

Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan: Tokayev consolidates power

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On 23 August, Kazakhstan held early elections to its unicameral parliament, the Kurultai. The vote followed constitutional amendments adopted in a referendum on 15 March this year (see '[Kazakhstan's new constitution: preparations for succession and the façade of democratisation](#)'), which abolished the upper house. Adilet, a party associated with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, won a decisive majority. According to the Central Election Commission, it secured 71.2% of the vote on a turnout of 74%, giving it 110 of the 145 seats in parliament. OSCE observers questioned the credibility of the turnout figures and highlighted the lack of political pluralism in the country.

The election result points to a further consolidation of power by Tokayev. Although five parties will enter the Kurultai, none represents genuine opposition. Moreover, representatives of all seven parties allowed to contest the election declared their support for Tokayev. Despite the official narrative of democratisation, Kazakhstan will remain an authoritarian presidential republic, with the head of state continuing to determine both domestic and foreign policy.

Commentary

- **The victory of the Adilet party, established earlier this year, had been expected and demonstrates Tokayev's firm control over the country's political processes.** The party emerged from the previously dominant Amanat party, which has since been dissolved, with its members incorporated into Adilet. Its programme supports Tokayev's policies and reforms. Amanat, known as Nur Otan until 2022, was associated with Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first president of independent Kazakhstan, who held office until 2019. Adilet's members are now mainly people with direct ties to Tokayev, including his advisers. The party dominated the brief election campaign, with the election date announced in July, and its campaign materials had the strongest presence in public spaces.
- **Members of the newly elected Kurultai will support the president in implementing his policies,** including reforms aimed at modernising Kazakhstan and strengthening the rule of law. The country will also continue its multi-vector foreign policy. It will maintain relations with its traditional partners, Russia and China, while developing ties with previously less prioritised partners, including Western and Central Asian countries. The composition of parliament indicates strong support for the existing policy course. The

Kurultai will also include representatives of four other pro-presidential parties: Auyt, which represents rural interests and came second with 6.3% of the vote, securing 10 seats; the liberal Respublika party, with 5.6% and nine seats; Aq Jol, with 5.2% and eight seats; and the Nationwide Social Democratic Party, with 5.1% and eight seats.

- **The campaign and elections confirmed that there is no room in Kazakhstan for a genuine political opposition to operate legally.** In the run-up to the vote, journalists and activists who criticised Tokayev and the government or highlighted corruption were arrested and convicted. As during the earlier constitutional referendum, abstaining from the vote was one way of expressing opposition to the elections. Turnout was lowest in Almaty, at 43%. The country's most populous city has a traditionally politically engaged population. In addition, 2.51% of voters chose the 'against all' option, rejecting all the parties standing in the election. Tokayev introduced this option in 2021, and it offers another way to protest against the absence of genuine opposition. In the 2022 presidential election, for example, it was the second most popular choice.
- **Tokayev's possible candidacy in the presidential election scheduled for 2029 could represent another step towards the complete consolidation of power.** His remarks on election day attracted particular attention when he said it was too early to declare whether he would seek another term. This marks a notable change from his previous position, as he had firmly denied intending to extend his rule. However, on 7 July this year, the Constitutional Court ruled that the constitutional changes had 'reset' presidential terms, allowing Tokayev to stand for president again. Nevertheless, the 73-year-old president may opt to transfer power to a younger successor while retaining influence without holding formal office. Preparations for the succession could begin with the announcement of the country's vice-president. Tokayev has said the appointment will be announced within 10 days of the election and that the post will go to someone 'well known in the country'. Regardless of whether he decides to formally extend his rule, Tokayev will seek to retain influence over state policy after his current term expires.