislation limits the president to two consecutive terms. Citizens previously convicted of a deliberate crime or declared incapable by the court, and professional employees of religious organizations and associations are not eligible to run for presidential office.

Only political parties registered by the Ministry of Justice no later than four months before the announcement of the election campaign can nominate a candidate for the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Currently, five political parties are registered with the ministry. All five support the current government. In addition to nomination by a registered political party, candidates must receive signatures from at least 1 percent of the total electorate (or over 200,000 signatures) from at least 13 of 14 districts. Currently, independent or non-partisan aspirants are not eligible to register as electoral candidates.

For the 2021 presidential elections, five candidates are officially registered. Notably, two additional candidates saw their campaigns end prematurely. These were Khidirnazar Allakulov, whose party registration was rejected on June 21, and pop singer Jahongir Otajonov, who withdrew in July citing public pressure and intimidation. Otajonov's party was not registered prior to his withdrawal as a prospective candidate. In both cases, lack of signatures or incomplete documentation was cited as the reason that the registrations were denied.

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Uzbekistan approved an action plan and cost estimate for the 2021 presidential election. According to the Law on the State Budget for 2021, the maximum amount of funds allocated for the preparation and conduct of this year's

presidential election in Uzbekistan is 300 billion Uzbek sum (approximately \$28 million USD), providing that a corresponding cost estimate is developed and agreed to with the Ministry of Finance.

The CEC determines the amount of state funds allocated to finance participation in elections for each candidate. Funds are transferred in accordance with the established procedure to the payroll of a political party in an amount corresponding to the number of registered candidates from that party. Financing or providing material support to political parties in elections by foreign or anonymous sources, including foreign governments, foreign citizens and legal entities and international organizations.

The allocated funds should be directed to campaigning for organizing the work of proxies of candidates and other activists involved in campaigning for party-wide campaigning events. Each party will receive 15.4 billion Uzbek sum (approximately \$1.4 million USD) for pre-election events, while candidates nominated by parties will receive 3.097 billion Uzbek sum (approximately \$290,000 USD) for pre-election campaigning. Political parties can receive private donations from legal entities up to 1,35 billion Uzbek sum (\$126,128 USD) and from individuals to 135 million Uzbek sum (\$12,617 USD) for the purpose of financing non-campaign related activities.

A political party is obliged to submit annual reports on party campaign expenditures to financial authorities, state tax authorities, the Accounts Chamber and the Ministry of Justice. Each party must submit an interim financial report to the CEC on Election Day and a final report after the announcement of the election results. The CEC will publish reports on the spending of allocated funds on its website and social networks within a specified time frame after the end of the elections. Unused funds must be returned to the state budget. Political parties can only receive private donations for financing their regular statutory activities from legal entities limited to 1,35 billion Uzbek sum (\$126,128 USD) and from individuals to 135 million Uzbek sum (\$12,617 USD).

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The presidential election will be administered by a three-tiered election administration, led by the Central Election Commission (CEC) and supported by 14 district election commissions (DECs) and 10,760 precinct election commissions (PECs)². Members of election commissions must be citizens of Uzbekistan who are at least 21 years old and have a secondary or higher education and prior experience in the preparation and conduct of elections. The CEC is a permanent body consisting of 21 seven full-time members and 14 who work on a voluntary basis. CEC members are appointed by the Parliament for an indefinite term based on nominations from local *kengashes* (local councils). The CEC chairperson is elected among the members of the commission, following a recommendation of the president of Uzbekistan. The current CEC consists of 14 men and seven women.

The CEC is ultimately responsible for managing, organizing and conducting elections in Uzbekistan, from the registration of voters and candidates to the counting, tabulation, validation and announcement of election results. The CEC is tasked with forming temporary DECs, which

² See interactive map of polling stations <https://www.saylov.uz/uz/map>

oversee elections at the regional level, and are formed at least 70 days prior to the election based on the recommendations of regional and city *kengashes*. Ballots will be printed in Uzbek and other languages used locally (such as Russian and Karakalpak) in accordance with local DEC decisions. DECs are composed of eight to 18 members – in total the 14 established commissions at this level include 266 DEC officials.

DECs form PECs not less than 40 days ahead of Election Day through nominations provided by nongovernmental organizations and *mahallas*, *semi-governmental community councils*. Party and candidate representatives and state and local government officials are not allowed to serve on lower-level election management bodies. PECs comprise between five and 19 members who will organize voting at designated polling stations on Election Day. In total, there are 142,044 PEC officials for the 10,760 polling locations. Interactive map on polling station locations available at CEC website.

More than half of the members a PEC cannot be members of one organization, with the exception of PECs formed of embassy staff or consultants located abroad or PECs in military units; sanatoriums and rest homes, hospitals and other inpatient medical institutions; or places of detention and imprisonment.

PECs are responsible for notifying voters about the polling place and time no later than 10 days before the election, or October 14, 2021.

According to the latest data from the CEC, 14 electoral districts and 10,760 polling stations have been organized in the country for the presidential elections. For out-of-country voting, 61 PECs have been established.

How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?

The Central Election Commission (CEC), in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, issues and implements guidelines on preventive and sanitary measures on Election Day. The approved instructions, which aim to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the presidential elections, were announced in the weeks leading up to the election.

According to the instructions, at polling stations and in voting rooms, members of the election commission, voters, observers and media representatives must use thermometers, pyrometers, protective masks, disposable gloves (for members of the election commission), antiseptics and other protective items. On Election Day, at least six hours before the start of voting, the buildings and voting rooms of all PECs must be disinfected. If a polling station is in the red or yellow zone, as determined by the Ministry of Health, commission members will be provided with and required to use additional protective equipment: special overalls, gowns and face shields. Lower-level commissions are advised to mark lines that indicate the direction of movement in order to maintain a social distance of 1.5 to 2 meters at the entrances to polling stations and voting rooms. Participants in the electoral process should avoid shaking hands or other forms of direct contact and to maintain social distance. At each polling station, a health worker will take the temperature of visitors at the entrance to the building, disinfect their hands with an antiseptic and control for the presence of masks. If necessary, the health worker will

issue masks. Over 21,000 medical workers will be on hand election day to ensure quarantine needs and assist in maintaining hygiene at polling stations during the presidential elections.

In addition, voting will be organized for voters receiving treatment for coronavirus at home or at hospitals. A member of the commission will provide voters personal protective equipment (including a mask, gloves and a pen) in a plastic bag, as well as a ballot and a copy of the voter list for signature. The voter, wearing the mask and gloves, signs the copy of the voter list stating that they received a ballot paper. Then the voter places the completed ballot paper in a portable ballot box.

When counting votes at all polling stations, commission members must first disinfect their hands and ballot boxes, and then count the votes, observing social distance. Representatives of political parties, observers and the media must also use masks and maintain social distance. The mobile ballot boxes will be the first to be opened, counted and reconciled after the polls close.

Who can vote in these elections?

All citizens of Uzbekistan aged 18 years or older have the right to vote, with the exception of prisoners serving sentences for “serious and grave” crimes, those who have been declared incapacitated by a court decision and people 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 shorter than five years are eligible to vote based on the assumption that such voters do not “represent a great public danger.” Early voting is permitted for voters who will be away from their polling stations on Election Day. Early voting starts 10 days before and ends three days prior to Election Day.

Voter registration in Uzbekistan is passive. Each voter can be included in only one voter list for the territory where they permanently or temporarily reside. Voters can check their data and find their polling location in CEC website.³

How many registered voters are there?

There are 21,249,921 voters included in the unified electronic voter list, of whom 6,993,924 are young people under age 30 (almost 33 percent), 50,6 percent women and 4.15 percent first-time voters (880,155 people).

The lists of voters are 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. Compilation of the SEVR began in 2017. The CEC reports that there are approximately 21.2 million voters on the electronic voters’ list Uzbekistan out of a total population of 34,063,326. Information for SEVR is transferred from the Information System on Electoral Process Management (ISEPM), which is compiled from information provided by government authorities including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³ See here <https://www.saylov.uz/en/faq/user-polling-station>

While the CEC oversees the SEVR, the Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications maintains the ISEPM. SEVR is updated during the election period by a special schedule determined by the CEC; during non-national election years, SEVR is updated annually. *Mahallas* or semi-governmental community councils and precinct election commissions (PECs) conduct door-to-door verification and process any corrections through SEVR. While voter registration will cease 72 hours prior to Election Day, voters may register on Election Day if they can provide proper identification and proof of residency at a permanent domicile. In this case, they will be added to a supplemental voters' list for this precinct. The PEC will use this information to update SEVR.

This exception allowing same-day registration was made in consideration of the SEVR's updating very close to Election Day, and to forestall the possibility that some eligible voters might be excluded from the system. Voter lists will be extracted from the SEVR and compiled separately for each polling station. Voters residing abroad can cast ballots at the 54 out-of-country polling stations, predominantly at diplomatic locations and in cultural centers in which there are high concentrations of Uzbek citizens living, including the territory of the Russian Federation where there are up to 700,000 eligible voters of Uzbekistan at present. All votes cast abroad will be counted toward a specific constituency in Tashkent, as determined by the CEC. Voters may confirm their registration information over a two-week period at polling locations or on the CEC website.

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

Several provisions are in place to ensure the rights of voters with disabilities on Election Day. Polling stations will have specially equipped booths for secret voting for people with disabilities, including booths that are accessible for voters who use wheelchairs. The Central Election Commission (CEC) will also take measures to ensure free travel for voters with disabilities to polling stations in densely populated areas and to place ramps at least 90 centimeters wide and with appropriate exit angles at the entrances and exits of polling station buildings. Polling stations will maintain additional conditions that enable voters to freely come, leave and move inside the building. Those voting from home (by prior authorization) will deposit ballots into mobile ballot boxes.

In accordance with the Agreement on Cooperation signed between the CEC and the Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan, voters with visual disabilities are registered with the district and precinct election commissions to ensure polling stations serving them are provided with braille stencils. Article 31 of the Electoral Code stipulates use of tactile guides to fill ballots using braille to support the independent voting of voters with visual disabilities. For the 2021 election, the CEC approved a sample and description of a tactile script and, in accordance with the agreement, each polling station will be provided with two tactile ballot guides. As necessary, optical magnifiers and lanterns will also be provided at polling stations and precincts for people with limited sight.

According to Article 55 of the Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a voter who is unable to fill out a ballot paper independently has the right to invite another person at his or her

discretion into the booth or room for secret voting, except for members of the election commission, observers and representatives of the media.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Polling stations will be formed at diplomatic and other representations of the Republic of Uzbekistan in accordance with the requirements of the Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Resolution of the Central Election Commission (CEC): "On approval of the Regulations on the procedure for the formation of polling stations at diplomatic missions and consular offices of the Republic of Uzbekistan in foreign countries," dated October 22, 2019.

For the presidential election, 54 stationary polling stations will be organized at embassies and consulates in 38 countries.⁴ In 128 cities in these countries, and in 11 states where Uzbekistan has no diplomatic missions, 316 mobile voting stations will be opened.⁵ The results of voting in these locations will be included in the voting results for Tashkent city. The CEC reported that 1.8 million voters are registered abroad.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

International observers are allowed to register for accreditation with the Central Election Commission (CEC) to observe the October 24, 2021 presidential election. International observers may be present at working sessions and meetings of the CEC, district election commissions and precinct election commissions. After voting is complete, these observers may receive certified copies of the protocols of election results. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights sent a full observation mission to Uzbekistan and established a 39-person observation presence (11 members in the core team and 28 Long-Term Observers [LTOs]) starting September 15. These will be augmented by approximately 250 Short-Term Observers (STOs). A total of 969 international election observers are registered, including 629 representatives from international organizations and 340 representing foreign government delegations or embassies.⁶ Additionally, 1,439 representatives of local media and 233 representatives of foreign media are also accredited.

The Election Code does not permit domestic or citizen election observation other than by party- and candidate-affiliated observers. Candidates running for office may nominate 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* (local community councils) will also be able to observe, although they must remain nonpartisan. Given the special status of *mahallas*, they are able to observe as semi-official representatives of local authority. Media representatives will also be accredited to observe the elections, although

⁴ Information on polling stations abroad <https://mfa.uz/en/press/news/2021/list-of-polling-stations-for-the-elections-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-uzbekistan-formed-at-diplomatic-and-other-missions-of-the-republic-of-uzbekistan-in-foreign-countries---30299>

⁵ Meeting with Central Election Commission, October 15, 2021.

⁶ Meeting with Central Election Commission, October 15, 2021.

they are not permitted to videotape voting processes. All accredited observers have the right to monitor all stages of the election process, as guaranteed by law.

Interested organizations must notify election commissions about their observers at least 10 days before Election Day. Observers must also notify the precinct election commission of their intention to visit polling stations.

Who is managing security on Election Day?

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Guard of the Republic of Uzbekistan are responsible for maintaining public order and ensuring public safety. The ministry appoints officials responsible for security within voting premises and instructs public safety officers on their tasks, rights and responsibilities. Employees responsible for public safety will be provided a special leaflet developed by the Central Election Commission.

On Election Day, public safety officers are responsible for the security of the buildings where ballots and other documents are stored from the moment the ballots are received; ensuring security during the transportation of election results documents under the supervision of members of district and precinct election commissions; and carrying out official activities on Election Day *without* going to polling stations. Furthermore, public safety officers are prohibited from influencing voters, observers and other participants in the electoral process; entering voting booths or rooms when voters mark their ballot papers; distributing any campaign materials or literature; asking voters how they voted or providing voters any assistance in filling out ballots; interfering with the activities of the election commission, including when sealing ballot boxes, opening them and counting votes; and participating in meetings of election commissions.

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

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. After the end of early voting, members of the PEC designate a portable ballot box for the received ballots without counting the votes. Ballots from early voting are counted alongside ballots received on Election Day.

The first step in counting is for the PEC to determine the total number of persons included in the voter list, the number who received ballot papers and the number of ballot papers in the ballot boxes. Next, PEC members count the votes cast for each candidate at the precinct separately. On the basis of the counted ballots, the PEC determines 1) the number of votes cast for each candidate, 2) the number of invalid ballots and 3) the number of spoiled ballots.

Results are entered into the official protocol of the PEC and signed by all members, after which they are 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, where they will remain for at least 48 hours. 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.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Resolution of election disputes is regulated by the Election Code and through Central Election Commission (CEC) resolutions. A political party, candidate, candidate's representative or proxy, voter or election observer may file complaints to precinct election commissions and appeal them 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 five days after a decision is made and can be submitted to the court. Courts are required by law to address appeals within three days or immediately, if complaint is submitted during last 6 days prior to elections or on E-day. 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. Based on the validity of a complaint, the CEC may invalidate an election entirely or in part.

Only candidates and political party authorized representatives have the right to challenge PEC results and request recounts.

The CEC will maintain hotlines and online application of appeal to receive election-related complaints before, during and after Election Day.

Resources

- IFES/Uzbekistan meetings with local interlocutors, September 29–October 22, 2021
- Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan [website](#)
- Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan Telegram Channel
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission, Republic of Uzbekistan, Interim Report, September 15–October 5, 2021
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission, Republic of Uzbekistan, Needs Assessment Report, May 24–28, 2021.

About IFES in Uzbekistan

IFES re-established programming in Uzbekistan in 2021 in support of the Central Election Commission and civil society stakeholders. Through these programs, IFES provides assistance in strengthening the capacity of election officials to administer open and inclusive elections, deliver targeted voter education and awareness and ensure the accessibility of elections and civic process for all citizens of Uzbekistan. Through its work with civil society organizations, IFES is working to engage youth in civic advocacy and empower women to assert their rights as equal citizens and support the electoral and political enfranchisement of persons with disabilities and representatives of ethnic minority communities in building a culture of democracy and inclusive decision-making.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Uzbekistan Central Election Commission as of October 21, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.