

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

An Open Access Journal

Home About ▾ Browse Issues ▾ For Authors ▾ Login

Register

Volume 17, Issue 4

THE 2015-2016 ELECTORAL CYCLE IN KAZAKHSTAN SUMMED UP

0

Kadyrzhan SMAGULOV, Kultai ADILOVA, Nesipbala KAMBAROVA

MAGULOV, Kultai ADILOVA, Nesipbala KAMBAROVA

Kadyrzhan Smagulov, Ph.D. (Political Science), Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Kultai Adilova, Ph.D. (Law), Associate Professor, Head of the Law Department, Süleyman Demirel University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

Nesipbala Kambarova, MA (Law), Senior Lecturer, Adıner Higher Law School, Caspian Public University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ABSTRACT

Since the 2011-2012 parliamentary and presidential elections Kazakhstan has been free from political turbulence. Amid the rapidly worsening world and regional economic context that has affected Kazakhstan, and many other countries for that matter, the people in power had to think and act promptly. Later it became abundantly clear that confronted with the popular discontent and disturbances stirred up by the negative trends in the economy and financial sphere that swept the country after the parliamentary elections, the people in power were able to gain time and remain in control. The electoral cycle of 2015-2016 allowed them to rally the absolute majority of the country's population in support of their economic and political measures.

Keywords: elections, president, parliament, political parties, opposition.

Introduction

In the face of the far from simple financial and economic conditions the country was coping with throughout 2015 and in the first months of 2016 and the possibility of rising social tension, the people in power had no other alternative but to hold pre-term presidential and parliamentary elections.

To avoid unwelcome outbursts and ensure the desired results, the government took certain preventive measures to keep the party environment in check.

Here we analyze the results of the electoral cycle of 2015-2016.

Moving Toward the Elections

In the wake of the 2012 parliamentary elections, the government took certain measures to eliminate the non-systemic political opposition.

In 2011-2012, the loyal Rukhaniyat Party experienced certain changes in its ranks. Its chairman Serikzhan Mambetalin, elected party chairman in 2010, was obviously inclined to close ranks with the Kazakh national-patriots, the most scything critics of the



...

»

government for its half-hearted support and promotion of the Kazakh language. In 2012, at a special Rukhaniyat congress, he was removed from his post and excluded from the party. He was arrested three years later and accused of fanning national strife and insulting national honor and dignity in social networks.

In 2015, smaller parties were lumped together into bigger ones; the Party of Patriots and the Kazakhstan Social Democratic Auyl Party were united to form the People's Democratic Patriotic Auyl Party. The Rukhaniyat Party was united with the Democratic Adilet Party to become the Birlik Party.

The government was very active among the opposition parties as well, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK) and the unregistered People's Alga! Party being its main targets. They were closely affiliated with Mukhtar Ablyazov, businessman and disgraced politician, the central figure of several criminal cases of larceny on a big scale. In 2012, Vladimir Kozlov, leader of the Alga! Party, was arrested and accused of premeditated actions designed to fan social strife by spreading literature and other information carriers with grievous results. The same year, the party was banned as an extremist organization; in August 2015, the CPK was liquidated by a court decision.

This narrowed the political field down to what was believed to be the optimal arrangement: three parliamentary parties (Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan—CPPK) and three extra-parliamentary parties (the Nationwide Social Democratic Party [NSDP], Auyl, and Birlik, while the Azat Party has not been visible on the political field for a long time). These parties perfectly fit the country's political context. Under the 2007 amendments, the state had acquired the right to fund political parties, which made Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and CPPK a de facto part of the state machine.

The smaller parties (Birlik and Auyl) have several functions to perform: first, to create the illusion of a multiparty system and nationwide support of the government by all the political forces. Second, to set up election commissions at the local level; the law has banned representation of only one party in such commissions. Third, the opposition offers a choice of loyal parties if there is a need to replace one of the parliamentary parties; its success will be explained by the enlargement of the parties and hence correspondingly larger electorates.

The NSDP is a moderate opposition party designed to attract at least some of the protest voters.

The 2015 Presidential Elections

In 2015, the acute economic crisis caused by the plummeting oil prices, devalued national currency, and the sanctions against Russia, Kazakhstan's largest trade partner and member of the EurAsEC, made pre-term presidential elections desirable and even necessary. On 14 February, Deputy Chairman of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan Anatoly Bashmakov formulated this initiative, which was later supported by the speakers of both houses of parliament. After consulting with the chairman of the Constitutional Council, Nursultan Nazarbaev signed a decree that set 26 April 2015 as the election date.

The Central Election Commission registered three candidates: N. Nazarbaev from the Nur Otan Party, T. Sydykov nominated by the CPPK, and A. Kusainov nominated by the Trade Union Federation of Kazakhstan. It should be said that the number of presidential candidates has been shrinking from one election to the next. In 2005, there were five candidates, in 2011, there were four, while in 2015, there were only three. One of the candidates was not nominated by a political party: in 2005 and 2011, this role belonged to M. Eleusizov, and in 2015, to A. Kusainov.

The opposition parties (NSDP and Azat) decided to stay away, while the loyal parties—Ak Zhol, Auyl, Birlik, and the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan—supported Nazarbaev.¹

The turnout across the country was impressive—95.22%; the Almaty Region (98.48%) and the South Kazakhstan Region (97.78%) were the most active. On the whole, the turnout in 15 (out of 16) regions was higher than 94.5%; the city of Almaty with 78.28% being the only exception.

Nursultan Nazarbaev won with 97.75% of the votes; Turgun Sydykov received 1.61%, while Abulgazi Kusainov acquired 0.64%. The head of state reaped the highest share of votes in the Almaty Region (98.84%) and in Astana (98.54%); the city of Almaty lagged behind, giving 92.55% of its votes in support of the head of state. The Mangistau Region gave the CPPK candidate the largest share of the votes (2.22%), while the Karaganda Region gave the lowest (0.63%). In Almaty, A. Kusainov was supported by 1.48% of the votes, while the Akmola Region gave him only 0.1%.

On the whole, Nazarbaev's electoral base increased by 2.2% compared with the previous elections; the highest increase was registered in the West Kazakhstan Region (+4.57%) and the lowest in the Aktobe Region (+0.68%). In 15 out of 16 regions, Nazarbaev received over 97.5% of the votes; in Almaty, 92.55%.

An analysis of the spread of votes cast for Nazarbaev by region at the three latest presidential elections showed that the differences between the regions were small and growing smaller. While in 2005, the spread was 77.2-95.83% (18.63



...

»

percentage points), in 2011, it dropped to 6.3 percentage points (or 3.59 percentage points if we exclude Almaty); and in 2015, 6.33 percentage points (or 1.4 percentage points without Almaty).

The political sphere remained the same after the presidential elections, while the country's financial sphere changed a lot. In August, the National Bank of the RK announced that it would switch to a floating national currency exchange rate. In just one day, the tenge lost 26% of its exchange rate to the dollar; during the next few days, the rate improved, albeit insignificantly, while in January 2016, the U.S. dollar cost 340 tenge. Early in 2014, the exchange rate was 150 tenge, which means that in two years the tenge weakened more than 2.2-fold.

The 2016 Parliamentary Elections

In January 2016, the president, acting on the initiative of the deputies, disbanded the Majilis and called for pre-term elections on 20 March. The deputies were convinced that society should be consolidated at this difficult time, the country needed an adequate legal basis for implementing the Plan of the Nation, and it could save money by electing the parliament and the local power bodies on the same day.

The following six parties participated in the elections: Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, CPPK, Auyt, NSDP, and Birlik.

The turnout of 77.1% was 1.65% higher than at the previous election in 2012. The turnout was the highest in the Almaty Region (94.06%); the highest increase in turnout was registered in Astana (+ 21.35%), while in the city of Almaty, the number of voters dropped by 7.3%.

In 2016, Nur Otan received 1.21% more than in 2012, the total share being 82.2%; Astana cast the highest share of votes (85.18%) for the ruling party; while Almaty cast the lowest (70.1%).

The Akmola Region demonstrated the biggest increase in votes (+5.52%) cast for Nur Otan compared with 2012. In the Karaganda Region, on the other hand, the electoral base of the presidential party shrank by 2.43%. This means that in 14 out of 16 regions the share of votes cast for Nur Otan increased.

Ak Zhol attracted the votes of 7.18% of the voters, or 0.29% less than in 2012. It received the highest share of votes (8.8%) in Almaty and the lowest (5.2%) in Astana, where the party lost 2.11% (the biggest loss); in Almaty, on other hand, it received 2.24% more than in 2012. On the whole, the party lost some of its supporters in 10 out of 16 regions.

The CPPK came third with over 7% of the votes (7.14%, or 0.05% less than in 2012). The people's communists lost votes in 6 out of 16 regions. The Jambyl Region demonstrated the highest support of the communist ideology (8.58%), while the West Kazakhstan Region showed the lowest (5.41%).

That fact that the opposition NSDP gained fewer votes than Auyt, which came fourth in the race, is highly important as the result of unification of the Party of Patriots and Auyt. Their total gain at the previous parliamentary elections—2.28% in 2004; 2.29% in 2007; 2.02% in 2012; and 2.01% in 2016—meant that the average figure was 2-2.23% of the votes. What is important is the fact that their unification gave the pro-government media the opportunity to talk about a crushing defeat.

On the whole, the NSDP received a meager 1.18%, that is, 0.5% less than in 2012. The largest number of its supporters lives in Almaty (9.99%) and the smallest in the Almaty Region (0.11%). In four years, its electoral base has shrunk in 12 out of 16 regions.

An analysis of the spread of votes showed that in 2016 Almaty demonstrated the smallest share of those who voted for Nur Otan (70.1%), while the highest was registered in Astana (85.18%). The spread of votes between these two figures is 15.08 percentage points, the same index, minus Almaty, being 4.86 percentage points. It should be said that the main presidential party demonstrated a much wider spread at the previous parliamentary elections: 46.73 percentage points in 2004 and 33.37 percentage points in 2007 (15.95 percentage points without Almaty). This means that the voters (although not the Almaty electorate) in 15 out of 16 regions demonstrated their high support of Nur Otan despite the regions' different structures, national and geographic conditions, resources, and economic and social contexts.

Similar analyses of the other main parties are also highly illustrative. In 2004, the spread of votes cast for Ak Zhol was 36.02 percentage points; in 2007, it was 5.35 percentage points (or 4.45 percentage points without Almaty); in 2012, 1.78 percentage points (or 1.64 percentage points without Almaty); and in 2016, 3.6 percentage points (or 2.44 percentage points without Almaty). This means that the share of votes was practically the same in all the regions and remained at a level of 7%, which gave the party seats in the parliament. This time, however, Ak Zhol did not get at least one third of the votes to repeat its success of 2004. On the one hand, the party gained seats in the Majilis; while on the other, Nur Otan remained the absolutely dominating party in all the regions.



...

»

The CPPK faced the following spread of votes: 2.84 percentage points in 2004; 3.24 percentage points (or 2.98 percentage points without the Mangistau Region) in 2007; 3.97 percentage points or 6.08-8.20%, or 1.12 percentage points (without the West Kazakhstan Region) in 2012; and 3.17 percentage points (or 2.57 percentage points without the West Kazakhstan Region) in 2016. Very much like the Ak Zhol Party, starting in 2012, the CPPK has been gaining about 7% of votes in all the regions.

This means that “the government is the main electoral engineer and political technologist in Kazakhstan.”²

Very much like in 2012, the 2016 elections created the already familiar balance of political forces in the Majilis: Nur Otan in the center, Ak Zhol on the right, and the CPPK on the left. Lyudmila Karmazina has written that Ak Zhol and the CPPK were allowed a limited number of seats to prevent their domination over Nur Otan in the Majilis.³

It should be said that the government did not act at random. It had good reasons to select these two parties. First, most of the younger generation does not support the communist ideology (the protest level among them being much higher than among other groups), while the middle class supports liberal ideas. This explains the CPPK’s presence in the parliament.

With Azat Peruashev as its new leader, Ak Zhol became the party of big and medium business closely affiliated with the government.

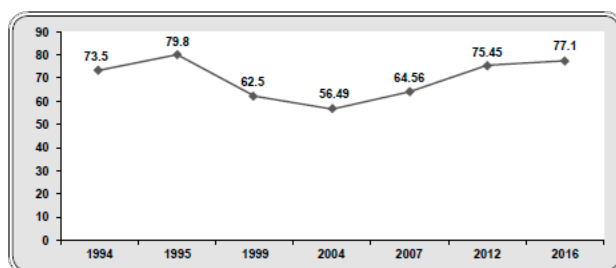
This means that the 2016 parliamentary elections did not change the party context, the contracting electorate of the NSDP being the only exception. For the second time Ak Zhol and the CPPK gained enough votes to squeeze into parliament.

The Results of the 2015-2016 Electoral Cycle

An analysis of the turnout at the parliamentary and presidential elections revealed that in both cases it dropped in 2004-2005 when the government was extremely active with respect to the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan opposition movement.

Figure 1

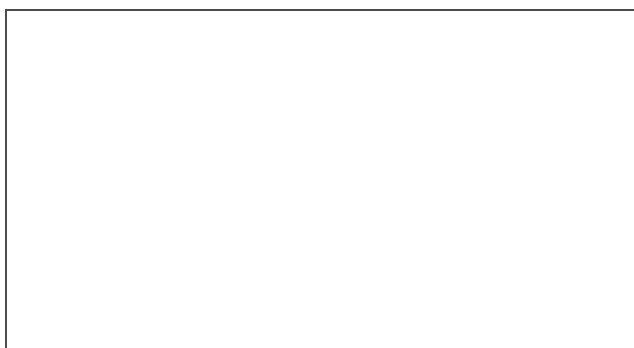
Dynamics of the Turnout at the Parliamentary Elections



Later, turnout increased by about 20% at both the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Figure 2

Dynamics of the Turnover at the Presidential Elections



The turnover at presidential elections is normally higher than at parliamentary elections; this means that people attach particular importance to the highest post in the country with the widest possible powers.

In 2016, six political parties ran for the Majilis; in 2004 there were twelve of them. This means that the number of parties in Kazakhstan is decreasing. In 2006, all the large pro-presidential parties were lumped together into Nur Otan; in the same way, the opposition parties were united into one large party, the NSDP. As mentioned above, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan was



eliminated in 2015, the place it vacated on the left being given to the systemic CPPK party. Smaller parties, such as PPK and Auyl, and Rukhaniyat and Adilet, were united into larger structures.

Today Nur Otan dominates the party system of Kazakhstan. Despite the fact that since 2012, two more parties (Ak Zhol and CPPK) have been also present in the Majilis, together they do not outnumber the pro-presidential party and are unable, therefore, to block its initiatives.

An analysis of the parliamentary elections revealed that in 2007, the preferences of the electorate began gradually losing their diversity. Indeed, 15 out of 16 regions demonstrate practically identical shares of votes and this is despite the very different turnouts. The more or less identical degree of satisfaction with the situation in the country explains why Nur Otan's electoral base is more or less stable, but it does not explain why people continue voting for Ak Zhol and the CPPK.

By the way, "after September 1995, when the Constitutional Law on the Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted, it received over 792 amendments and addenda."⁴ Since 1995, when the parliament received its legal powers, they have been considerably limited. Under Art 13 (1) of the Constitutional Law of the RK on the Government, the Cabinet of Ministers of Kazakhstan has the right of legislative initiative.⁵ The government is actively using this right. Political scientist Marat Shibutov has pointed out that "the interdepartmental commission under vice minister of justice is the key legislative structure responsible for all laws. The interests of the regions are defended not in the parliament, but in the republican budget commission."⁶

It should be said the deputies have not yet tapped the full right of the parliamentary political parties to form the government they received in the course of the Constitutional reform.⁷ Indeed, the electorate remained loyal to Nur Otan despite the fact that the government approved devaluation of the tenge in 2014, there was a switch to a floating national currency exchange rate in 2015 (both decisions devalued people's incomes two-fold), and there were the protests against these measures. The party, in turn, appoints the people responsible for these negative economic trends to ministerial posts. According to public opinion polls, the greatest number of respondents eager to replace the government lives in the Atyrau, Mangistau, Karaganda, and Kostanay regions and in Astana;⁸ the same people, however, support the pro-presidential party at the parliamentary elections.

The results of the 2016 parliamentary elections demonstrated that the opposition represented by the NSDP had lost its electorate. An analysis of the election campaigns of 1999-2016 showed that the opposition in Kazakhstan has lived through several stages. At the first, the radical ideas of an uncompromising struggle against the ruling regime predominated. At the second, most of the opposition members moved to moderate positions and closer to the government. At the third, the government eliminated the non-systemic opposition represented by the CPK and the Alga! Party and spread its control to the entire oppositional field. It seems that after the parliamentary elections of 2012 and criminal persecution of oppositional businessman Mukhtar Ablyazov that predated the elections, the NSDP and Azat became less active and put forward fewer initiatives; the big functionaries preferred to move away from active political involvement. This is confirmed by the refusal of NSDP members to run for president and their half-hearted protests against the results of the parliamentary elections of 2012 and 2016. The NSDP in fact became part of the systemic opposition that was not allowed into parliament, a fate the CPPK and Ak Zhol avoided.

Conclusion

The electoral cycle of 2015-2016 demonstrated that people associate the government and all the important decisions with the President. This is confirmed by the much higher turnout at the presidential elections compared with the parliamentary elections and practically 100% support of the incumbent.

The results of the parliamentary elections are not that clear. In 2016, as well as four years earlier, Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the CPPK negotiated the barrier with almost similar results, even though in 2016 the situation in the country was much worse than in 2012. The alternative political force represented by the NSDP is losing its electorate; this means that it failed to capture the votes of those who voted for other parties. It seems that the protest electorate prefers to protest by ignoring the parliamentary elections.

It should be said that the government used all the familiar tools and invented new approaches (parliamentary elections in the wake of presidential elections being one of them) to ensure parliamentary seats for the loyal parties. The voters who supported the president at the presidential elections elected the pro-presidential party by inertia. Used during the 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 elections, this method confirmed its efficiency.

At the same time, the right of the protest electorate and the people who disagree with the official policy is grossly violated by the deliberately limited political rivalry, strict control of the party environment, uprooting of the non-systemic and moderate opposition, the ban on unsanctioned rallies, and control over practically all of the media.



- ¹ See: “Report on the Results of the Elections of President of the RK of 2015,” available at [\[Link\]](#), 9 July, 2016.
- ² L.I. Karmazina, “Kazakhstan posle vyborov: sokhranenie status quo,” in: *Sbornik trudov konferentsii “Partii i vabory: vchera, segodnya, zavtra,”* ed. by Yu.G. Korguniuk, G.M. Mikhaleva, KMK, Moscow, 2012, p. 62. [Back to text](#)
- ³ Ibidem. [Back to text](#)
- ⁴ “Election System of the RK,” available at [\[Link\]](#), 9 July, 2016. [Back to text](#)
- ⁵ See: *Constitutional Law on the Government of the RK*, available at [\[Link\]](#), 9 July, 2016. [Back to text](#)
- ⁶ “A Very Short Distance between Power and People in Kazakhstan Kills Political Parties. Interview with political scientist M. Shibusov,” available in Russian at [\[Link\]](#), 9 July, 2016. [Back to text](#)
- ⁷ See: L. Karmazina, “Kazakhstan i Rossia: propotsionalnye pravila vyborov v parlament,” *Vetsnik ENU*, No. 1 (61), 2008. [Back to text](#)
- ⁸ See: *Tsennosti i idealy nezavisimogo Kazakhstana*, Collective monograph, ed. by Z.K. Shaukenova, Almaty, 2015, p. 300. [Back to text](#)



« Previous Post

Next Post »

SEARCH

Search



[Submit Your Paper](#)

RECENT ARTICLES

[The Influence of the Implementation of Internal Supervision and Good Corporate Governance \(GCG\) on the Prevention of Fraud at the Bina Administration Foundation](#)

[“IN IMPROVING CONSUMER DECISIONS CHOOSE SHOPPING AT INDOMARKET MINIMARKET BY UPGRADE QUALITY OF SERVICE AND THE INFLUENCE OF REFERENCE GROUP”](#)

[“IN IMPROVING CONSUMER DECISIONS CHOOSE SHOPPING AT INDOMARKET MINIMARKET BY UPGRADE QUALITY OF SERVICE AND THE INFLUENCE OF REFERENCE GROUP”](#)

[The Influence of the Implementation of Internal Supervision and Good Corporate Governance \(GCG\) on the Prevention of Fraud at the Bina Administration Foundation](#)

[The Influence of the Implementation of Internal Supervision and Good Corporate Governance \(GCG\) on the Prevention of Fraud at the Bina Administration Foundation](#)

METRICS

**Central Asia and the
Caucasus**

Not yet assigned
quartile

SJR 2021

0



powered by scimagojr.com

© 2022 Central Asia and the Caucasus Powered by WordPress

