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Elections in Tajikistan

November 6 Presidential Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Tajik election authorities as of November 1, 2013, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Who will Tajikistani voters elect on November 6, 2013?

Voters of Tajikistan will cast ballots to elect their next President. The President is head of State, occupying the highest position in the government. This will be the second presidential election since a 2003 constitutional amendment extended the presidential term from five to seven years. It is the fourth presidential election since 1994, which marked the end of the nation's Civil War.

On August 30, parliament set the presidential election date for November 6. Campaigning lasts from registration of candidates until 24 hours before Election Day. The candidate registration period was originally scheduled from September 17 to October 7. However, the Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) extended the deadline by three days to October 10, and again by one day to October 11 to allow additional time for candidates to gather and submit signatures. Under Tajikistan's legislation, candidates are required to submit signatures from 210,000 registered voters (5 percent of the electorate) to qualify as candidates.

The President will be directly elected by absolute majority, and must secure over 50 percent of all votes cast on Election Day to win in the first round. If no candidate receives an absolute majority of votes, a second round will be held between the two candidates who receive the most votes. The second round must take place within one month, but not sooner than 15 days following the first round. This year, a second round would fall between November 21 and December 6. The constitution establishes that more than half of all registered voters must vote for the election to be valid; if this threshold is not reached, the election is considered "failed" and new elections will be called.

What is the current political situation in Tajikistan?

Overall, the political, economic and social situation in Tajikistan remains stable, although the approaching election campaign has created new challenges. Upstart opposition movements are ever-increasing threats to the fragile political order.

The political situation in Tajikistan has been marked with efforts by the government to consolidate power and limit opposition ahead of the November 6 election. Several prominent would-be opposition leaders – including Zaid Saidov, leader of the unregistered New Tajikistan Party – were arrested in the months prior to the election.

Additionally, there has been pressure on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). During the summer, the Khujand-based human rights NGO Civil Society was de-registered due to alleged tax violations. In an attempt to counteract these trends, a number of prominent political figures established the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, which is charged with "defending Tajik democracy and civil society." The coalition consists of 13 persons, including a core group of activists forming the New Tajikistan Party. Several opposition parties – most prominent are the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and the Social Democratic Party – have formed the United Reformist Forces, which pledged to nominate a unified candidate for the presidency.

The political space has become smaller ahead of the presidential elections. This political climate, combined with the fact that about 1.5 million citizens are abroad working as labor migrants, has made the period leading up to elections a quiet one. President Emomali Rahmon will be officially seeking a final, seven-year term under the current constitution, which should he prevail, will see him remain in office until 2021.

The political opposition attempted to nominate and register a unified candidate – lawyer and long-time Democratic Party member Oinihol Bobonazarova – who would have been the first woman in independent Tajikistan nominated to run for President. Of note was the support of the IRPT for Bobonazarova, which came as a surprise to some of its more conservative members. However, Bobonazarova was unable to produce the 210,000 signatures required to confirm her registration with the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER), even after the CCER extended the deadline to October 11 (from October 7). The signatures of labor migrants living outside of Tajikistan were deemed invalid, although such persons are legally allowed to vote.

Another movement, the upstart *Junbishi Milli* (National Movement of Tajikistan), attempted to organize a unified opposition around Social Democratic Party Chairman Rahmatullo Zoirov to oppose Rahmon. Plans took a turn when Bobonazarova received the backing of the coalition instead of Zoirov, causing internal friction between several movements. With Bobonazarova failing to garner enough signatures, the opposition does not have a competitive candidate to face Rahmon. The resulting discord bodes ill for a united opposition movement going forward.

Why is the presidential election important? What is at stake?

At stake is a seven-year term of office for the next President. Tajikistan has had only one President since the Civil War-era election of 1994 ushered in President Emomali Rahmon (Rahmonov at the time) as leader of the country. Due to changes in the constitution, Rahmon is eligible to run for what officially is a second term during this election, having been elected under the new constitution in 2006.

A President may only serve two terms in office. Prior to 2006, Rahmon won elections in 1994 and 1999; the constitution was amended to allow for seven-year terms following these polls.

Tajikistan has a strong presidential system modeled after neighboring States (aside from Kyrgyzstan) and the Russian Federation. The President is the single most important, influential decision maker in the country. The parliament is currently dominated by the President's People's Democratic Party.

Who are the candidates for President?

There are six registered candidates running to be the next President of Tajikistan, including incumbent President Emomali Rahmon.

The candidates are:

- Olimjon Boboev, nominated by the Party of Economic Reform
- Ahmadbek Bukhoriev, nominated by the Agrarian Party of Tajikistan
- Abduhalim Ghaffarov, nominated by the Socialist Party of Tajikistan
- Saidjafar Ismonov, nominated by the Democratic Party of Tajikistan
- President Emomali Rahmon, nominated by the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions and the Union of Youth of Tajikistan
- Ismoil Talbakov, nominated by the Communist Party of Tajikistan

Seven of the eight registered political parties nominated candidates for the election; however, Oynihol Bobonazarova was widely regarded as the only nominee posing serious opposition to the President. Bobonazarova was unable to secure the required number of supporting signatures before the October 11 extended deadline.

Best known for her advocacy of human rights work with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, Bobonazarova collected just 201,326 supporting signatures, falling below the requisite 210,000 to register. Nominated by the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) as part of the United Reformist Forces, Bobonazarova claims the “whole State machine” presented obstacles to her registration, including delays in providing the signature collection forms and a campaign to discredit IRPT leaders.¹ Bobonazarova was also supported by the Social Democratic Party and several civil society organizations that, with the IRPT, formed the Union of Reformist Forces of Tajikistan.

President Rahmon is favored to win the election by a large margin, thereby extending the 61-year-old's more than two-decade rule over the Central Asian country until 2021. In 2006, Rahmon won the presidential election with a resounding 79.3 percent of the vote. Under the constitution, this would be President Rahmon's last term in office.

Who can run for President of Tajikistan?

Citizens of Tajikistan between the ages of 35 and 65 who speak the State language and have resided in Tajikistan for the last 10 years may be nominated for President. The power to nominate a candidate is restricted to registered political parties, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions, the Union of Youth of Tajikistan and regional councils.

¹ Bakhtiyor. “Tajikistan President Election!!!”. Peace and Collaborative Development Network. October 11, 2013. Accessed October 30, 2013. Web. <http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/tajikistan-president-election>.

Self-nominated independent candidates are not permitted to run. Presidential nominees are required to collect supporting signatures of 5 percent of the electorate to register as a candidate before the registration deadline. On August 31, the Commission on Elections and Referenda announced the approximate number of voters was 4,024,914 and set the 5 percent threshold of supporting signatures at 210,000 for 2013.

Who is eligible to vote?

All citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote in the 2013 presidential election. Voter eligibility is restricted for Tajik citizens who are imprisoned or have been declared incapacitated by a court.

How is the voter registry managed and maintained?

In Tajikistan, there is no central voter register. Instead, each precinct election commission compiles lists of voters based on data provided by local executive authorities. Voter lists are made public 15 days prior to Election Day. From the time voter lists are published through the end of Election Day, a voter may be added to a supplementary voter list by presenting their passport or another identity document.

The absence of a central voter register leaves Tajikistan susceptible to voter fraud and inaccuracies in the voter lists due to multiple registrations and voting by a single person.

What laws regulate the presidential elections in Tajikistan?

There are three key documents regulating presidential elections in Tajikistan:

- Constitution of Tajikistan
- Constitutional Law on Elections of the President, also known as the Presidential Election Law
- Central Commission on Elections and Referenda instructions and resolutions

Additionally, these core documents are supplemented by provisions of other legislation. These include applicable clauses contained in the Law on Periodical Print and Other Mass Media; the Law on Political Parties; the Law on Assemblies, Rallies, Activities and Demonstrations; the Code of Administrative Offences; and the Criminal Code.²

How many registered voters are there?

On August 31, the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) announced there are approximately 4,024,914 registered voters for the 2013 presidential election.

² OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Interim Report: Election Observation Mission Republic of Tajikistan Presidential Election, 6 November 2013*. 2013. Web. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/107336>.

Attempts to approximate the number of registered voters in Tajikistan are complicated by the absence of a central voter register. Voter lists are compiled at the local level by precinct election commissions (PECs) and are made public 15 days prior to Election Day. After voter lists are published, voters still have the opportunity to be added to a supplementary voter list by presenting their passport or another identity document to PEC officials – this can be done through Election Day.

What is the structure of the government?

Tajikistan is a republic, with three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial. Tajikistan has a strong presidential system of government; the President has broad powers over the other branches. The parliament is a bi-cameral legislature consisting of 34 seats in the upper house (indirectly elected) and 63 seats in the lower, directly-elected house.

In the *Majlisi Milli* (National Assembly), 34 members are elected through an indirect vote to serve five-year terms. Of these, 25 are selected by local deputies, eight are appointed by the President and one seat is reserved for the former President. All members are appointed by either the President or officials the President has appointed. In the *Majlisi Namoyandagon* (Assembly of Representatives), 41 members are elected by an absolute majority vote in single-member constituencies to serve five-year terms, and 22 members are elected through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve five-year terms.

The President appoints members of the Supreme Court and other key judicial positions.

What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

Of the six registered candidates, none are women.

Of those nominated as candidates, Oynihol Bobonazarova was the only female candidate. A well-known human rights activist and lawyer, Bobonazarova would have been the first woman registered as a presidential candidate in Tajikistan.

Bobonazarova was nominated by the Islamic Revival Party, but the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda withdrew her candidacy on October 11 for failing to collect the required 210,000 supporting signatures by the registration deadline.

How will the campaigns be financed?

Each registered candidate is entitled to receive TJS 25,000 (USD \$5,241) from the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) for the 2013 presidential election campaign.

Additionally, nominating bodies are entitled to spend up to TJS 200,000 (USD \$41,925) in support of their candidate's campaign. In the case of President Emomali Rahmon, who was nominated by three entities, each group is entitled to TJS 200,000 (USD \$41,925) furnished by the CCER.

While the CCER obliges candidates to submit financial reports by November 20, the law does not require any reporting or oversight of campaign finance.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The 2013 presidential election is administered by a three-tier system of election commissions comprising the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER), 68 district election commissions (DECs) and 3,155 precinct election commissions (PECs).

The CCER is the highest and only permanent electoral body in Tajikistan. Its members are appointed to five-year terms, with the current term spanning from 2009 to 2014. The President proposes the 15 CCER members, including the chairperson and deputy chairperson, who must be confirmed by the lower chamber of parliament. At the moment, all registered political parties are represented in the current CCER; three of its members are women.

The CCER is principally responsible for ensuring preparation and conduct of elections and referenda in Tajikistan. The CCER is guided by the constitution, the Presidential Election Law and its own instructions and resolutions, as well as provisions of other laws that pertain to elections.

The CCER is located in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

Voting will take place in 3,155 precinct election commissions set up on Election Day, supported by 68 district election commissions. There will be 58 polling stations for the conduct of out-of-country voting in 26 countries.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Yes. Tajik citizens abroad may vote in the presidential election in 26 other countries. Polling stations will be located in Russia, Afghanistan, Turkey, China, the United States, throughout Central Asia and Europe, among others.³

The Central Commission on Elections and Referenda estimates there are approximately 900,000 eligible voters currently residing abroad.⁴ A large percentage of those eligible voters are living in Russia, where they take jobs as seasonal laborers during the harvest.

³ Yuldoshev, A. "One of authorized representatives of pdp's presidential candidate replaced." *Asia-Plus*. October 23, 2013. Web. <http://news.tj/en/news/one-authorized-representatives-pdp-s-presidential-candidate-replaced>.

What is the media environment like?

Media freedom has been tested recently. Although non-State media serve as critical voices of government policy, President Emomali Rahmon cautioned media and political parties against being too critical, reminding them “not to forget their responsibility for social stability.” Still, critical commentaries have appeared via social media, a medium the government has struggled to regulate. The best the government can do to control these forums of criticism is block websites and impose punitive measures on individual commentators and stations within its control, such as not renewing broadcasting licenses.

In Tajikistan, national television channels are the primary source of political information. All national television channels are State-owned, and private broadcast media only operate at the regional level. In spite of this, Tajikistan enjoys a relatively diverse media environment. While Internet use throughout the country remains low, web-based news sources and social media have played an increasingly important role in urban areas, although access to these sights is occasionally blocked by the government.

Campaign coverage is regulated by the Presidential Election Law. Registered candidates are afforded the right to participate on an equal basis in the pre-election campaign, including use of State media. The Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) allocates 30 minutes of free airtime on State-run television and radio to each registered candidate. Candidate proxies are afforded 20 additional minutes of free airtime. This gives candidates an opportunity to present their electoral platforms to the Tajik public. Registered candidates also receive an equal allotment of space in all State-run newspapers.⁵

Additionally, the CCER has started a nationwide voter education campaign on public television, focusing on voters’ rights and voting procedures.

Freedom of expression and information are protected by the Constitution of Tajikistan. In 2013, the Law on Periodical Print and Other Mass Media was passed, which is anticipated to increase access to information by journalists. Obstacles to freedom include criminal penalties for insulting the President and other high-ranking officials, and a 2012 amendment to the Criminal Code, which only partially decriminalized defamation.

⁴ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Republic of Tajikistan Presidential Election, November 2013, OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report*. November 2013. Web. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/tajikistan/104054>.

⁵ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Interim Report: Election Observation Mission Republic of Tajikistan Presidential Election, 6 November 2013*. 2013. Web. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/107336>.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

On Election Day, in-country observation may only be conducted by media and bodies that nominated candidates – namely registered political parties, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions, the Union of Youth of Tajikistan and regional councils. The law does not provide for non-partisan citizen observers.

International observers are provided for in law. On October 23, the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) announced it expects more than 700 international observers to monitor the 2013 presidential elections. The CCER also announced it has accredited 130 international observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.⁶

Both local and international observers have the right to attend sessions of election commissions; receive copies of official documents; meet with candidates and other participants of the election process; freely visit polling stations; and observe voting, counting and tabulation of results.

Information on the result of the election of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan shall be published in the press by the CCER within 10 days of Election Day,⁷ although there is no strict deadline.

What is the legal process for electoral dispute adjudicated?

As outlined by the Presidential Election Law, election disputes are adjudicated by election commissions. Decisions made by election commissions can be appealed to a higher-level election commission or the courts, with the Supreme Court wielding final decision authority.

As of October 11, the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda stated that, so far, it has not received any official complaints.

⁶ Yuldoshev, A. "One of authorized representatives of pdp's presidential candidate replaced." *Asia-Plus*. October 23, 2013. Web. <http://news.tj/en/news/one-authorized-representatives-pdp-s-presidential-candidate-replaced>

⁷ Constitution of Tajikistan. "On the Election of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan." *The World Law Guide*. Web. <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/6817>.

Resources

- Constitution of Tajikistan, 1994 ([English](#))
- Law on Election of the President ([English](#))
- Law on Elections to the *Majlisi Oli* (parliament) ([English](#))
- OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission in Tajikistan ([English](#))
- OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report ([English](#))
- OSCE/ODIHR Interim Report ([English](#))
- US News and World Report Article “Why you should care about Tajikistan’s Election” ([English](#))
- Tajik Presidential Hopefuls Struggle without Support of Migrant Workers ([English](#))