



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

27 October 2024

### ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

28-30 May 2024



Warsaw  
26 July 2024

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**REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN**  
**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
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**ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In anticipation of an official invitation from the authorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan to observe the 27 October parliamentary elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 28 to 30 May. The NAM included Keara Castaldo, ODIHR Senior Election Adviser, and Kakha Inaishvili, ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and preparations for these elections. Based on this assessment, the NAM should recommend whether to deploy an ODIHR observation activity for the forthcoming elections and, if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions as well as with representatives of political parties, media, civil society, and the international community. A list of meetings is annexed to this report.

ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Election Commission for their assistance in organizing the NAM as well as all of its interlocutors for taking time to meet with the NAM and for sharing their views.

## **II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Uzbekistan is a presidential republic with most executive and decision-making functions vested in the president, who shares legislative power with the bicameral parliament, *Oliy Majlis*. The 2019 elections resulted in the representation of all five registered political parties in the parliament. The upcoming parliamentary elections will be held under a new mixed electoral system and will complete the political cycle of constitutional reform preceded by the adoption of an amended Constitution and subsequent 2023 amendments to the electoral legal framework.

The elections will take place under a recently revised legal framework. The December 2023 legal amendments introduced a mixed electoral system combining a closed list proportional representation and majoritarian systems, modified the structure of election administration and rules for the formation of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and increased the gender quota from 30 to 40 per cent, among other changes. Some of the amendments addressed prior ODIHR recommendations, such as reviewing the electoral legal framework, introducing additional measures to enhance the participation of women in public and political life, and cancelling fees for filing a complaint. Other ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those related to certain aspects of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression, as well as citizen election observation and registration of political parties.

The elections will be administered by a three-tiered structure led by the CEC. Preparations are underway and the CEC, besides adopting various regulations, plans to organize a comprehensive training for members of all lower-level commissions. In addition, the CEC intends to conduct an active voter information campaign on mixed electoral system and voting procedures. A public awareness campaign targeting specific groups, including voters with disabilities, first-time voters, and women, is also envisaged.

Voter registration is passive. In line with international standards and addressing a previous ODIHR recommendation, recent constitutional changes lifted the blanket restriction on voting rights of those declared legally incapable. There are some 20 million voters registered, and voter lists are extracted from a centralized, electronic register. While no ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed any concerns regarding the accuracy of voter lists, the registration of voters in supplementary voter lists on election day is still provided for by the law, although without ensuring sufficient safeguards against the possible misuse of this procedure.

Eligible voters aged 25 or older, who have resided permanently in the country for at least five years before election day may stand for elections. Only registered political parties may nominate candidates. Following the recent amendments, in addition to single-mandate constituencies, political parties may also nominate candidates in the nationwide constituency as part of a closed list. Independent candidates and electoral coalitions are not provided for. All five registered parties informed the ODIHR NAM about their intention to field candidates.

The law guarantees equal campaign opportunities for all contestants, including in terms of holding meetings, access to the media and publication and distribution of campaign materials. The campaign is expected to focus on domestic socio-economic issues, poverty reduction, ecology, and ongoing reforms. Parties intend to campaign with traditional methods such as rallies and distribution of campaign materials, as well as online. All parties met by the ODIHR NAM expect to campaign without hindrance.

Campaigns are funded from the state budget and funding is allocated only to the political parties that have nominated a candidate. Despite previous ODIHR recommendation, and not in line with international good practice, alternative sources of campaign funding remain prohibited. Political parties have to submit an interim campaign finance report before election day and a final report after the elections. No ODIHR NAM interlocutor raised major concerns regarding the current rules of campaign funding.

The media environment is characterized by a large number of state-owned media. Contestants are entitled to receive free airtime and space on national and regional state-owned media outlets. The national broadcaster plans to organize debates, talk-shows, and air voter information materials on its channels, with sign language interpretation. Self-censorship remains an issue and journalists and bloggers often face threats. Despite prior ODIHR recommendation, defamation remains a criminal offense while slandering or insulting the president publicly can result in up to five years of imprisonment.

Individuals and legal entities may file a complaint with the election commissions. The election administration has jurisdiction over all election-related complaints, except for those against the actions and decisions of election commissions that are filed with administrative courts. The decisions of the CEC, including on election results, can be challenged to the Supreme Court. Positively, recent amendments cancelled fees for individuals to file a complaint thus addressing prior ODIHR recommendation.

Observers from international organizations, political parties, *Mahallas* and media representatives are entitled to observe the election. The legislation does not contain provisions for observation by citizen observers, contrary to international standards and previous ODIHR recommendations. Some ODIHR NAM interlocutors highlighted procedures for registering civil society organization and restrictions on funding as the main obstacles for the growth of civil society and their full participation in election processes.

All interlocutors met with during the ODIHR NAM underscored the need for an ODIHR election observation activity for the parliamentary elections noting the added value of an independent assessment of electoral process. Representatives of official bodies emphasized that they intend to administer the electoral process transparently and welcomed any recommendations for potential improvement of the process. Specific aspects that could benefit from review include the implementation of a revised legal framework, the work of election commissions at all levels, the voter and candidate registration, the conduct of the election campaign, its media coverage and election dispute resolution. Due to the lack of action on introducing important safeguards against election day irregularities, resulting in negative assessments during previous observations, the authorities' efforts to prevent such irregularities and adherence to procedures would also merit independent scrutiny.

On this basis, and while being mindful of the outstanding issues with regard to the respect of fundamental freedoms, the ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an election observation mission for the 2024 parliamentary elections. In addition to a core team of experts, ODIHR will request the secondment by OSCE participating States of 28 long-term observers to follow the election process countrywide, as well as 300 short-term observers to follow election day procedures. In line with ODIHR's standard methodology, the EOM would include a media monitoring element. This recommendation is contingent upon the availability of additional funds for the deployment of such a mission format.

### III. FINDINGS

#### A. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Uzbekistan is a presidential republic with most executive and decision-making functions vested in the president, who shares legislative power with the bicameral parliament, *Oliy Majlis*. The previous parliamentary elections took place in 2019 and resulted in the representation of all five registered political parties in the parliament.<sup>1</sup>

The upcoming parliamentary elections will be held under a new mixed electoral system, completing the political cycle of constitutional reform. This follows the adoption of a substantially revised Constitution and 2023 amendments to the electoral legal framework. In January 2024, further changes to several legislative acts aligned the activities of the parliamentary chambers with the updated Constitution, introducing self-dissolution provisions for both chambers, modifying the appointment process for the prime minister and the cabinet members, and granting legislative initiative to citizens, the upper chamber of the parliament, the Ombudsperson, and the Central Election Commission (CEC), among other changes.

Many ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed the adoption of the mixed electoral system and considered it as a precondition to increase the role of political parties, also envisaged in the president's 2022-2026 Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan. The strategy focuses on socio-economic development, efficient public administration, independent judiciary and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Still, burdensome requirements for party registration, broad legal grounds for denial of registration or suspension of party activities, and restrictions on holding assemblies persist. ODIHR, in

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<sup>1</sup> According to the official results, Liberal Democratic Party obtained 53 seats, Democratic Party *Milliy Tiklanish* 36 seats, Social Democratic Party *Adolat* 24 seats, People's Democratic Party 22 seats, and Ecological Party 15 seats.

its 2023 final report on early presidential election noted that the fundamental freedoms of association,<sup>2</sup> assembly<sup>3</sup> and expression<sup>4</sup> remain excessively circumscribed by legislation and in practice.

Although the Chairperson of the Senate and the Deputy Chairperson of the lower chamber of the parliament are women, they remain under-represented in the outgoing parliament, holding 47 of the 150 seats in the current Legislative Chamber, and 22 of the 100 members of the Senate.<sup>5</sup> Despite ongoing reforms aimed at increasing women's participation in line with the 2022-2026 National Programme, women are still underrepresented in political life, and gender stereotypes persist.<sup>6</sup>

ODIHR has observed ten elections and a referendum in Uzbekistan since 1999.<sup>7</sup> Most recently, ODIHR deployed an Election Observation Mission to assess the 2023 early presidential election. Its Final Report contains 27 recommendations, including 7 priority ones, for the authorities to bring the electoral process in line with OSCE commitments.<sup>8</sup>

## B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Uzbekistan is a party to the main international instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the 2023 Constitution and the 2019 Election Code, last amended in December 2023. In addition to revising the electoral system, the recent amendments, modified the formation rules for the Central Election Commission, introduced a new tier of Territorial Election Commissions, amended the provisions related to registration of party lists, and increased the gender quota from 30 to 40 per cent, requiring the placement of a woman as at least two out of every five candidates on the party list. In addition, the number of senators in the upper chamber of the parliament was reduced from 100 to 65 and changes were made related to local elections.

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<sup>2</sup> Criminal and administrative laws prohibit and penalize unregistered associations. The 1999 Law on Non-Governmental Organizations is supplemented by numerous decrees and resolutions governing their operation and funding, requiring approval of foreign grants by the Ministry of Justice. The Criminal Code criminalizes the unlawful organization and participation in unregistered associations, punishable with up to five years of imprisonment.

<sup>3</sup> Despite an absence of legally prescribed procedures for holding rallies and demonstrations, administrative laws prohibit and penalize peaceful assemblies organized or conducted in violation of legally prescribed procedures, and if repeated, the act is criminalized and punishable with up to three years of imprisonment. Further, the Code of Administrative Responsibilities has sanctions up to UZS 33,000,000 for 'creation of conditions to hold unauthorized gatherings, meetings, rallies and demonstrations (EUR 1 equals 12,589.4 UZS). Paragraph 36 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly states that "Offences such as the failure to provide advance notice of an assembly or the failure to comply with route, time and place restrictions imposed on an assembly should not be punishable with prison sentences or heavy fines".

<sup>4</sup> Provisions of the Criminal Code on offenses of terrorism, religious extremism, public insult or slander against the president are vague and open to arbitrary application.

<sup>5</sup> See 2023 [Inter-parliamentary Union data](#) on Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments.

<sup>6</sup> The 2022 UNDP study on "[Negative Impact of Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchal Attitudes on Gender Equality](#)" underscored that women's participation in the parliament improved by reaching 32 and 25 per cent of the seats in the Legislative Chamber and the Senate, respectively, however, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in the executive power (3.4 per cent), as well as in managerial positions (27 per cent) and in entrepreneurship (25 per cent).

<sup>7</sup> See previous [ODIHR election-related reports](#) on Uzbekistan.

<sup>8</sup> In paragraph 25 of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document, OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations". See ODIHR Electoral Recommendations Database Paragraph25.odihr.pl.

<sup>9</sup> These include the [1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), [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](#) (CRPD, ratified by Uzbekistan in June 2021).

According to the CEC, extensive public consultations, including with the involvement of the CEC members, preceded the adoption of the amendments.<sup>10</sup> The changes addressed a few prior ODIHR recommendations on reviewing the electoral legal framework and introducing additional measures to enhance the participation of women in public and political life. Other previous recommendations remain unaddressed, including those related to protecting fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, and expression, as well as on citizen election observation and the registration of political parties. Positively, the ODHR NAM learned that in March 2024, following the concerted efforts of an inter-agency working group, the legislative chamber and the CEC adopted a roadmap for implementing recommendations contained in the ODIHR final reports on the 2023 constitutional referendum and early presidential election.<sup>11</sup>

The parliament comprises two chambers – a 65-member Senate and a lower chamber with 150 members, both with five-year terms. The composition of the Senate is based on territorial representation, with 4 members indirectly elected from each of the 12 regions, the city of Tashkent and the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and 9 senators appointed by the president.

Following the 2023 amendments, the 150-member legislative chamber is elected using a mixed electoral system combining proportional representation and majoritarian systems, replacing the previous majoritarian system. Seventy-five members are elected in single-mandate constituencies through “first-past-the-post” system.<sup>12</sup> The other 75 members are elected from a nationwide constituency under a closed-list proportional system with a 7 per cent threshold. Seats are allocated using the Hare quota under the largest remainder method.<sup>13</sup> If national voter turnout is below 33 per cent, elections are declared invalid and must be repeated. However, run-off elections are not subject to a turnout requirement. Independent candidates are not allowed to stand, which ODIHR has previously criticized as contrary to paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

### C. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The elections will be administered by the CEC, 14 TECs, and some 11,000 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), including some 60 PECs abroad.<sup>14</sup> The recent amendments modified the structure of the election administration by replacing the 14 District Election Commissions with the new TECs.<sup>15</sup> State and local authorities are obliged to provide logistical and operational support to election commissions.

The 2023 legal amendments also changed the CEC formation rules and reduced the number of its members from 21 to 9, of which one must be a representative of the Republic of Karakalpakstan.<sup>16</sup> There are two women in the current composition. The parliament appoints the CEC members for an indefinite term based on proposals from regional representative bodies. The CEC chairperson is elected

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<sup>10</sup> ODIHR opinion regarding these amendments was not solicited unlike the practice on previous occasions.

<sup>11</sup> The roadmap includes specific measures for addressing ODIHR recommendations and the relevant agencies responsible for implementation in the period of 2024-2025.

<sup>12</sup> The boundaries of constituencies are determined taking into account the administrative-territorial structure of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the regions and the city of Tashkent. In line with the principle of equal suffrage, the Election Code requires that the number of registered voters in single-mandate constituencies should not deviate from the national average by more than 10 per cent.

<sup>13</sup> The quota is obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes by the number of seats contested. Then, each party's votes are divided by the quota, which yields the number of seats that each party won. Seats that cannot be allocated in this way are given to the parties with the largest remainder of the votes.

<sup>14</sup> Thirteen TECs are formed by the CEC and one by the local parliament of the Republic of Karakalpakstan.

<sup>15</sup> The district election commissions are responsible for managing local elections only.

<sup>16</sup> The powers of the CEC members working on a voluntary basis were terminated based on the decisions of the legislative chamber of the parliament following the recent legal amendments.

for a five-year term by the CEC from among its members and can hold this position for no more than two consecutive terms.

The CEC is responsible for organizing and conducting elections. It provides guidance and support to lower-level commissions and plays a leading role in all stages of the electoral process. The CEC is preparing for the upcoming elections and has been adopting regulations related to various aspects of the electoral process, including on forming TECs and PECs, trainings of election commission members, and the remuneration of election administrators. According to several ODIHR NAM interlocutors, the CEC is engaged in consultations with a wide range of electoral stakeholders to improve the administration of elections. Sessions of election commissions at all levels are open to representatives of the media, political parties, and international observers. ODIHR has previously noted that the facilitation of citizen observation of the elections would enhance the transparency of the process, including the election administration.

The TECs oversee the national and local elections within their territories, form lower-level electoral commissions and tabulate voting results.<sup>17</sup> On 29 May, the CEC formed TECs upon recommendations of the regional representative bodies. The CEC conducted individual interviews to select experienced and qualified candidates for the positions of chairs, deputies, and secretaries within the TECs. The CEC also informed the ODIHR NAM that it intends to organize a comprehensive cascade training for members of all lower-level election commissions.

The PECs organize and conduct voting and counting and consist of five to nineteen members. The TECs appoint PEC members no later than 40 days before election day based on proposals from the local councils who receive nominations from *Mahallas*, public associations and other organizations.<sup>18</sup> No single organization can nominate more than half of the PEC members for a specific PEC. Political parties, including contestants, are not entitled to nominate commission members.

According to the Election Code, every polling station should have ramps and voting booths that are suitable for persons with physical disabilities. While some CSOs reported that the majority of polling stations are accessible for persons with limited mobility, they also noted that voters in wheelchairs still face barriers due to inadequately adapted buildings. According to the CEC, such buildings must have a “call for help” button at the entrance to aid individuals who may require help. On election day, voters requiring assistance may be assisted by a person of their choice.

The legislation provides for several alternative voting methods for voters. Those who are unable to vote at their designated polling station on election day can vote early 10 to 3 days before the elections. Voters unable to visit the polling station due to health or other reasons can use mobile voting. Special polling stations are set up for voters at prisons, military units, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities. Additionally, voters abroad can cast their votes at embassies and consular offices.

The CEC recognised the need for a thorough voter information campaign to raise awareness about the new proportional component of the electoral system, voting procedures, and candidate nomination rules. The CEC is planning a public awareness campaign in various formats, including with outreach efforts for voters with disabilities, first-time voters, and women. Information materials aired on television (TV) will include sign language interpretation.

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<sup>17</sup> TECs consist of a chair, a deputy chair, a secretary of the commission and twelve to eighteen other members. Based on the CEC decision, up to three TEC members serve on a permanent basis, the remaining members work on a voluntary basis.

<sup>18</sup> *Mahallas* are Uzbek community structures, a self-governing body, involved in numerous aspects of citizens' everyday life. There are some 9,200 *Mahalla* units across Uzbekistan, each with a committee comprised of four regular members.



All ODIHR NAM interlocutors from state institutions and political parties expressed confidence in the election administration's ability to manage the process effectively. However, other ODIHR NAM interlocutors questioned the independence of the election administration, especially at the local level, and mentioned potential irregularities on election day, including multiple and proxy voting, despite previous intensive voter education and training programmes. ODIHR has previously recommended that the appointment process for election commission members at all levels be revised to ensure their independence from the state.

#### D. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens aged 18 or older have the right to vote. In line with international standards and addressing a previous ODIHR recommendation, recent constitutional changes lifted the blanket restriction on voting rights of those declared legally incapable.

The Single Electronic Voter Register (SEVR) is automatically compiled using databases of several ministries and agencies.<sup>19</sup> Citizens may verify their voter registration data online and in-person in the polling stations. Preliminary voter lists, by polling stations, are extracted from the SEVR and displayed for public scrutiny starting 15 days before election day.<sup>20</sup> PECs are responsible for verifying of the voter lists and collecting the data from the local bodies and *mahallas* to verify the factual addresses of the voters. Mistakes in the lists may be appealed by citizens to the PECs, which shall decide on the matter within 24 hours. There are some 20 million registered voters.

Voter lists are finalized five days prior to election day. The CEC informed ODIHR NAM that the electronic voter identification system piloted during the previous elections has been discontinued and will not be used in upcoming parliamentary elections. While ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not express concerns regarding the accuracy of voter lists, the existing legislation still allows registration of voters to supplementary lists on election day without ensuring sufficient safeguards against the potential misuse of this procedure, despite a long-standing ODIHR recommendation.

#### E. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Eligible voters aged 25 or older who have resided permanently in the country for at least five years before election day may stand for parliamentary elections.<sup>21</sup> The legal framework disqualifies citizens with unexpunged criminal records for serious crimes. Candidates cannot stand independently of political party nominations, contrary to prior ODIHR recommendations, and electoral coalitions are not provided for.

Only registered political parties are allowed to nominate candidates and some ODIHR NAM interlocutors pointed to burdensome requirements for party registration resulting in a lack of pluralistic views. Following the recent amendments, political parties may now nominate candidates in the nationwide constituency as part of a closed list in addition to single-mandate constituencies. Political parties may nominate one candidate in each of the 75 single-mandate constituencies and at least 75 but not more than 100 candidates on the party lists. The recent amendments also addressed prior recommendation of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

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<sup>19</sup> A number of government agencies, including the State Centre for Personalization, the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Defense, and Foreign Affairs, provide input data for the compilation of the SEVR.

<sup>20</sup> Voters abroad can verify their registration and appeal non-registration through the website of the MFA.

<sup>21</sup> Active military or security personnel or professional clergy of religious organizations are not eligible.

by introducing special measures and increased quotas for women.<sup>22</sup> For these elections, at least 40 per cent of the total number of candidates nominated by a political party must be women with at least 2 of every 5 candidates on the party list being women.

Nomination of candidates starts 65 days and ends 45 days before the elections. To be eligible to nominate candidates, a political party must be registered with the Ministry of Justice at least four months before the announcement of the election. In addition, it must collect supporting signatures of at least 40,000 eligible voters across Uzbekistan's 14 administrative-territorial units, with no more than 8 per cent of the signatures collected from one unit. ODIHR has previously recommended a reduction of the ceiling on the number of supporting signatures that can be collected from a single territorial unit.

Voters may sign in support of more than one party, in line with international good practice. Despite a prior ODIHR recommendation on introducing integrity measures, the Election Code allows a signature collector to enter any voter's data into the signature collection form upon the voter's request. After submitting supporting signatures, the CEC verifies a 15 percent sample including an equal number of signatures from each administrative unit and parties have two days to correct mistakes. ODIHR has previously recommended establishing clear procedures for verifying signatures and grounds for disqualification to prevent disqualification based on inaccuracies or invalid signatures in a limited sample, even if the remaining number of signatures would suffice to fulfil the legal requirement.

## F. ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The Election Code, the LFPP, and CEC instructions regulate the conduct of the election campaign and campaign finance.<sup>23</sup> The election campaign will begin following the completion of candidate registration and end the day before the election day. Campaign silence also applies to the publication of opinion polls related to election results, including online. All parties met by the ODIHR NAM expect to campaign without hindrance.

The legislation contains provisions aimed at ensuring equal campaign opportunities for all contestants, including for holding meetings, access to media, and the publication and distribution of campaign materials. Dissemination of false information as well as information discrediting the honour and dignity of candidates is prohibited. Contestants are required to co-ordinate campaign events with the election administration while government bodies, local authorities, and public associations are obliged to provide them with campaign venues free of charge. Contestants are also required to notify local authorities three days in advance of the holding of the event. The legislation contains provisions prohibiting the misuse of state resources, including the involvement of state officials in campaigning.

The upcoming campaign is expected to focus on domestic socio-economic issues, poverty reduction, ecology, and ongoing reforms. Parties intend to campaign with traditional methods such as rallies and distribution of campaign materials, as well as online. Most political parties met by the ODIHR NAM acknowledged the necessity of increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, and described plans to be inclusive in their candidate lists in the upcoming elections.

Funding for campaigns is provided from the state budget and is allocated only to the political parties that have nominated a candidate. The CEC allocates amounts per each party based on the number of

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<sup>22</sup> The UN CEDAW Committee in its [2022 Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Uzbekistan](#) has recommended to amend the electoral law and introduce targeted measures such as increased quotas and dedicated campaign financing.

<sup>23</sup> CEC regulations determine reporting deadlines and templates, require the return of private campaign donations, as well as allow for parties to prepay election related expenditures from party funds, subject to compensation from state campaign funds.

registered candidates. Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, and contrary to international good practice, alternative sources of campaign funding, such as private individual donations, remain prohibited.<sup>24</sup> Financing of election campaigns by foreign states and nationals, and by legal entities, is also prohibited.

Political parties must submit an interim finance report before election day and a final report after the elections to the CEC. The interim report must include expenditures for campaigning online and on social networks. Despite prior ODIHR recommendations, third-party expenditures are not subject to regulation. Additionally, campaign expenses incurred by a political party that did not nominate a candidate but supported the campaign of another party are also not regulated.<sup>25</sup> Political parties must publish campaign reports on their websites and in print media within a month after the publication of election results.<sup>26</sup> The Chamber of Accounts conducts an *ex post* financial audit, including on campaign finances, due at the beginning of the next calendar year, and the results of the audit are published.

## G. MEDIA

The media environment is characterized by a large number of state-owned media outlets, which remain a significant source of information, potentially diminishing the plurality of available views. The National Television and Radio Company (*NTRC*) operates 12 television stations with nationwide coverage, as well as 14 regional broadcasters and 4 radio stations. Commercial media compete with numerous state-funded media outlets in a growing but limited advertising market.

The Constitution provides basic guarantees of freedom of expression and access to information. In 2023, the Agency of Information and Mass Communications (*AIMC*) published a revised Draft Information Code which aims to amend and codify eight existing laws on freedom of expression, access to information and the media. ODIHR Director and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (*RFoM*) have noted that while the code contains positive elements, it also includes provisions that need improvement to meet international standards and OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and media freedom.<sup>27</sup> Despite a prior ODIHR recommendation, defamation, insult and the dissemination of false information remain criminal offenses, although not punishable with imprisonment. However, publicly slandering or insulting the president can result in up to 5 years of imprisonment.<sup>28</sup>

Website owners, bloggers, and other ‘public information’ resources are required to monitor third-party content to ensure it complies with the law and contains accurate information. A few interlocutors informed the ODIHR NAM that self-censorship remains an issue and that journalists and bloggers face threats and extortion. Independent journalists and bloggers who investigate political, economic, and

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<sup>24</sup> See Paragraphs 204 and 209 of the [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) which reiterate that “[f]unding of political parties is a form of political participation, and it is appropriate for parties to seek private financial contributions” and that “all individuals should have the right to freely express their support for a political party of their choice through financial and in-kind contributions”. Paragraph 233 states that “subsidies [...] should not be the only source of income or create conditions for over-dependency on state support”.

<sup>25</sup> The role of *mahallas*, including support of the campaign activities with its resources is also not subject to adequate scrutiny.

<sup>26</sup> Parties must also submit annual financial reports, including on campaign, to the *Oliy Majlis*, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, and the Tax Committee. However, unlike the Chamber of Accounts, they are under no obligation to publish the findings.

<sup>27</sup> See ODIHR and [RFoM statement](#) from 9 July 2024

<sup>28</sup> For instance, according to a [media report](#), on 4 June the court sentenced a blogger, Murod Makhudov to more than seven years of imprisonment for libel, extortion, and embezzlement.

environmental issues are frequently sentenced to lengthy prison terms, further intensifying self-censorship amongst media professionals.<sup>29</sup>

The media regulator, the AIMC, monitors the compliance of media and social media users with legal requirements and issues warnings for alleged violations. Websites can be filtered and blocked for non-compliance without judicial authorization, but this decision can be appealed in court. The register of restricted information resources is not publicly available.

Contestants are entitled to receive free airtime and space on national and regional state-owned media outlets. The CEC determines the exact amount, order and timing of airtime and space in consultation with political parties. Contestants may also purchase additional airtime and space for political advertisements both in public and private media. The media regulator oversees compliance of all mass media with the legal framework and plans to coordinate the coverage of the elections. The national broadcaster plans to organize debates, talk-shows, and air voter information materials on its channels, which will also include sign language interpretation. Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, local and foreign media representatives must be accredited by election commissions to cover the election campaign.

## H. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Individuals and legal entities may file complaints with election commissions. The election administration has jurisdiction over all election-related complaints, except for those against the actions and decisions of election commissions that are filed with administrative courts. Political parties that nominated candidates, the candidates themselves, the candidate's proxies, observers, and voters may challenge decisions of the election commissions in court.<sup>30</sup> The decisions of the CEC, including on election results, can be challenged to the Supreme Court. The courts are required to rule on complaints within five days, or immediately if a complaint has been submitted within six days before or on election day. ODIHR has previously recommended that the system of resolving election-related disputes should ensure open hearings and published, substantiated decisions, and that sanctions for electoral violations should be reviewed. Positively, following the recent amendments, filing fees for individuals have been eliminated, in line with a prior ODIHR recommendation.<sup>31</sup>

## I. ELECTION OBSERVATION

Representatives from international organizations, political parties, *Mahallas* and media are entitled to observe elections. Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, the legislation does not contain provisions for citizen observation.<sup>32</sup> Interested eligible organizations must apply for registration no later than 10 days before election day. International observers are accredited by the CEC, while other observers are accredited by the TECs. Some ODIHR NAM interlocutors indicated that procedures for registering civil society organization and restrictions on their funding continue to constitute obstacles for the growth of civil society and their participation in election processes.

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<sup>29</sup> According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), Mustafa Tursynbayev and Salamat Seitmuratov were sentenced for five years of imprisonment for extortion, corruption and fraud. These two YouTubers were investigating mass deforestation caused by the rice industry.

<sup>30</sup> Mistakes or inaccuracies in voter lists may be raised by any citizen and shall be examined within 24 hours by the relevant PEC, and the decision is subject to appeal in court.

<sup>31</sup> Respective amendments were made to the Law on State Duty in January 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that "The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place".

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All interlocutors met with during the ODIHR NAM underscored the need for an ODIHR election observation activity for the upcoming parliamentary elections, noting the added value of an independent assessment of the electoral process. Representatives of official bodies emphasized that they intended to administer the electoral process transparently and welcomed any recommendations for potential improvement of the process. Specific aspects that could benefit from review include the implementation of a revised legal framework, the work of election commissions at all levels, the process of voter and candidate registration, the conduct of the election campaign and its media coverage, and the system for election dispute resolution. Due to the lack of action on introducing important safeguards against election day irregularities, resulting in negative assessments during previous observations, the authorities' efforts to prevent such irregularities and adherence to procedures would also merit independent scrutiny.

On this basis, and while being mindful of the outstanding issues with regard to the respect of fundamental freedoms, the ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an election observation mission for the 2024 parliamentary elections. In addition to a core team of experts, ODIHR will request the secondment by OSCE participating States of 28 long-term observers to follow the election process countrywide, as well as 300 short-term observers to follow election-day procedures. In line with ODIHR's standard methodology, the EOM would include a media monitoring element. This recommendation is contingent upon the availability of additional funds for the deployment of such a mission format.

## **ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS**

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Laziz Karaev, Head, Department for Co-operation with the UN and Other International Organizations  
Alisher Mirzaliev, Third Secretary

### **Central Election Commission**

Zayniddin Nizamkhodjaev, Chairperson  
Bakhrom Kuchkarov, Deputy Chairperson  
Gulnoza Rakhimova, Member  
Azizkhan Adkhamov, Head, International Co-operation Department

### **National Center of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Human Rights**

Dilnoza Muratova, Deputy Director  
Ikbolzhon Abdumazhidov, Head, International Co-operation Department

### **Agency of Information and Mass Communications**

Asadjon Khodjaev, Director  
Dilshod Saidjanov, First Deputy Director  
Marat Aitov, Head, Analysis and Planning Department  
T. Gaibullaev, Chief Specialist

### **Public Broadcaster**

Abdurashid Jurabaev, Chairperson  
Madamin Safarov, Deputy chairperson  
M. Kolkonova, Head of Department  
L. Djuraev, Head of Department

### **Political Parties (Alphabetical order)**

Robakhon Makhmudova, Chairperson, "Adolat"  
U. Rasulov, Deputy Chairperson, "Adolat"  
R.Urmanova, Head of Department, "Adolat"  
Abdushukur Khamzayev, Chairperson, Ecological Party  
Komiljon Jurayev, Head of Department, Ecological Party  
Kamoljon Khursanov, Head of Department, Ecological Party  
Sevara Niyozmat, Representative, Ecological Party  
Aktam Khaitov, Chairperson, Liberal Democratic Party  
Bakhtiyor Yakubov, Deputy Chair, Liberal Democratic Party  
Shukhrat Bafoev, MP, Liberal Democratic Party  
Alisher Qodirov, Chairperson, "*Milliy Tiklanish*"  
Firuza Mukhamedzhanova, Deputy Chairperson, "*Milliy Tiklanish*"  
A Djumabaev, Deputy Chairperson, "*Milliy Tiklanish*"  
Ulugbek Inoyatov, Chairperson, People's Democratic Party  
Ulugbek Vafaev, Deputy Chairperson, People's Democratic Party,  
Mikhail Elshov, Chief Consultant, People's Democratic Party  
G.Asatova, Head of Department, People's Democratic Party

### **Civil Society**

Abdurakhmon Tashanov, Human Rights Society "EZGULIK"  
Gulnoz Mamarasulova, Director of a Representative office of the Sweden-based Association of Central Asia in Uzbekistan

Sayora Khodjaeva, Institute for Democracy and Human Rights  
Komil Abdullaev, Chairperson, Association of Disabled People  
Botir Omonturdiyev, Deputy Chair, Association of Disabled People  
Malika Alimova, Representative, Volunteer Movement

**International Community**

Ambassador Antti Karttunen, Head of OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan  
Andrew Yurkovsky, Senior Project Officer, OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan  
Representatives of diplomatic missions of OSCE participating States<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The ODIHR NAM extended an invitation to representations of all OSCE participating States resident in Uzbekistan.