

Kazak Opposition Claims Mass Violations

Author: [Gaziza Baituova](#)

Nursultan Nazarbaev is set for another seven years in power after an election widely condemned as fraudulent.

Kazak opposition leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay has described last weekend's presidential elections as "the height of dishonesty and injustice" and hinted at protests ahead.

"We recorded hundreds of thousands of violations. The mass fraud is still continuing," said Tuyakbay, Nursultan Nazarbaev's main rival from the opposition coalition For a Fair Kazakstan.

"We can, if necessary, bring more than 10,000 people into the streets for rallies, marches and protest actions," he warned.

Angry demonstrations over falsified election results led to changes of power in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. The Kazak authorities, however, have warned that they will ensure there is no revolution in their country, even passing a law banning demonstrations in the immediate aftermath of the election.

Tuyakbay indicated that his supporters would stick to legal methods, saying, "We will do everything within the framework of the constitution."

Kazakstan's Central Electoral Commission, CEC, has formally named Nazarbaev as president, with the inauguration date set for January 11. According to official figures, Tuyakbay won 6.6 per cent of the votes on December 4 against Nazarbaev's 91.15 per cent.

Ak Jol party leader Alikhan Baimenov got 1.65 per cent, while the other two contenders, ecology group leader Mels Eleusizov and Communist Party chief Erasyl Abylkasymov scored less than half of one per cent each.

"By universal acknowledgement, this election was the best in the history of sovereign Kazakstan. Maximum openness was shown to all participants of the electoral process," said CEC head Onalsyn Jumabekov.

Tuyakbay supporters and foreign observers strongly disagree. The OSCE described the poll as failing to meet international standards for democratic elections.

"Unfortunately, although the authorities made certain efforts to improve the electoral process, they did not show sufficient political will to hold truly sound elections," said the OSCE's Bruce George.

In the southern city of Taraz, the head of Tuyakbay's local election headquarters said preliminary figures assembled by the campaign show that over 500 cases of violations of electoral legislation were recorded there on polling day.

Tuyakbay's press secretary, Aidos Sarimov, told IWPR that the situation was similar around the country, with many people voting more than once, raising voter turnout numbers which he said didn't actually exceed 60 per cent.

Observers in Taraz told IWPR that some people were allowed to vote twice, once in the place where they were registered and again where they lived.

Others were excluded from the electoral roll, despite having previously registered their names. Some who'd been living in a constituency for many years complained they were left off the list.

Cases where voters were bused in from outside were also recorded.

Taraz resident Lidia Serebrennikova said that this happened at her polling station, but "when we objected, we were told that infirm old ladies were being brought to vote. However, it was healthy young people that got out of the vehicles and voted in an organised manner."

Though election monitors at some polling stations were kept well away from the staff who were handing out ballots and registering voters, observer Irina Medvedeva got close enough in the East Kazakhstan region to see two people being given several ballots.

Students reported being pressured to vote for Nazarbaev by lecturers, and some in the South Kazakhstan region were allowed to cast their ballots without being registered, said Nurlan Seijaparov, the head of Tuyakbay's campaign headquarters in the area.

Overcrowding was also a problem, with queues stretching around tables where ballots were issued, obstructing the observers' view of the process. At Pavlodar's teacher training institute the long lines discouraged voters. "The flow didn't stop all day. My friends and I left before it was our turn," said one student.

"The active participation of the population clearly shows the interest and hope of the people of Kazakhstan for the development of a democratic society. However, the high turnout, in several cases, caused overcrowding at electoral districts, which complicated the voting process and hindered secrecy of voting," said Tadeusz Iwinski, head of the Council of Europe delegation.

Tuyakbay and OSCE observers reported that unauthorised outsiders were drafted in to help election staff hand out ballot papers in Pavlodar.

OSCE observers were particularly critical of the count, saying although polling took place in a calm and peaceful manner, things deteriorated after the polls closed. It described the counting process as "bad" or "very bad" at 25 per cent of constituencies where the process was observed.

Around 460 observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights monitored the election, along with representatives from other organisations including the European Parliament, which also noted problems.

“We witnessed several improvements in the electoral process, and they gave us hope. But we are of the opinion that a great deal needs to be done for the incipient democracy in Kazakhstan to grow and develop,” said the head of the parliamentary delegation Struan Stevenson.

Dariga Nazarbaeva, the president’s daughter and leader of the pro-government People’s Coalition of Kazakhstan, defended the process and criticised the conclusions made by observers, particularly the OSCE.

“We can state that the People’s Coalition of Kazakhstan did not record the violations which the OSCE gave in their report,” she said.

Nazarbaev, who will now serve another seven-year term, gave a speech on December 5 promising prosperity alongside the development of democracy.

He also offered an olive branch to those in the “constructive” opposition - a chance to join the government.

Tuyakbay, however, was quick to reject the offer.

“How can there be any question of cooperation when elementary rights are infringed?” he said.

“These elections... are a clear demonstration that the authoritarian regime is turning into a totalitarian regime. If we accept these results, our country can expect a tragic future.”

Gaziza Baituova is an IWPR correspondent in Taraz.

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