

## INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Azerbaijan – Early Parliamentary Elections, 1 September 2024

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### STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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#### PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

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The 1 September early parliamentary elections took place in a restrictive political and legal environment that does not enable genuine pluralism and resulted in a contest devoid of competition. While efficiently preparing the elections, the election administration lacked impartiality and took a formalistic approach that limited the inclusivity of the election. Against the background of continued repression of dissenting voices, the campaign was barely visible, and efforts were not made to engage citizens or enable them to participate without fear of retribution. While many candidates participated in the process, almost all were supportive of the government's policies in their campaign messages. Positively, these elections saw more engagement of women as contestants and in the election commissions. The legal framework for the elections does not meet international standards or OSCE commitments for democratic elections and restrictions introduced in political party and media legislation further limit fundamental freedoms. Campaign coverage rules also contributed to the absence of information on the contestants in the media. Despite a voting process that was orderly and assessed to be overall efficiently run, serious irregularities and omissions of important safeguards were observed, particularly in the vote count, raising questions about the integrity of the process.

The electoral legal framework is not conducive to democratic elections as it maintains undue restrictions on fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly, falling short of international standards and OSCE commitments. The Election Code remained substantially unchanged since the last parliamentary elections, leaving long-standing priority ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations as well as judgements of the European Court of Human Rights unaddressed. These relate to limitations on fundamental freedoms, the composition of election commissions, unequal campaign conditions in public media, and adding voters to the voter lists on election day. The latest review of constituency boundaries resulted in more equal distribution of voters among constituencies, partially addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation, but lacked transparency and was not conducted in line with international good practices.

The electoral preparations at all levels were administered efficiently and within the established deadlines. The CEC held regular public sessions contributing to transparency, however, the sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were formalistic with limited debate. The trainings for lower-level commissions were well-organized and the CEC conducted an extensive voter information campaign and took measures to facilitate voting by persons with disabilities. Lower-level commissions did not always ensure transparency of their work as their sessions were generally held on an *ad hoc* basis and on short notice and publicly available information about their activities was limited. While election commission members are nominated by different parliamentary groups, the lack of genuine political differentiation between them resulted in the control of election administration by the majority party and does not ensure its impartiality and the integrity of the electoral process.

For these elections, 6.4 million voters were registered, which is approximately 1.2 million less than the number of citizens of voting age, raising concerns about the accuracy of data and inclusiveness of the voter register. Voter lists were available for public scrutiny, enhancing transparency. Contrary to international good practice, adding voters to the voter list on election day was not complemented by adequate administrative safeguards or judicial oversight, allowing for potentially arbitrary additions and multiple voting. Restrictions on the right to vote for those with an intellectual or psychosocial disability

remain, contrary to international standards. Some 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered to vote across the country.

In total, out of the 1,508 initial applicants, only 998, or about two-thirds, were registered to stand for the elections, including 305 nominated by political parties and 693 self-nominated. Approximately 30 per cent of the candidates were women. The constituency election commissions mandated with candidate registration applied the rules and procedures inconsistently, limiting the inclusivity of the process. Prospective candidates were denied registration mainly due to insufficient number of valid signatures and inaccurate income and asset declarations, without any opportunity to correct mistakes in their applications. Several nominees withdrew, in some cases allegedly due to intimidation or citing burdensome administrative procedures. Recently introduced stringent requirements for political party registration and dissolution have negatively impacted pluralism and introduced further restrictions on freedom of association.

While women remain underrepresented in elected and appointed positions, there are no affirmative measures to enhance their political involvement which is further hindered by persisting gender stereotypes. In total, there were 21 women MPs in the outgoing parliament (18.42 per cent) including the speaker and no woman as minister or leader among the 26 political parties. While women were fairly well represented among attendees and speakers at campaign events, gender equality issues were overlooked in the campaign discourse. While women were underrepresented in the CEC, they were more represented in lower-level commissions, including as chairs, partially addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation. Positively, women constituted 30 per cent of the registered candidates, a significant increase from 21 per cent in the previous elections.

The campaign was barely visible and generated limited public engagement. While a high number of candidates stood for election, the contest lacked a competitive nature and voters were not offered genuine political alternatives. Party platforms and messages, conveyed primarily through small-scale events, were generally supportive of the President's and government policies. Restrictive campaign regulations and their implementation, including on freedom of assembly and expression, did not allow candidates to convey their messages or enable voters to freely obtain information, as required by OSCE commitments. By law, contestants must submit their print campaign materials to the lower-level election commissions prior to their distribution, which potentially results in self-censorship. The political debate was further subdued as authorities declared their intention to monitor the internet space and social networks, albeit campaigning on social networks is not regulated by law. ODIHR EOM was informed of attendees, including public sector employees, forced to attend campaign events, raising concerns about voter intimidation and voters' ability to cast their vote free of fear of retribution.

Campaign finance regulations prescribe limits for donations and expenditure, but reporting and disclosure requirements as well as oversight remain insufficient, negatively impacting transparency. Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, and the introduction by the 2023 Law on Political Parties of annual public funding for all parties receiving votes in the previous elections, there is no public funding of the campaign. Lower-level election commissions, mandated with oversight, posted only some financial reports and many of those reports were lacking any information on donations and expenditures, limiting the information available to voters. Several contestants raised concerns about bureaucratic hurdles to open legally prescribed campaign accounts, while at the same time noting voters' reluctance to donate due to fear of retribution.

The media legislation includes restrictive registration requirements for media outlets and journalists curtailing pluralism. Contrary to international standards, defamation and libel remain criminal offences, resulting in self-censorship and news websites were blocked without a prior court decision, including during the campaign period. Since November 2023, arrests and detentions of journalists intensified,

including on charges depriving them of their registration as journalists; some 20 remain detained. Only the ruling party was effectively entitled to free airtime on the public broadcaster; but it refrained from using this. Legal provisions effectively allow private media to cover the campaign only in paid format. Subsequently, monitored broadcast media did not provide any coverage of the campaign and contestants, and all election-related news items referred to the activities of the CEC, further limiting the opportunity for candidates to convey their messages to voters and the ability of voters to make an informed choice. Newspapers and online media, which offered space for paid advertisement, became the sole platform for the candidates to convey their messages in media.

The law provides for the filing of complaints and appeals to election commissions and courts on potential violations of electoral rights. However, the effectiveness of the dispute resolution mechanism was undermined by the lack of impartiality of election commissions and longstanding concerns over the independence of the judiciary. In line with the law, election commissions established expert groups to consider election complaints. The CEC reviewed most received complaints on merits, but the arguments of the invited parties were never considered, and the CEC adopted decisions prepared in advance, thus depriving the complainants of procedural guarantees prescribed by law, OSCE commitments and international good practice. CEC and court decisions were not fully reasoned, and the CEC decisions failed to indicate the availability of further legal remedies. All appeals filed to courts of appeal and the Supreme Court were rejected or dismissed.

While the law provides for citizen and international election observers, it grants election commissions wide discretionary powers to expel observers on grounds of inappropriate behaviour or in case of overcrowding. As a result of restrictive legal provisions that impact the registration and functioning of civil society organizations, well-known citizen election observer groups remained unregistered and deprived of funding, with some prominent members continuing to be under arrest or detention and were thus unable to observe the elections. Election commissions accredited 112,749 citizen observers, including party and candidate observers. The vast majority of these observers were nominated by the ruling party, their nominated candidates and affiliated parties, raising concern over the access of independent and impartial observers to the process. The CEC also registered 598 international observers.

The IEOM observed in 922 polling stations throughout the day. The overall assessment of the opening and voting processes was positive with observers finding these to be orderly and efficiently organized. However, observers also noted serious irregularities and inconsistencies in the application of important procedures, which raise concerns about the integrity of the voting process, including voters being allowed to vote without ID, seemingly identical signatures on the voter lists, unauthorized persons keeping track of voters, and a number of observed indications of ballot box stuffing. Further, the addition of significant numbers of voters to the voter lists and inconsistencies in the application of procedures in the marking and checking of marks of voters, having voters sign the voter lists were observed; all important safeguards against multiple voting. The closing and counting process was assessed negatively to a great degree in 40 of the 92 polling stations observed mainly due to omissions of important reconciliation procedures that safeguard the count. Ballots were not properly reconciled with signatures on voter lists, evidence of deliberate falsification of entries in voter lists or result protocols were noted, and additional indications of ballot box stuffing were observed. Further, the transparency of the count was not assured in nearly a third of the observations, and concerns about transparency continued during the tabulation process, which was negatively assessed in 15 of the 79 ConECs visited. Overall, the counting and tabulation processes, as well as instances of serious irregularities throughout the day, raised questions about whether ballots were counted and reported honestly, in line with paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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### Background

On 28 June 2024, President Ilham Aliyev dissolved the parliament and called early parliamentary elections to be held on 1 September.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the decision, the parliament (*Milli Majlis*) appealed to the President to call early elections, stating that the parliament's full functionality could not be ensured due to hosting an international event in Baku in November, when the elections were originally scheduled.<sup>2</sup> The President requested and obtained the opinion of the Constitutional Court, although this is not a constitutional requirement. The Constitutional Court decided that the parliament was justified in saying that it would not be able to perform its duties because of the holding of COP29, however, no sufficient explanation was provided by parliament or the Constitutional Court how holding an international event would prevent parliament from fulfilling its obligations.<sup>3</sup> Several IEOM interlocutors expressed concerns that holding elections during the holiday and agricultural season would result in further diminished public engagement. This was the fourth consecutive direct national election to take place early.<sup>4</sup>

These were the first parliamentary elections held throughout the internationally recognized territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and they unfolded amidst ongoing talks to sign a peace agreement to end the long-lasting conflict with Armenia and the hosting of COP29 with the stated aim to raise the country's international image.<sup>5</sup>

The political landscape is shaped by the continued dominance of the President who won a fifth consecutive term in February 2024 with an overwhelming majority of 92 per cent of the votes, and the political party he chairs, the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP). YAP has been uninterruptedly in office since 1993 and holds a majority of 68 of the 114 currently occupied seats.<sup>6</sup> While there are 9 more parties represented in the parliament, jointly holding 10 seats, along with 37 members of parliament elected as

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<sup>1</sup> See the [decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#). The Constitution prescribes that the president may call early parliamentary elections, inter alia, "if the parliament fails to fulfil its obligations due to unavoidable reasons".

<sup>2</sup> The [UN Climate Change Conference COP29](#) will be held in Baku from 11 to 22 November 2024. See the reasoning for early elections by [the Parliament](#). It was among others stated that a new parliamentary composition is required to effectively use the diplomatic opportunities the COP29 provides.

<sup>3</sup> According to Article 98-1.1 of the Constitution, the president can dissolve the parliament if: it expresses twice during the year no-confidence to the Cabinet of Ministers, or if it fails to appoint members of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Board of the Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan upon a double submission of the president, as well as if it fails to fulfil its obligations due to unavoidable reasons. According to the [Constitutional Court's decision](#), holding of the COP29 in November constitutes a reason for the dissolution of the Parliament for failing to fulfil its obligations due to unavoidable reasons.

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 69 of the 2016 Venice Commission Opinion on the Draft Modifications to the Constitution [Opinion](#) stated that the new Article 98-1 makes Parliament largely ineffective as a countervailing power to the President. [...] It is dangerously vague and may be interpreted as allowing dissolution of Parliament whenever the President deems that Parliament does not "perform its duties". New Article 98-1 is therefore incompatible with democratic standards. Paragraph 9 of the 1996 UN HRC CCPR General Comment No.25 to ICCPR ([UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#)) states that "genuine periodic elections are essential to ensure the accountability of representatives for the exercise of the legislative or executive powers vested in them".

<sup>5</sup> The President and public officials made several public statements about the significance and the international recognition for the country of hosting COP29. See for instance, the [President's statement on X](#) on 21 July. This view was also shared by many IEOM interlocutors.

<sup>6</sup> Eleven seats remained vacant, following the invalidation of elections in four constituencies, the appointment of three MPs to administrative positions, three deceased, and one was arrested. No re-runs were held, despite a legal requirement.

self-nominated, in almost all cases, there are no dissenting votes by MPs, and they do not represent different political views.<sup>7</sup>

Detentions and arrests of political actors, human rights defenders, civil society activists, academics and journalists persisted in the pre-electoral period.<sup>8</sup> While the authorities, in some cases, cited dubious funding sources and accounting of detained individuals, including from religious fundamentalist and separatist sources,<sup>9</sup> these detentions and arrests are perceived by a number of international and local human rights bodies as a crackdown on dissent and critical voices.<sup>10</sup> In addition, IEOM interlocutors cited concerns about widespread endemic corruption and political influence in institutional appointments. Overall, such a political environment does not allow in practice the free expression of the opinions of the electors, as required by Paragraph 5.1 and other commitments of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>11</sup>

The Constitution and the 2006 Law on Equal Rights for Women and Men provide for equality of men and women, and Azerbaijan became part of CEDAW in 1995.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding the legal framework, there are no affirmative measures for enhancing women's political participation and representation. Women remain underrepresented in elected and appointed positions; with 21 women in the outgoing parliament (18.42 per cent) including the speaker. There are no women as ministers or leaders among the 26 political parties. The appointed First Vice-President is a woman. Among the seven state committees, only the Committee on Family, Women's and Children's problems is chaired by a woman. This underrepresentation in various elected and appointed positions, along with gender stereotypes that hinder women's political involvement indicates that the efforts taken by authorities and political parties to address this issue have so far, been insufficient.<sup>13</sup>

## **Electoral System and Legal Framework**

Members of parliament are elected by a simple majority in 125 single-mandate constituencies for a five-year term. If a parliament is elected through early elections its term may be shorter than five years.<sup>14</sup>

The Central Election Commission (CEC) is mandated with reviewing the constituencies every five years. Partially addressing a prior ODIHR recommendation, the most recent review conducted in September 2023 resulted in a more equal distribution of voters among constituencies, reducing the number of constituencies with deviations exceeding 10 per cent of the average as permissible by

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<sup>7</sup> In 2024, the parliament adopted 91 laws, 29 unanimously while the remainder with 1 to 10 dissenting votes or abstentions. Out of the 26 party leaders, 14 have held high-ranking positions in state institutions in the past.

<sup>8</sup> Since the 2024 presidential election, an additional 12 journalists, political activists, and civil society researchers and activists were detained or arrested.

<sup>9</sup> Common charges include large-scale drug dealing, smuggling, or failure to comply with a lawful order of the police

<sup>10</sup> See among others, the [OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media statement](#), 7 March 2024, [United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner Press Release](#), 15 August 2024, [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe \(PACE\) Press Release of 8 March 2024](#), the [European Parliament Resolution](#), 25 April 2024 and [Amnesty International](#), 30 April 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 5.1 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that “free elections that will be held at reasonable intervals by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure, under conditions which ensure in practice the free expression of the opinion of the electors in the choice of their representatives”.

<sup>12</sup> In 2019, the draft of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2020–2024 was prepared and submitted to the Government, but it has not yet been approved.

<sup>13</sup> Several women politicians reported to the ODIHR EOM that they experienced gender-based discrimination in the political sphere. See Paragraph 27 of the sixth [report](#) of the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<sup>14</sup> If early elections are held, the next regular election must take place again on the first Sunday of November on the fifth year since the beginning of the parliament's term, hence shorter than five years.

international good practice from 51 to 10.<sup>15</sup> However, contrary to good practice, the drawing of new constituency boundaries was not reviewed by an independent commission. Similarly, the legislation does not require the CEC to conduct public consultations with relevant stakeholders in this process and no pro-active measures were taken by the CEC thereby undermining the integrity of the process.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the CEC did not publish any information on the boundaries of the constituencies, which created confusion among some stakeholders and diminished the transparency of the process.<sup>17</sup>

Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the Constitution (last amended in 2016) and the Election Code, supplemented by CEC regulations.<sup>18</sup> Azerbaijan is a party to the key international and regional instruments related to democratic elections.<sup>19</sup> The Election Code remained substantially unchanged since the last parliamentary elections. The latest amendments made in April and June 2024 pertained only to minor technical details.<sup>20</sup>

The electoral legal framework is not conducive to democratic elections as the Constitution and other laws provide for the curtailment of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression,

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<sup>15</sup> In 2020, 51 constituencies exceeded 10 per cent from the average including 29 that exceeded 15 per cent. After the 2023 review, 10 constituencies exceed 10 per cent from the average number of voters, including 5 that exceed 15 per cent namely, constituencies Nakhchivan, Zangilan-Gubadli, Absheron Third, Shabran-Khachmaz, Shamkir Village exceed the average by 10 per cent, and Agdam-Khojaly, Aghdam, Lachin, Khankendi, Yasamal Third exceed by 15 per cent. See Paragraph 7.3 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, which stipulates that the participating States will “guarantee universal and equal suffrage to adult citizens”. Paragraph I.2.2.iv of the 2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters recommends that the “permissible departure from the norm should not be more than 10%, and should certainly not exceed 15% except in special circumstances”. Paragraph 21 of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) states “the principle of one person, one vote, must apply, and within the framework of each State’s electoral system, the vote of one elector should be equal to the vote of another. The drawing of electoral boundaries and the method of allocating votes should not distort the distribution of votes”.

<sup>16</sup> Election constituencies are designed based on “average voter representation norm” determined by dividing the total number of registered voters in the country by 125; the norm is 50,470. Paragraph 18 of the 2002 [Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters \(Code of Good Practice\)](#) states that “the political ramifications of (re)drawing electoral boundaries are very considerable, and it is therefore essential that the process should be nonpartisan and should not disadvantage national minorities...The best solution would be to submit the problem in the first instance to a commission comprising a majority of independent members and, preferably, a geographer, a sociologist, a balanced representation of the parties and, where appropriate, representatives of national minorities”. Paragraph 19 of the Venice Commission 2017 [Report on Constituency Delimitation and Seat Allocation](#) recommends: “Like all crucial elements of electoral law, the delimitation of constituencies should be adopted after extensive public consultations with all relevant stakeholders. This should make it legitimate for both stakeholders and voters”.

<sup>17</sup> Confusion among candidates and voters due to the change of boundaries was reported in constituencies 2, 6, 15, 16, 24, 25, 41, 89, 101. For instance, a nominee in Constituency 24, who had been a candidate in several past elections in the same constituency, collected signatures of voters registered in villages assigned to the wrong ConEC. Also, some prospective candidates were denied registration for collecting supporting signatures outside their constituency as they were not aware of the boundaries.

<sup>18</sup> Applicable legislation includes the laws on Political Parties, Media, Freedom of Assembly, Non-Governmental Organizations and relevant provisions of the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offences and the Administrative Procedure Code.

<sup>19</sup> Since 2020, Azerbaijan has, in unilateral declarations before the ECtHR, acknowledged violations of a right to a free election related to the 2020 parliamentary elections and agreed to pay compensation to at least 25 individuals, following their applications to the ECtHR.

<sup>20</sup> The amendments harmonized the terminology between the Election Code and the new Law on Media and added a requirement to include the ID issue and expiration dates wherever the law required provision of personal data.



falling short of international standards and OSCE commitments.<sup>21</sup> Long-standing priority ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, as well as European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgements remain unaddressed, including those related to undue restrictions of fundamental freedoms, the composition of election commissions, unequal campaign conditions in public media, and adding voters to the voter lists on election day. Moreover, the Election Code is comprehensive but lacks clarity on some issues, including media coverage of elections, oversight of campaign finances, rules for vote recounts and grants broad discretionary powers to the election commissions including on candidate registration.

The 2023 Law on Political Parties introduced additional restrictions on the registration, periodic verification, and operation of political parties, including an increase in the required number of party members for registration from 1,000 to 5,000 and the imposition of a mandatory annual re-registration.<sup>22</sup> According to the Ministry of Justice, after the law entered into force, 33 political parties ceased to exist leaving 26 parties registered. In addition, the law also granted broad powers to the authorities to monitor internal party activities, impose sanctions and deregister parties, contrary to international standards.<sup>23</sup> Some parties informed the IEOM that the Ministry of Justice's oversight of their internal procedures and periodic verification of their membership created an environment of intimidation, potentially further limiting political pluralism.<sup>24</sup> In addition, some parties informed the IEOM that they have been repeatedly denied registration with no proper substantiation.

## Election Administration

The elections were managed by a three-tiered election administration comprising the Central Election Commission (CEC), 125 Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs), and 6,343 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), all appointed for a five-year term.<sup>25</sup> The CEC is appointed by the parliament, ConECs are appointed by the CEC, and PECs are appointed by the respective ConECs. Women were underrepresented in the CEC with only 4 out of 18 members. In line with a prior ODIHR recommendation, the number of women as chairpersons and members of lower-level election commissions increased with women constituting 41.55 per cent of ConECs and PECs permanent members with full voting rights, and 32 per cent of chairs and 43 per cent of secretaries

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<sup>21</sup> Paragraph 12 of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) states that “freedom of expression, assembly and association are essential conditions for the effective exercise of the right to vote and must be fully protected”. The [2016 Venice Commission Opinion on the Draft Modifications to the Constitution](#) criticized, *inter alia*, the broad grounds for the limitation of freedom of assembly that disrupts “public order” and “public morals” (article 49), broad prohibitions on freedom of association (article 58) which “gives the legislator a *carte blanche* to define any activity as criminal and, hence, to prohibit any association which pursues it or even carries an intention to do so”. See relevant sections of this report for further details. See also the [2023 Joint Opinion of ODIHR and the Venice Commission on the 2023 Law on Political Parties](#).

<sup>22</sup> In Paragraph 47, the [2023 Joint Opinion of ODIHR and the Venice Commission on the 2023 Law on Political Parties](#) reiterated that “the new threshold seems to be formidably high and puts a burden on citizens trying to exercise their rights under Article 11 of the ECHR which is potentially restrictive and as such would be disproportionate and not necessary in a democratic society” and “the new law has introduced a number of new highly problematic provisions which risk having further chilling effects on pluralism in the country”.

<sup>23</sup> Paragraph 7.6 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) commits participating States to “respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination”. See also paragraph 4 of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#).

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Justice called registered party members to verify their membership, which was reportedly perceived by some party members as intimidation. Paragraph 23 of the [2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guideline on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “according to this principle of associational freedom, political parties are regarded as private associations that should be free to establish their own internal organization and their rules for selecting party leaders and candidates and should not be hindered by external regulations which limit free competition and political pluralism”.

<sup>25</sup> A total of 55 PECs were established in the regained territories.

The CEC, ConECs and PECs consist of 18, 9 and 6 members, respectively.<sup>26</sup> Members of election commissions are nominated in equal shares by three parliamentary groups: the political party which has the majority, the 9 parties representing the minority, and the 37 non-partisan MPs jointly; each group nominates six CEC members, three ConEC and two PEC members. By law, the majority party YAP nominates the chairpersons of all election commissions at all levels. The lack of genuine political differentiation between the three parliamentary groups, previously evidenced by the ECtHR, does not ensure the independence and the impartiality of the election administration and the integrity of the process.<sup>27</sup> Registered candidates have the right to nominate members with consultative rights at all levels of commissions. However, these members are *de facto* observers as they do not participate in decision-making nor are they assigned any other duties. ConECs registered 6,436 such representatives, including 6,205 nominated by political parties and 231 by candidates.

Technical preparations were conducted efficiently and within the established deadlines despite a compressed timeframe. The CEC held regular sessions attended by representatives of the media and contestants, as well as international observers, contributing to transparency. On the other hand, CEC sessions and their agendas were not announced in advance while the decisions on administrative matters and session minutes were not published, which detracted from transparency. Decisions were usually adopted unanimously with limited debate. In line with its mandate, the CEC conducted cascade trainings for ConECs and PECs. The trainings observed by the ODIHR EOM, both on central and local level, covered essential procedures adequately and were well-attended. The CEC also conducted seminars for various election stakeholders and a widespread voter information program, calling voters to check their entries in the voter lists and to vote as well as targeting certain categories of voters, such as women and youth. The CEC provided Braille templates for the ballots to all polling stations and envisaged to equip polling stations in precincts where voters with low mobility reside with ramps.

While ConECs were well-resourced, experienced and completed their tasks within prescribed deadlines, publicly available information about their activities was limited, at odds with international standards.<sup>28</sup> ConECs sessions were generally held on an *ad hoc* basis and at short notice with only some of their decisions displayed on noticeboards, detracting from transparency. In addition, some ConECs denied ODIHR EOM long-term observers access to their documentation, particularly those related to candidate registration.<sup>29</sup> These limitations undermined the principle of transparency, at odds with international good practice.<sup>30</sup>

While ODIHR EOM interlocutors did not raise concerns about the capacity of the CEC to undertake election preparations efficiently, many reported on inconsistent and selective candidate registration by

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<sup>26</sup> The current composition of the election commissions was established in 2021. The law does not limit the number of mandates of commissioners. According to the CEC, some 3 per cent of the ConEC members and some 11 per cent of the PEC members have been replaced prior to these elections for various reasons including running as candidates or being affiliated with candidates.

<sup>27</sup> See among others, paragraph 78 of the [ECtHR decision on Gahramanli and Others v. Azerbaijan \(2015\)](#) and Paragraph 60 of [Tahirov v. Azerbaijan \(2015\)](#). Article 20 of General Comment 25 on article 25 of the ICCPR states: “An independent electoral authority should be established to supervise the electoral process and to ensure that it is conducted fairly, impartially and in accordance with established laws which are compatible with the Covenant”.

<sup>28</sup> Paragraph 19 of the 2011 [UNHRC General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR](#) states that: “To give effect to the right of access to information, States parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest. States parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information”.

<sup>29</sup> Including ConECs 7, 8, 9, 20, 92, 94, 116, and 125. For instance, the list of nominees, including rejected applicants and their contact information, letters requesting information from the tax and property authorities, signature sheets, reports on signature verification, or decisions denying registration to nominees.

<sup>30</sup> Paragraph 68 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “only transparency, impartiality and independence from politically motivated manipulation will ensure proper administration of the election process, from the pre-election period to the end of the processing of results”.



ConECs (see *Candidate Registration* section). In addition, IEOM interlocutors questioned the independence of PECs, noting that these are overwhelmingly composed of public employees and chaired by their supervisors, for example, schoolteachers being PEC members and their director serving as a PEC Chair.<sup>31</sup>

## Voter Registration

Citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote, with the exception of those declared incapacitated by a court decision, including as a consequence of intellectual or psychological disability. Deprivation of the right to vote on the basis of mental disability is inconsistent with international obligations and standards.<sup>32</sup> Stateless persons who have resided in the country for the last five years may vote.

Voter registration is passive and is managed by the election administration. Voters are registered in the precinct where they have resided for at least 6 of the 12 months prior to the announcement of an election. Voter lists are compiled from the CEC-maintained nationwide voter register. On an annual basis, PECs provide an update of the lists based on data received from local authorities. Additionally, the central database of the voter register is inter-connected with the database of the Ministry of Justice, which provides automatic updates on changes to the civil status and residence. The law requires an additional update of the voter lists prior to each election in the same manner as for the annual update. At odds with international good practice and previous ODIHR recommendations, voters could be added to the supplementary voter list on election day upon proof of residence, without adequate administrative safeguards or judicial oversight.<sup>33</sup>

According to the CEC, the voter register contained 6,421,960 voters on election day.<sup>34</sup> This is some 1.2 million less than the number of citizens of voting age, as published by the State Statistical Committee. While this discrepancy could be partially justified by different methodologies of data collection and the updating of the data, the information provided is insufficient to adequately explain the difference and raises concerns about the accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter register. Some 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered in 574 polling stations scattered across the country that are managed by 10 ConECs.<sup>35</sup>

Voters and other electoral stakeholders had ample opportunities to scrutinize the voter lists. Voter lists were available at polling stations and accessible online, including at the ConECs and at the one-stop-service centers (ASAN), through the CEC hotline, enhancing transparency.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Paragraph 3.1.b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that: “where there is no longstanding tradition of administrative authorities' independence from those holding political power, independent, impartial electoral commissions must be set up at all levels, from the national level to polling station level”.

<sup>32</sup> See Articles 12 and 29 of the [2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#). Paragraph 24 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that restrictions on rights and freedoms must be “strictly proportionate to the aim of the law”. Paragraph 14 of the [UN CCPR General Comment No. 25](#) states that grounds for deprivation of voting rights should be “objective and reasonable”.

<sup>33</sup> Paragraph 1.2 (iv) of the [Code of Good Practice](#) recommends: “There should be an administrative procedure subject to judicial control or a judicial procedure, allowing for the registration of a voter who was not registered; the registration should not take place at the polling station on election day”.

<sup>34</sup> This is approximately 168,000 less than number of eligible voters in the 7 February early presidential election, when voters could also vote abroad, in rest homes, medical facilities, oil platforms and ships at sea.

<sup>35</sup> Out of 10 ConECs, 7 were fully assigned to IDP voters, and 3 partially, with some IDP polling stations. Another four ConECs also had IDPs voters in the voter lists.

<sup>36</sup> Decisions on requests for corrections and inclusion in voter lists from voters should be taken within one day or immediately if received on election day.

## Candidate Registration

Eligible voters can stand as candidates. Those with dual citizenship or obligations before other states are disqualified, against ECtHR case law and international good practice.<sup>37</sup> Individuals with an unexpunged prior conviction for a serious crime are also disqualified;<sup>38</sup> while this restriction is not against international standards, frequent criminal convictions of opposition political actors effectively deprive them of an opportunity to stand for election. While detainees are eligible to stand, the ODIHR EOM was informed that penitentiary institutions do not allow them to notarize the power of attorney necessary for their application.

Candidates can be nominated by a registered political party or coalition, an initiative group of voters or self-nominated.<sup>39</sup> Nominees were required to collect at least 450 supporting signatures of voters, which is in line with international good practice. A number of IEOM interlocutors perceived the list of required documents for the nomination process and the obligation for notarization as burdensome, and increasing risk of disqualification for technical shortcomings.

ConECs had five days to certify nominations, and an additional seven days to verify the accuracy of the submitted income and asset declarations and the validity of supporting signatures and to decide on the registration of a candidate. By law, ConECs may deny registration to applicants in case of intentional mistakes in their applications, without offering them an opportunity to correct the mistakes. However, neither the law nor regulations define intentional and unintentional mistakes, granting ConECs discretionary powers to deny registration.

In total, 1,508 individuals applied for nomination, including 458 party-nominated, 1,048 self-nominated and one nominated by an initiative group. ConECs confirmed as nominees 1,462 of them. Subsequently, 1,420 nominees received signature sheets for the collection of voters' signatures. The remaining ones did not request signature sheets, thus discontinuing their candidacies. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted that ConECs provided each nominee only with 10 signature sheets of 50 lines each. Some interlocutors opined that this limitation, which is not prescribed by law, impaired their ability to collect sufficient number of valid signatures, including a reserve. In the next step, 1,197 nominees submitted signatures while 223 were unable to collect the required signatures or decided to discontinue their candidacies.

According to the CEC, out of these, 41 nominees were denied registration by ConECs due to insufficient number of valid support signatures; including cases where multiple seemingly identical signatures were submitted. The CEC informed the IEOM that ConECs applied the same regulation for signature verification as in previous elections, which was criticized by ECtHR.<sup>40</sup> Several IEOM interlocutors alleged that YAP did not conduct any evident signature collection campaign and claimed that, instead, local public entities, including utility service providers, provided lists with the personal data of voters.

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<sup>37</sup> See among others the [ECtHR judgments on Kara-Murza v. Russia \(2022\)](#) and [on Tanase v. Moldova \(2010\)](#). Paragraph 1.1.b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “persons holding dual nationality must have the same electoral rights as other nationals”.

<sup>38</sup> The law defines serious crimes as “acts for which the upper limit of the penalty of deprivation of liberty does not exceed twelve years for intentional or negligent commission”. Convictions for serious crimes are expunged six years after completing the sentence.

<sup>39</sup> A candidate may stand in only one constituency and does not have to be registered to vote in that constituency.

<sup>40</sup> The regulation, *inter alia*, does not require presence of the prospective candidates during the process nor verification of signatures by experts; also, it does not guarantee procedural safeguards against arbitrary decisions. See, for example, [ECtHR on Tahirov vs Azerbaijan \(2015\)](#).

According to the CEC, 24 applicants were denied registration for submitting inaccurate income and property declarations, including for failing to report on vehicles which they had sold long time ago by power of attorney.<sup>41</sup> While, the CEC said that applicants are not invited to correct such inaccuracies, several interlocutors, including rejected candidates, noted that often inaccuracies were not intentional.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, ConECs registered 1,052 candidates.<sup>43</sup> According to the CEC, on election day, 990 candidates remained on the ballot, of which 29.5 per cent were women. This includes 305 who were nominated by political parties and 684 who were self-nominated. Some 450 prospective candidates discontinued or withdrew their candidacies; some alleged fear of repercussions and informed the ODIHR EOM long-term observers about intimidation exerted by the local executive, ConECs and employers.<sup>44</sup> Rejected candidates also informed they had been threatened not to file complaints against the denial of their registration, including by means of threats to their family and business.

The ODIHR EOM long-term observers noted that ConECs applied candidate verification and registration rules and procedures inconsistently for different applicants.<sup>45</sup> Several IEOM interlocutors alleged that ConECs had a selective approach that resulted in the denial of registration of certain candidates. Such an approach does not ensure inclusivity and is at odds with international standards.<sup>46</sup>

## **Election Campaign**

The campaign officially commenced on 9 August and concluded on 31 August lasting 23 days.<sup>47</sup> The law defines campaigning broadly and prohibits it before the official start of the campaign. Several contestants informed the ODIHR EOM that they refrained from any political activity prior to the official start of the campaign, due to fear of deregistration as prescribed by law. Restrictive campaign regulations and their implementation, including on freedom of assembly and expression, did not effectively allow contestants to convey their messages to voters or enabled voters to obtain information, as required by OSCE commitments.

In addition to the ruling party, YAP, 24 parties contested these elections; all but one publicly perceived as ‘loyal opposition’. YAP was the only party with candidates in all constituencies while the other 24

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<sup>41</sup> Prospective candidates were denied registration for failing to include in their income and asset declaration vehicles they sold by power of attorney or small amounts of money as income in Constituencies 17, 32, 35, 52, 58, 84; and for failing to include amounts ranging from AZN 345-2,464 in constituencies 17, 32, 35, 52, 58, 84, 89. One Azerbaijani Manat (AZN) equals EUR 0.53.

<sup>42</sup> For example, a Musavat candidate was rejected because the cadaster record showed her ownership of a house, that she claimed had been demolished 20 years ago. Similarly, she disputed the record of her ownership of a vehicle she claimed to have legally sold long time ago. Paragraph 24 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states: “any restriction on rights and freedoms must, in a democratic society [...] be strictly proportionate to the aim of that law”. Paragraph 273 of the [ODIHR and Venice Commission 2020 Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states: “sanctions must bear a relationship to the violation and respect the principle of proportionality”, and Paragraph 87 states: “in case of technical omissions or minor infringements of registration requirements, the political party should be given reasonable time in which to rectify the failure”. See also Paragraph 271.

<sup>43</sup> Of them, 362 nominated by 25 political parties, 834 on their own initiative and one by initiative group. After initial registration, 51 candidates withdrew and one got de-registered by the CEC decision following a complaint (See *Election Dispute Resolution* section).

<sup>44</sup> This was reported among others in constituencies No. 24, 34, 47, 70, 92 and 110.

<sup>45</sup> The ODIHR EOM long-term observers (LTOs) requested from 55 ConECs to review the request letters addressed to the tax and property authorities for all applicants; 8 ConECs refused to provide information; five ConECs which provided information, sent such requests only about candidates whom they viewed as “suspicious”.

<sup>46</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) calls states “to respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office individually or as representatives of political parties without discrimination”.

<sup>47</sup> Some contestants expressed concerns about the duration of the campaign period, which they perceived as too short and limiting their opportunities to connect with voters.

parties had a total of 181 candidates. The Popular Front Party urged voters to boycott, citing the non-genuine nature of the elections and restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms.<sup>48</sup> While an average of eight candidates ran in each constituency, the elections were not competitive, as also acknowledged by many interlocutors, including authorities and contestants.<sup>49</sup> Some parties informed the ODIHR EOM that they participated in these elections with the sole aim to be eligible for public funding.

The campaign was barely visible. Campaigning was mostly conducted through door-to-door canvassing, posters of candidates displayed on the designated boards and digital content.<sup>50</sup> Meetings were primarily small-scale, often in closed or intimate settings. In the events observed by the ODIHR EOM, YAP was the most prominent.<sup>51</sup> In addition to YAP candidates, almost all other contestants supported the President's and government's policies. Infrastructure projects in the regained territories and hosting COP29 as a sign of enhancing the international status of the country also featured prominently in their campaigns. Some contestants also campaigned on the need for improved social services and local infrastructure or criticized internal policies of the government, and on a few instances, they criticized the foreign policy.<sup>52</sup>

At odds with international good practice, contestants are required by law to submit their print campaign materials to the ConECs prior to their distribution, which potentially results in self-censorship.<sup>53</sup> The authorities publicly called on the contestants to refrain from disrupting the normal conduct of the elections; some contestants perceived it as a call to refrain from criticism of the authorities.<sup>54</sup> The ODIHR EOM did not observe any campaign materials in formats suitable for persons with various accessibility needs.

In line with the law, the CEC provided contestants with a list of 5,506 campaign venues.<sup>55</sup> Some IEOM interlocutors noted that these venues were under police surveillance, which discouraged voters from participating. In addition, some were located in unsuitable and not easily accessible places. Contestants informed the IEOM that they were reluctant to hold meetings outside the designated venues, due to a five-day advance notification requirement. ODIHR EOM LTOs attended campaign events where participants, including public sector employees, informed them that they were ordered or paid by their

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<sup>48</sup> The leader of Popular Front Party shared on [his Facebook account on 21 July](#) that “the National Council urges the citizens of the country not to go to the polling stations on the day of voting and to boycott the fake election spectacle of a government that has deprived the rights and freedoms of the people and opportunities to live happily”.

<sup>49</sup> On [11 August](#), a list of was said to be the “future winners of the elections” was leaked on the internet.

<sup>50</sup> ODIHR EOM LTOs observed 59 campaign events of 8 political parties and 24 independent candidates.

<sup>51</sup> Of the 35 campaign events of political parties observed by ODIHR EOM LTOs, 21 were conducted by YAP.

<sup>52</sup> On [18 August](#), the leader of Azerbaijan People's Party, during a campaign event in Sabirabad-Shirvan stated “There is no work, the retirement age is too high, the pension is too little, prices are terribly high, and there is no childcare allowance”. On [19 August](#), Musavat's leader affirmed “The rapprochement of Azerbaijan with Putin who started aggression against Ukraine [...] contradicts the deep-rooted interests of Azerbaijan.”

<sup>53</sup> Paragraph 61 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states: “The insistence that materials intended for use in election campaigns must be submitted to electoral commissions, indicating the organisation which ordered and produced them, the number of copies and the date of publication, constitutes an unacceptable form of censorship, particularly if electoral commissions are required to take action against illegal or inaccurate publications. This is even more true if the rules prohibiting improper use of the media during electoral campaigns are rather vague”.

<sup>54</sup> On 10 July, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, during a meeting of the CEC with the ConECs, stated that “Persons who intend to prevent the normal conduct of the elections will be identified in time and action will be taken against them. [...] During the election campaign, as well as on the voting day, special attention will be paid to the observance of ethical behavior rules by citizens.” Several media outlets reported this statement and affirmed that it was immediately deleted: [Inews](#), [Azadliq](#), [AZTV Xabar](#), [Turan](#).

<sup>55</sup> In total, 80 per cent of the campaign venues observed were accessible to persons with physical disabilities.

employer to attend, raising concerns about voter intimidation and voters' ability to cast vote free of fear of retribution.<sup>56</sup>

Several candidates informed the ODIHR EOM that they trade favours with individual voters, including regarding employment, social benefits, medical treatment and legal assistance, raising concerns about misuse of administrative resources to induce voters.

Women constituted 34 per cent of the speakers appearing at campaign events observed by the ODIHR EOM and 46 per cent of attendees. Gender equality issues were overlooked in the campaign discourse, with the rare references to women being limited to their roles within the family, reflecting persistent gender stereotypes. Youth issues were given minimal attention during the campaign, with most of the focus on the emigration and unemployment of young people. At the campaign events monitored, 19 per cent of the attendees were young individuals.

Campaigning on social networks is not regulated. Nevertheless, the authorities announced their intention to monitor the internet space during the elections, including social networks.<sup>57</sup> The ODIHR EOM followed the online activities of all registered parties and their leaders, and state institutions.<sup>58</sup> The low-key campaign was also reflected online. The tone of the online campaign was neutral with the main posts promoting candidates' posters, slogans, and meetings. Additionally, all parties and leaders and the majority of candidates were using social media to discuss social and economic issues. In a few instances, some contestants criticized internal government policies, but only on rare occasions, criticism of foreign policies was expressed. On the other hand, the Popular Front Party (AXCP), which boycotted the elections, in their posts was strongly critical of the government and presented the current government as authoritarian and repressive. The ODIHR EOM did not observe use of intolerant and discriminatory rhetoric online.

## **Campaign Finance**

The Election Code regulates campaign finance. Candidates may fund their campaigns with donations from nominating parties, individuals and legal entities as well as their own resources. Foreign, state, charitable, and anonymous donations, as well as in-kind donations are prohibited. Parties may contribute up to AZN 150,000 from their own finances to each nominee, while individuals and legal entities may donate up to AZN 3,000 and AZN 50,000, respectively.<sup>59</sup> Campaign expenses for each candidate can reach up to AZN 500,000. Contrary to previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, there is no public funding of electoral campaigns, which contributes to an unlevel playing field.<sup>60</sup> The new Law on Political Parties provides for annual public funding of all parties which received votes in the previous elections.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> ODIHR EOM LTOs reported hearing of cases of voters being pressured to attend campaign events in Agsur, Baku, Gusar, Khachmaz, Ujar, and Zagatala. Paragraph 7.7 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) calls on states to “ensure that law and public policy work to permit political campaigning to be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere in which neither administrative action, violence nor intimidation bars the parties and the candidates from freely presenting their views and qualifications, or prevents the voters from learning and discussing them or from casting their vote free of fear of retribution”.

<sup>57</sup> On 10 July, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, during a meeting of the CEC for the chairs of ConECs, stated that “Continuous monitoring of the internet space and social networks will be conducted”.

<sup>58</sup> The ODIHR EOM observed Facebook accounts of all registered political parties and their leaders and some state institutions, for a total of 52 accounts starting from 1 August until the end of the campaign.

<sup>59</sup> One Azerbaijani Manat (AZN) equals EUR 0.53.

<sup>60</sup> See Article 1 and 8 of the [Council of Europe recommendation 4 \(2003\)](#). According to Article 2.3. of the [Code of Good Practice](#), equality of opportunity must be guaranteed [...] with regard to public funding of [...] campaigns”.

<sup>61</sup> In 2023, public funding of political parties amounted to AZN 5 million; 90 per cent is distributed among parliamentary parties, 5 per cent is allocated to new parliamentary parties based on by-election results, and 5 per cent to parties that won valid votes in an election but are not represented in the parliament.



Candidates were required by law to conduct all campaign related transactions through designated bank accounts. A CEC instruction mandated opening bank accounts only at the state-owned International Bank of Azerbaijan. Some candidates complained about bureaucratic hurdles to open an account before nomination.<sup>62</sup> As allowed by law, YAP established a unified campaign fund for all 125 candidates.<sup>63</sup> The bank is required to provide updates on individual candidates' accounts to the ConECs and, in the case of unified accounts, to the CEC, every week and, during the last 10 days, every 3 days.

The law requires prospective candidates to submit declarations of their income and property to the ConECs, but it does not require ConECs to make this information public, limiting transparency.<sup>64</sup> Candidates must submit three campaign finance reports to the ConECs.<sup>65</sup> While ConECs are required to publish these reports within five days, some failed to do so, while a few posted them on notice boards, which does not provide sufficient accessibility to the information. ConECs shall also publish information on the income and expenditures reported by the candidates, on a bi-weekly basis, in local media but there are no media in some regions so this was not consistently done. Some reports did not indicate any amounts in the fields provided for accounting of donations and expenditures, undermining the effectiveness of the reporting system and limiting the information available to voters. Further, there are no explicit requirements to report expenditures related to online campaigning. Several candidates informed the ODIHR EOM that they relied solely on their own resources and did not collect donations, because the requirement to provide detailed personal information discourages potential donors due to fear of reprisals.<sup>66</sup> In line with the law, YAP submitted its reports for the unified account to the CEC which published them in a timely manner.<sup>67</sup>

The CEC and ConECs are responsible for overseeing and auditing campaign finance. The law does not prescribe how the audit should be conducted nor does it require publication of audit results, detracting from transparency and not ensuring effective oversight. Equally, the law does not foresee a graduate system of proportionate, effective and dissuasive sanctions. Namely, violations, including failure to submit or to publish a report are punishable by non-dissuasive fines, while candidates may face deregistration if they exceed the spending limit by more than 5 per cent.<sup>68</sup> The CEC informed the ODIHR EOM that they did not refer any campaign finance related matters to the court to date.

Previous ODIHR EOM recommendations, including on enhancing transparency, ensuring effective oversight and prescribing effective proportionate and dissuasive sanctions remain unaddressed. Overall, the gaps in the legislation combined with the lack of capacity of oversight bodies to ensure audit of the

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<sup>62</sup> Nominees were required to submit to the bank the same set of notarized documents as to the CEC. For instance, Azerbaijan Democratic Party informed that 3 of its 18 nominees were not able to open bank accounts because of the 24-hour deadline to do so.

<sup>63</sup> The law allows parties with more than 60 candidates to create a unified account. The maximum amount a party can contribute to such account is AZN 500,000.

<sup>64</sup> Paragraph 228 of the [2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) defines that "It may also be appropriate to require that candidates file a public disclosure of assets and liabilities".

<sup>65</sup> An initial report at the time of registration, an interim report between 10 and 20 days prior to election day, and a final report no later than 10 days after the publication of the final election results. In case of a unified campaign fund, parties submit their reports to the CEC.

<sup>66</sup> A number of candidates reported minimum, or zero income and expenditures, while others informed ODIHR EOM LTOs that they were funding their campaign expenses with unreported cash and such practice was confirmed by some ConECs.

<sup>67</sup> YAP reported a donation of AZN 140,000 from the party and expenditures for campaign and information and consultation services of AZN 139,727.

<sup>68</sup> Fines for candidates range from AZN 1,000 to 2,000, for individual donors from AZN 100 to 500; for public officials from AZN 1,500 to 2,000, and for legal entities AZN 5,000 to 7,000. The [2017 GRECO Second Addendum to the Second Compliance Report on Azerbaijan](#) recommended the introduction of more effective, proportionate, and dissuasive sanctions for such violations, particularly by expanding the range of penalties.

submitted reports and enforcement of the legal requirements diminished the transparency of the campaign finances, contrary to international standards and good practice.<sup>69</sup>

## **Media**

While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the right to access to information and prohibits censorship, it foresees broad grounds for limitations on these freedoms.<sup>70</sup> Contrary to international standards and previous ODIHR recommendations, defamation and libel, including on social networks, remain criminal offences, punishable with up to three years imprisonment, or up to five years, if targeted at the president.<sup>71</sup>

While the Law on Media prescribes that the state shall ensure diversity of opinion and freedom of activity in the field of media, the same law as well as other media-related legislation and their implementation further curtail these rights in practice and detract from media pluralism. For instance, the Law on Information entitles the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport to provisionally block websites of media outlets based on their content prior to seeking a court decision, which has resulted in a number of local and international news websites being blocked in the country, including during the election campaign.<sup>72</sup>

The 2022 Law on Media was met with strong criticism from local and international organizations including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the Council of Europe.<sup>73</sup> The law introduced a wide range of excessive requirements for the registration of media outlets and

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<sup>69</sup> Paragraph 7.3 of the [2003 United Nations Convention Against Corruption](#) prescribes that states “shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures, [...], to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties.” Paragraph 247 of [the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “voters must have relevant information as to the financial support given to political parties, as this influences decision making and is a means of holding parties accountable”. See also paragraph 47 of the [2017 GRECO Second Addendum to the Second Compliance Report on Azerbaijan](#), which states that “[t]he clearly partisan composition of the CEC and election commissions is a particularly important issue which remains to be addressed in order to ensure effective and impartial supervision of political financing”.

<sup>70</sup> The [2016 Venice Commission Opinion on Draft Modifications to the Constitution](#) criticizes the overly broad definition of hate speech as “propaganda provoking racial, national, religious discord and animosity and hostility based on any other criteria” as giving too much room for censorship. Moreover, the opinion notes that norms on personal data protection should not be used to prevent access to information of public interest, they “should not prevent collection and disclosure of data on “private life” of public figures, within the limits set by the ECtHR case-law under Article 10 of the European Convention”.

<sup>71</sup> Paragraph 47 of the [General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR](#) calls States to “consider the decriminalization of defamation”, while Paragraph 38 provides that “all public figures, including those exercising the highest political authority such as heads of state and government, are legitimately subject to criticism and political opposition. [...] Laws should not provide for more severe penalties solely on the basis of the identity of the person that may have been impugned”.

<sup>72</sup> Some prominent opposition online media, including [azadliq.org](#) and [24saat.org](#), were not accessible during the campaign period. Despite a legal requirement, the list of blocked websites is not publicly available. See also the [ECtHR judgment on RFE/RL INC and others v. Azerbaijan \(2024\)](#) where the court found in favour of four websites blocked in 2017. Paragraph 43 of the [General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR](#) suggests, that “Any restrictions on the operation of websites, blogs or any other internet-based, electronic or other such information dissemination system” are only permissible to the extent they do not violate Article 19 of the ICCPR, concluding, that generic bans on the operation of websites are not in line with Article 19 of the ICCPR. Paragraph 70 of the [2011 report of the UN Special Representative on Freedom of Expression](#) calls upon states “to provide lists of blocked websites and full details regarding the necessity and justification for blocking each website”.

<sup>73</sup> See the [2022 Legal Analysis on the Law on Media](#) commissioned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the 2022 [Venice Commission Joint Opinion with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law of Council of Europe on the Law on Media](#).

journalists;<sup>74</sup> making registration *de facto* mandatory.<sup>75</sup> Such registration requirements run contrary to international standards and have resulted in a significant decrease in the number of media outlets.<sup>76</sup> There are no requirements for disclosure of ownership of the media, undermining transparency.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, registered media outlets and journalists can apply for state subsidies and are granted privileged access to information, including covering the election process.

Since November 2023, in part following the publication of an investigative report on corruption of high-ranking state officials, persecution of journalists intensified, with some 20 journalists still in detention, including some on charges of grave crimes, depriving them of their registration as journalists until their criminal records are expunged.<sup>78</sup> Such arrests, combined with the overly-restrictive legal framework contribute to a significantly constrained media-environment, leading to widespread self-censorship and severely limiting the scope for independent journalism and critical discourse.

By law, campaigning in media includes interviews, press conferences, open discussions, debates, round-table discussions, political advertising, as well as TV and radio programs. This broad definition does not allow for editorial coverage of the campaign and the contestants. Campaign regulations for the media are comprehensive but they do not provide for equitable access of contestants to the media and do not ensure that voters are provided sufficient information to make an informed choice, as required by international standards.<sup>79</sup> Namely, the public broadcaster *ITV* is required by law to provide at least three hours of primetime per week free of charge only to parties and coalitions of parties with more than 60 registered candidates. In these elections, only the ruling YAP met this requirement but decided not to use the free airtime.<sup>80</sup> While self-nominated candidates and those nominated by parties with less than 60 candidates are eligible for free airtime on the local branches of the public broadcaster, these in practice do not exist. As required by law, *ITV* provided airtime for paid advertisement. Positively, the prices were decreased, compared to the previous parliamentary elections.<sup>81</sup> However, no contestants

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<sup>74</sup> To register, online media are required, inter alia, to produce at least 20 original news items per day for at least 20 days a month; journalists must have, *inter alia*, a university degree, three years of work or scientific experience connected to media, no criminal convictions for certain crimes, must be employed by a registered media outlet, or be registered as a sole-proprietor, and adhere to the code of professional ethics. Registered media may also register their journalists and obtain accreditation to public institutions and access venues to seek, impart and disseminate information. Non-registered journalists are required to request accreditation for each event separately.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, in November 2023 in absence of registration, the media outlet "Dunya" Information Agency ([dia.az](http://dia.az)) was transformed into a blog. Yet, it was made inaccessible, pursuant to a request of the Media Development Agency to the Baku Court of Appeal.

<sup>76</sup> Paragraph 44 of [General Comment No. 34 to Article 19 ICCPR](#) provides that "general State systems of registration or licensing of journalists are incompatible with paragraph 3 of Article 19 ICCPR". More than [5,000 media outlets](#) were registered in the past while 300 remained registered after the law entered into force.

<sup>77</sup> Paragraph g. of the [Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy](#) states that "[t]ransparency of media ownership is of paramount importance. Society has the right to know who owns media and influences the priorities, narratives, and content. Transparency of media ownership provides the basis for plurality and diversity of media content".

<sup>78</sup> Ulvi Hasanli, Sevinc Vaqifqizi Abbasova, Mahammad Kekalov, Nargiz Absalamova, Hafiz Babali, Elnara Gasymova; Farida Mehralizada (Abzas Media); Aziz Orujov, Shamo Emin (YouTube channel Kanal 13); Ibrahim Humbatov (Azerinfo.az); Arshad Ibrahimov ([dunyaninsesi.az](http://dunyaninsesi.az)); Teymur Karimov (Kanal 11); Arzu Sayadoglu (Public Service Movement); Musfiq Cabbar, Ali Zeynal, Ramil Babayev, Ilkin Amrahov, Akif Gurbanov, Elmira Abbasov, Farid Ismayilov, Alasgar Mammadli (Toplum TV); Imran Aliyev ([Meclis.info](http://Meclis.info)); Afgan Sadygov (Azel TV); Vugar Gurdganli ([Az24saat.org](http://Az24saat.org)).

<sup>79</sup> In paragraph 7.8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) States committed to providing that "no legal or administrative obstacle stands in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process".

<sup>80</sup> YAP [stated](#) that it chose "not to exercise this privilege during the pre-election campaign period in order to adhere to democratic principles and ensure fair competition with independent and party candidates". Similarly, in the past two elections, only YAP qualified for free airtime and refused to use it for the same reasons.

<sup>81</sup> Airtime between 9:54 and 16:54 cost AZN 20 per second, and between 21:55 and 22:55, AZN 30.

requested paid airtime. Private media may provide only paid coverage of the campaign and none of the 72 private national and local broadcasters offered paid airtime.

In line with the law, the CEC established a Media Group comprised of 4 CEC members and 15 media representatives. It is mandated to oversee the campaign coverage and to resolve media-related issues during the campaign. It may refer violations to the law enforcement bodies, courts and the CEC. The Media Group held one session on an *ad hoc* basis, which was attended by ODIHR EOM; the group did not receive any complaints and it did not identify any violations. In the absence of a legal requirement, it did not publish any information on its work.

The prime time allocated for free and paid airtime on the public *ITV* was used for the coverage of the CEC activities and general information about the election process. Similarly, all election-related news items on the monitored broadcasters referred to the activities of the CEC.<sup>82</sup> Between 13 and 37 per cent of the coverage of the CEC in primetime news in monitored TV channels was with a positive tone, except for *Xezer TV*, which covered the CEC neutrally. The government's foreign policy dominated the evening news, with 21 to 59 per cent of all news coverage on the six monitored TV channels. In other news coverage on monitored broadcasters, the President received between 29 and 67 per cent of the primetime coverage, and of that coverage, between 28 and 70 per cent was in a positive or a very positive tone. In addition to the coverage officially allocated for the campaign, on a regular basis, promotional videos of the President's achievements were broadcast on all monitored channels, *inter alia* the President's pre-election campaign video from the presidential election, including right before the newscast. The government received between 12 and 44 per cent of the news coverage, including footage of Ministry of Defense activities which was mostly provided by the Ministry itself and was in a positive tone. Online media mostly covered meetings of the candidates with voters. Only APA clearly marked its materials as sponsored. Overall, the negligible coverage of the contestants in the media during the entire campaign did not allow voters to learn about the contestants and their programs, and limited their opportunity to make an informed choice.

## **Election Dispute Resolution**

Complaints and appeals may be filed by all stakeholders. Complaints may be filed to election commissions and the courts and short deadlines apply for filing and reviewing complaints, in line with international good practices.<sup>83</sup> In compliance with the law, the CEC and ConECs established expert groups, consisting of commission members and their staff with legal backgrounds, to review complaints.<sup>84</sup> In absence of a legal requirement, the CEC did not publish the complaints. The CEC maintains a register of complaints but it does not make it publicly available, undermining transparency.

The CEC received 28 complaints against ConECs decisions on candidate registration. Of these, 21 were filed by nominees denied registration and 19 were rejected as unsubstantiated while 2 were granted resulting in the registration of the complainants; an additional complaint was filed against the registration of a candidate resulting in his deregistration.<sup>85</sup> The CEC received four complaints on

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<sup>82</sup> During the official campaign period the ODIHR EOM conducted a systematic media monitoring of the prime time of the following TV stations: *ITV* (public), *AzTV* (state), *ARB*, *ATV*, *Real TV* and *Xezer TV*. The ODIHR EOM also monitored campaign coverage in the online media, that stated their intention to the CEC to provide paid space for the candidates.

<sup>83</sup> Complaints and appeals may be filed within three days from a decision or violation. The election commissions and courts must decide on the complaints and appeals within three days, or within two days, if submitted within 30 days before election day. Complaints filed on election day or the day after must be addressed immediately.

<sup>84</sup> Nine members at CEC, three members at ConECs.

<sup>85</sup> Six more complaints pertained to minor technical issues; of them two were granted and four dismissed on formal grounds (the complaint was not signed or was missing supporting documentation).

campaign violations and referred three of them to the ConECs citing lack of jurisdiction, while one was rejected citing lack of investigative powers.

Even though the complainants were invited to present oral arguments at the CEC sessions, at the sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM, the CEC never considered their arguments and always approved the draft decision prepared in advance, in all but one case unanimously. Most complainants did not have the opportunity to present additional evidence, or to review the examination protocols on which the CEC had based its decisions.<sup>86</sup> When the complainants alleged discrepancies between state registers and actual circumstances, the CEC based its decisions solely on state records without further investigation into the claims. Such approach of the CEC deprived the complainants of procedural guarantees prescribed by law and good practice.<sup>87</sup>

Prior to election day, 11 appeals were submitted to the courts against CEC decisions denying candidate registration. In two court hearings observed, the courts did not examine substantial evidence submitted. In 10 cases, the courts rejected the appeals as unsubstantiated simply finding that the CEC decisions were well reasoned, a practice previously found as a violation by the ECtHR.<sup>88</sup> One appeal was dismissed as inadmissible as the complainant had not previously appealed to the CEC. Six rejected candidates filed appeals to the Supreme Court, five were rejected and one dismissed as the appellant was not represented by a lawyer. Several ODIHR EOM interlocutors noted that the existing legal costs posed a barrier to accessing further appeals.<sup>89</sup> The CEC published its decisions in a timely manner on its website; however, the CEC decisions lacked detailed justifications, with most decisions merely referencing expert group findings and failing to indicate the availability of further legal remedies.<sup>90</sup> Information on court hearings was not publicly accessible, and while anonymized court decisions are to be published in the “E-court” online unified judicial database, they are not easily accessible due technical limitations.<sup>91</sup> While adjudication deadlines were generally respected by election commissions and courts, 14 appeals were still ongoing after the start of the campaign, undermining the principle of an effective and timely remedy.

While the mechanisms for election dispute resolution are in line with good practices, its effectiveness was undermined by the lack of independence and impartiality of election commissions, at odds with paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>92</sup> In addition, several IEOM interlocutors attributed the reduced number of court appeals, compared to the previous parliamentary elections, to a

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<sup>86</sup> When the CEC decisions alleged fraudulent signatures, the rejected candidates were not informed which exact signatures were deemed incorrect and how that was established.

<sup>87</sup> According to Article 112-1.9 of the Election Code the applicant has the right to present new evidence. Article 112-1.7 gives the complainant the right to attend the meeting related to investigation of his or her complaint. Article 24 of the Law on Administrative Procedure obliges an administrative body “to investigate thoroughly, completely and objectively all the factual circumstances that are important for the correct resolution of the case during administrative proceedings”. Paragraph 100 of the 2022 Code of Good Practice states that “the appeal procedure should be of a judicial nature, in the sense that the right of the appellants to proceedings in which both parties are heard should be safeguarded”.

<sup>88</sup> In the [ECtHR judgment on Gahramanli and others v. Azerbaijan \(2015\)](#), the ECtHR found a violation where the Baku Court of Appeal merely reiterated and upheld the CEC’s findings, and copied its reasoning, without conducting an independent examination of the arguments raised or addressing the applicants’ complaints about the shortcomings in the CEC procedure.

<sup>89</sup> Appeals to the Supreme Court can only be filed through a legal representative registered with the Bar Association. A lawyer at the expense of the state may be appointed in such cases to a person who proves they have insufficient resources to hire a lawyer.

<sup>90</sup> Paragraph 5.11 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) prescribes that “administrative decisions against a person must be fully justifiable and must as a rule indicate the remedies available”.

<sup>91</sup> The database web interface has a long dis-functional search feature, making the decisions accessible only to those in possession of a direct link or a QR code, such as the parties of a case.

<sup>92</sup> Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that “everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity”.



further decline in trust in the judiciary's independence and its effectiveness in handling disputes against authorities.<sup>93</sup>

## Citizen and International Observers

Observers may be nominated by parties, candidates, non-governmental, international and foreign entities. They must be accredited by the CEC, to observe nationwide, or by the ConECs, to observe within the territory of the respective constituency. Restrictive legal provisions limit foreign funding for civil society organizations in general and prescribe administrative obstacles, such as long delays or the lack of a possibility to rectify minor omissions in documents in the process of their registration as organizations, undermining the work of civil society, including in election observation.<sup>94</sup> Several well-known citizen election observation groups remained unregistered and deprived of funding, with some prominent members under arrest or detention, and were thus unable to conduct any election observation.<sup>95</sup>

The law and relevant regulations do not limit the number of representatives per entity, which can observe the activities of an election commission at the same time. However, the law grants wide discretionary powers to the election commissions to decide who can be present in case of overcrowding, and to deprive observers from observation, based on broad grounds, on the election commissions' interpretation of what are inappropriate actions or behaviors of the observer.

In total, 112,749 citizen and 598 international observers were accredited. A total of 126 YAP-nominated observers obtained a special permission to observe nationwide. The vast majority of observers were nominated by YAP, YAP-nominated candidates and affiliated parties, raising concern over the access of independent and impartial observers to the process.

## Election Day

In the polling stations observed by the IEOM the election day was orderly. Throughout election day, the CEC shared updates on voter turnout per constituency and nationwide. The CEC started posting preliminary results by polling stations some eight hours after closing of the polls. Women were well represented in the polling stations observed by the IEOM, with 48 per cent of the PEC members, including 40 per cent of the chairpersons. The preliminary voter turnout was announced at 37.27 per cent.

The IEOM observed opening in 102 polling stations which was assessed overall positive in all but five cases, however, observers noted important safeguards were omitted in nearly half of the observed

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<sup>93</sup> Paragraph 66 of the stated that the Article 98-1 “represents a serious threat to the independence of the judiciary; the involvement of “an independent judicial council” in the process of nomination of judges by the President is not guaranteed at the constitutional level” and that “the appointment of all judges of the two top courts will be in the hands of the executive [...] In essence, it would increase even more the dependence of the judiciary on the President”. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is a former Minister of Agriculture while the deputy Chief Justice is the government’s agent before the ECtHR.

<sup>94</sup> In the [ECtHR judgment on Election Monitoring Centre and Others v. Azerbaijan \(2021\)](#), the Court stated that “neither the Ministry of Justice nor the domestic courts explained why they regarded that the alleged breaches were impossible to remedy and justified outright dissolution of the [Election Monitoring Centre] EMC”. The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 11 of the ECHR in respect of the delay in the registration of the EMC and its dissolution. To date, this judgment has still not been implemented.

<sup>95</sup> Including the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, Institute for Democratic Initiatives and Election Observation Alliance. On 29 April 2024, a prominent EMDSC member, [Anar Mammadli was placed under pretrial detention](#) on charges of conspiracy to unlawfully bring money into the country. If convicted, he faces up to eight years in prison.

polling stations. The polling stations observed opened on time, with the exception of 9 that opened with minor delays. Key procedural safeguards during opening that were not always followed included; in 28 observed polling stations the ballot papers received were not counted, while in 43 cases their number was not announced or recorded in the PEC protocols; the PECs did not check whether the ballots were pre-stamped with the PEC stamp in 28 observations; and in 26 polling stations, the serial numbers of the ballot box seals were not announced and were not recorded in the PEC protocols. These omissions potentially compromised the integrity of the ballots and ballot boxes. Further, in 13 polling stations observed, PEC members demonstrated a lack of awareness of the opening procedures. IEOM observers reported that in some instances, they were obstructed in observing the opening procedures or other authorized persons faced similar limitations.

In the 914 observed polling stations, the voting process was orderly and generally assessed positively in 95 per cent of observations, however, observers also noted cases of serious irregularities and inconsistencies in the application of important procedures. Voters were not always checked for traces of ink before voting (10 per cent of observations), or consistently marked with ink after voting (7 per cent), voters were also not always asked to sign the voter lists (3 per cent), all important safeguards against multiple voting.<sup>96</sup> Further, a number of voters were added to the supplementary voter list on election day, including those who did not demonstrate to have residence within the respective precincts, contrary to legislation.

While the polling station layouts were found to ensure secrecy of the vote in 98 per cent of observations, the secrecy was compromised in a number of observations, either because voters did not mark the ballot in secret or did not fold it to preserve secrecy in 4 and 9 per cent of observations, respectively. Ballot boxes were not sealed properly in 3 per cent of polling stations observed and other procedural problems were observed also in 3 per cent of polling stations.

Serious irregularities were also observed that raise concerns about the integrity of the process including voters being allowed to vote without ID (17 cases), seemingly identical signatures on the voter lists (56 cases), unauthorized persons keeping track of voters (32 cases), and indications of ballot box stuffing (26 cases).<sup>97</sup> IEOM observers also reported direct observations of a voter voting in multiple PECs and a group of voters bussed to multiple polling stations.

Citizen observers were present in 63 per cent of the observations, while candidate or party observers in 86 per cent of observations. However, the transparency these observers could have added to the process was detracted by the fact that IEOM observers noted that candidate representatives and citizen observers were often not aware which entity nominated them. Further, the IEOM observers reported indications of citizen observers *de facto* representing contestants in 47 cases, while YAP-nominated contestant observers were far more present than other contestant observers. Unauthorized persons were present in 3 per cent of the visited polling stations.

IEOM observers were able to observe the voting procedures without restrictions in 95 per cent of observations but reported that PEC members did not cooperate fully with them in 5 per cent of polling stations observed and, in some cases, reported that they were not allowed to review the Voter Lists.

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<sup>96</sup> For instance, PEC members were inking the right thumb, instead of the left, as required by law; or they were checking for ink using an ordinary torch rather than an UV lamp.

<sup>97</sup> In addition, STOs reported that in PEC #2 ConEC 32; PEC #15 ConEC 124; and PEC #13 ConEC36 –the stated total number of voters who had voted so far visibly did not match the number of ballots in the ballot box, nor the number of signatures on the voter lists.

Despite measures to facilitate access to the voting process for persons with disabilities, independent access to the polling stations was not ensured in 70 per cent while the layout of the polling stations was not conducive for persons with disabilities in 35 per cent of those observed, respectively.

The counting was assessed negatively in 45 per cent of the 92 polling stations observed by the IEOM. The negative assessments were largely a result of PECs having omitted important reconciliation procedures that safeguard the integrity of the count, including counting the number of signatures in the main and supplementary voter lists (41 cases), determining the number of voters who voted by mobile voting (24 cases) or by deregistration voting cards (26 cases), cancelling the unused ballots (21 cases) and announcing the figures entered in the draft protocol (45 cases). In 58 cases, the ballots were not stamped with the PEC stamp, the validity of ballots was not determined reasonably (23 cases) or consistently (20 cases) and those contested were not determined by vote in 44 cases. The number of ballots in the mobile ballot box was not determined and entered into the protocol in 30 cases. Of serious concern, in addition to during voting, indications of ballot box stuffing were also observed in the count in 17 cases; including 4 where the number of ballots in the stationary box was higher than the number of voters who voted in the polling station and one mobile ballot box with clumps of ballots. Further, IEOM observers noted evidence of deliberate falsification of entries in voter lists or result protocols in 15 cases and in 8 cases the result protocols were pre-signed by PEC members. Overall, the counting process raised serious concerns about whether ballots were counted and reported honestly, in line with paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>98</sup>

Observers reported that not all people present had a clear view of the count in 29 of the 92 counts, they were not able to observe without restrictions in 27 cases and that PECs did not provide full co-operation in 22 cases. In 4 cases unauthorized persons were observed directing or interfering in the work of the PEC. In 60 per cent of the observed counts, PECs did not post a copy of the protocol at the polling station while in 19 per cent of the cases, not all entitled persons received copies. In 8 cases, tension or unrest in or around the PS was reported.

The IEOM observed tabulation in 79 ConECs and it was assessed positively in 64 observations. Negative assessments were mostly attributed to poor organization of the tabulation process (9 cases), lack of transparency (12 cases) and ConEC chairpersons failing to announce entries in the computer (36 cases). Party and candidate observers were present in only 21 and citizen observers in only 10 of the observed ConECs. Reported procedural irregularities included correction of the protocols without formal decisions (10 cases) and filling out protocols in ConECs premises (12 cases). In 15 cases the PECs did not deliver all required documentation to the ConECs and in 11 cases figures on the PEC protocols did not reconcile. Three cases of what appeared to be deliberate falsification on result protocols were observed.

***The English version of this report is the only official document.  
An unofficial translation is available in Azerbaijani.***

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<sup>98</sup> Paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document provides that the participating States will ensure that the votes are counted and reported honestly.

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**MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Baku, 2 September 2024 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

Mr. Michael Creed was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Ms. Lucie Potůčková headed the OSCE PA delegation. Mr. Ditmir Bushati is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 31 July.

Each of the institutions involved in this International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) has endorsed the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the electoral process. The OSCE PA will present its report at its upcoming autumn meeting.

The ODIHR EOM includes 13 experts in the capital and 28 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 279 observers from 34 countries were deployed, including 28 long-term and 172 short-term observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 54-member delegation from the OSCE PA. Opening was observed in 102 polling stations and voting was observed in 922 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 92 polling stations, and the tabulation in 79 ConECs.

The observers wish to thank the authorities for their invitation to observe the elections, and the Central Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan for the assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties and civil society organizations and the international community representatives for their co-operation.

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