On March 1, parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. Seven registered political parties participated in it. All parties, except the Social Democrats, accept election results. Experts say these were the most uninteresting parliamentary elections throughout the history of independent Tajikistan.

According to Tajikistan’s Central Commission for Elections and Referenda, the ruling People’s Democratic Party won 47 seats in the parliament according to the results of voting on the party list and in single-seat districts. The Agrarian Party won seven seats, the Party of Economic Reforms – five seats, the Communist Party – two seats, the Democratic and Socialist Parties of Tajikistan received one seat each. Only 0.32% of voters voted for the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan. This Party did not receive parliamentary seats because of the 5% barrier.

According to official data, over 75% of the electorate voted in the elections. Photo: CABAR.asia

The Central Commission for Elections states that about 3.8 million people or 75.1% of the
electorate voted in the elections. There are no exit polls or sociological surveys. A number of social network users said they did not vote and reported that they did not receive traditional notifications from election commissions.

Dushanbe resident Hakim, 33, told CABAR.asia that he did not vote because he was not familiar with the list of candidates for deputy seats.

“I knew about the elections, but I did not go there. I did not know these candidates or their achievements. They are not known to the people,” Hakim said.

On the contrary, Shahnoza, a third-year student at the National University of Tajikistan, noted that she went to elections to “vote for the country’s future and for its development”.

“I am a member of the People’s Democratic Party myself, and I voted for this Party. Everything is fine in our country, but I hope that the future deputies will not violate the president’s policies and will continue to work for the development of the country,” Shahnoza said.

**Elections Without Opposition**

The 2020 parliamentary elections became the first elections in the history of independent Tajikistan that were held without participation of the former leading political force in the country – the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). From 2000 to 2015, two deputies represented this party in the parliament. In September 2015, the country’s Supreme Court accused the IRPT of financing an attempted coup led by the former General of the Defense Ministry Abduhalim Nazarzoda. Later, the members of the Supreme Political Council of the Party were sentenced to long terms. The head of the IRPT, Muhiddin Kabiri, is currently in Germany, where he was provided with political shelter.

According to experts, the only real opposition in these elections was the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT). The Social Democrats nominated five candidates on the party list. However, the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda stated that only 0.32% of the electorate voted for the SDPT. Thus, this party was not able to overcome the 5% barrier to enter the parliament.

**(In)Visible Violations**

Videos showing a person who votes for the whole family appeared on social networks and information websites. Such voting is prohibited by the law.
Muso Bobohoijev, an Asia Plus reporter, conducted an experiment in which he asked the commission members on one of the voting stations to allow him to vote for his wife who had recently given birth to a child. A member of the commission allowed Bobohoijev to vote for two people.

Dilshod, Shahrinaw resident, told CABAR.asia that he went to the voting station after his shift at work.

“I went there in the afternoon and it turned out that my father already voted for all of us,” he said.

The prominent lawyer Shukhrat Kudratov, who is SDPT member, observed the elections at the Tajik Embassy in Russia. Kudratov told CABAR.asia that voters were brought to the embassy by buses.

“In this manner, 2500 voters arrived to the embassy before 1:30 pm, and after that there were no people at all,” Kudratov said.

According to him, embassy employees suggested the candidates to vote for; citizens without a Tajik passport received ballots, which is an absolute violation of the electoral law.

At the same time, the Central Commission for Elections did not report any violations. A day after the Election Day, the head of the Commission, Bahtiyor Khudoyorzoda, said that the election process was fair, open and violation-free.

More than 230 international observers monitored the election process, including an Election Assessment Mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the missions from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

As before, the SCO and CIS missions reported no major election violations.
OSCE/ODIHR states that a final report will be issued eight weeks after the end of the electoral process.

Representatives of all seven registered parties participated in the elections.

Of these, only the SDPT stated that it did not accept election results.

“We do not accept election results; in the nearest possible time, we will submit a petition for permission to protest against the results,” Kudratov noted.

Saidjafar Usmonzoda: Democratic Party Is Not a “Pocket” Political Party

The head of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Saidjafar Usmonzoda, also accepted the election results. After the previous elections, the Democratic Party also received one seat in parliament, which Usmonzoda took himself. In the previous composition of parliament, the head of the Democratic Party was the only deputy who gave critical feedback sometimes.

Usmonzoda brushed off the allegations that his party, like other opponents of the ruling People’s Democratic Party, is “pocket” party.

“The elections were violation-free and the Tajik people made their choice. During the year in parliament, I received more than 3,000 appeals from people and resolved their problems. I opposed the National Bank’s policy regarding bankers; I spoke against the Internet price increase. Could a “pocket” party do this?” the deputy asks.

“The most uninteresting and predictable”

According to political expert Parviz Mullojanov, these were the most uninteresting parliamentary elections since independence.
“Neither society, nor the population, nor the international community had any particular interest in the elections, since there was no intrigue. Basically, everyone somehow knew that the composition of the parliament would not significantly change,” said Mullojanov.

He believes that the only intrigue in these elections was whether the SDPT and the Communists would receive the seats.

“The SDPT probably believed they could enter the parliament. They also needed to demonstrate that they still exist as a party. Either way, they did not count on more than one or two seats,” Mullojanov said.

“As well, the small parties have stopped to pretend that they are important,” the political scientist concluded.