

# **UZBEKISTAN: Presidential election: preliminary findings of the OSCE observation mission**

*See HRWF list of religious prisoners in Uzbekistan (Sunnis, Sufis, Said Nursi Followers, Protestants) [here](#).*

OSCE/ODIHR (10.12.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2hsEx0W> – The 4 December presidential election underscored the need of comprehensive reform to address long-standing systemic shortcomings. The legal framework is not conducive to holding democratic elections. The election administration undertook measures to enhance the transparency of its work and prepared efficiently for the election. The dominant position of state actors and limits on fundamental freedoms undermine political pluralism and led to a campaign devoid of genuine competition. Media covered the election in a highly restrictive and controlled environment, and the dissemination of a state-defined narrative did not allow voters to receive an alternative viewpoint. Significant irregularities were noted on election day, including indications of ballot box stuffing and widespread proxy voting, despite a concerted campaign to address the latter. Election commissions faced difficulties in completing the results protocols.

The presidential election is regulated by a multitude of laws and Central Election Commission (CEC) resolutions. Recent legal amendments addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, mainly of a technical nature. Most other long-standing key recommendations have not yet been addressed.

Overall, the electoral legal framework places undue limitations on fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and is restrictively implemented.

Election commissions, led by the CEC, efficiently administered operational aspects during the preelection period, and met all legal deadlines. The CEC held open sessions and promptly published its decisions, thus contributing to the transparency of the electoral process. Important procedures related to election day and the tabulation of results were left unregulated. The CEC conducted a comprehensive voter awareness campaign on state and private media, including against proxy voting.

Four party-nominated candidates, including the prime minister who serves as the acting president, contested the election. The law does not provide for self-nominated candidates. Some candidate eligibility requirements are contrary to international obligations, including those related to residency, language proficiency and criminal convictions. In a positive step, the number of supporting signatures required for candidate registration was lowered from five to one per cent of voters nationwide, thus reducing an obstacle on the right to stand.

Although four candidates stood in the election, they refrained from challenging each other's platforms and government policies. The campaign lacked competitiveness and voters were not presented with a genuine choice of political alternatives. It took place in a highly regulated environment and was characterized by an apparent homogeneity of materials and events of the four candidates. Campaign activities of the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan candidate blurred the

line between party and State in contravention of paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

The absence of a centralized voter register and the possibility of registration on election day makes it difficult to ensure that voters were included in only one voter list and voted only once. The lack of safeguards against multiple registration and voting potentially undermines the integrity of the electoral process. Around 20.5 million voters were registered to vote, including some 12,000 abroad.

The legislation stringently defines campaign coverage, while granting each candidate ample free airtime and space within national and regional state media, which markedly exceeded editorial output. Uniform and repetitive reports on candidates' activities consistently featured in a predominantly positive tone, while the airing of their direct speech was confined to pre-recorded campaign messages. Access to national and international analytical and critical websites continued to be blocked. Consequently, the public was shielded from a genuine exchange of political ideas, which effectively compromised voters' ability to make an informed choice.

During an election year, parties receive an equal amount of public funding for campaign-related expenses. Campaign finance transparency is limited by a lack of requirements for public disclosure of expenditures and pre-election reporting by contestants. Private funding to parties or candidates for campaigning is prohibited, which is an undue limitation on citizens' ability to financially support their preferred contestant.

The election dispute resolution process is regulated by several laws and CEC resolutions, which results in a lack of coherence. The law does not provide for requests for recounts or the invalidation of results, thus limiting effective remedy on key aspects of the electoral process. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM has not been made aware of any formal complaints filed to election commissions or the courts.

National minorities enjoy full political rights under the Constitution. Campaign materials were available in three minority languages. The CEC produced most election-related material, including ballots, in Uzbek, Russian and Karakalpak languages. State-owned newspapers with a nationwide reach provided candidates with free print space for campaign messages in Uzbek, Russian, Tajik and Kazakh. Language or identity issues did not feature in the campaign.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women remain under-represented in elected and executive office. They comprised some 36 and 47 per cent of the DEC and PEC members, respectively. Of the sixteen CEC members, two are women.

Non-partisan citizen observation is not provided for in the law, contrary to paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Authorities accredited 548 international and over 37,000 party observers.

Election day was assessed negatively by OSCE/ODIHR EOM observers. Voting was assessed negatively in 12 per cent of observations, with observers noting serious irregularities inconsistent with national legislation and OSCE commitments,

including proxy voting and indications of ballot box stuffing. Observers assessed counting negatively in 46 of 77 cases. Reconciliation procedures were not followed in more than half of polling stations observed. PECs faced serious challenges in completing and reconciling the results protocols that often had to be amended during tabulation.

.....

**If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, click here for a free subscription to our newsletters!**

***Also:***

**HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/human-rights-in-the-world/>**

**List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>**