

ELECTIONS AND POWER

**ON THE RESULTS OF
THE SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
IN KAZAKHSTAN**

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The current political season will certainly occupy a special place in Kazakhstan's most recent history. It is no exaggeration to say that the political reform going on in the country is a symbolic event that has significantly changed the political arena and configuration of forces in the republic. This process was launched in May when amendments to the country's Constitution called upon to bring the economic and political development processes in Kazakhstan into harmony with each other were adopted. They were primarily aimed at introducing a presidential-parliamentary form of rule in the country. The president's deliberate transfer of some powers to the political parties and the parliament was not only a sign of the constructive development of the political system, but also a strategically tested step that greatly accelerated political modernization in Kazakhstan.

The change in the parliament's status and possibilities led to disbandment of the lower house and the decision to hold special elections to the Majilis on 18 August, 2007.¹ Analysts give a variety of reasons why the deputy corps of the third convocation became a thing of the past, but this step seems very logical, since it was dictated by the amendments to the Constitution, and they, in turn, were a demand of the times. There are no other clear reasons for the disbandment, since the Majilis' activity was not criticized in the government or society, and the house operated quite efficiently. This step

¹ See: Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaev No. 350 "About Dissolution of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan of the Third Convocation and Appointment of Extraordinary Elections of the Deputies of Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan," Akorda, Astana, 20 June, 2007, available at [http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,1&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL].

also meets the interests of Kazakhstan's democratic development and the tasks of the country's accelerated modernization.

Elections according to the proportional system held for the first time in Kazakhstan's history were not only an innovation for all the political forces and society as a whole, but were also a test of the party system's maturity. Few had any idea what a political party's tactics, or its relations with the republic's elite, should be in the new situation. For the first time, a list of leaders had to be compiled, which was offered to the voters as the party's overall image. Public opinion polls acquired an entirely different nature, and the fervor aroused by the party ratings on a national scale was one of the most entertaining elements of the past election marathon.²

In so doing, many experts christened them "no-intrigue elections" even before the actual campaign began, since the favorite and the results were known in advance. The results surprised everyone and gave rise to all kinds of different assessments. But all the same, despite all the ambiguity and unexpectedness of the election results, political reform in Kazakhstan is an important and long-term step, for the country has in fact transferred from one system to another—from the ex-Soviet Kazakh S.S.R. and a post-Soviet new formation with unclear legitimacy to a systemic national state.³ The past election campaign was a logical continuation of this reform. The government gave society another clear signal that it was steering a steady course toward democratization of the country and that political modernization would not be halted or conserved.

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It should be noted that certain merging and transformation processes preceded the elections on the republic's party field, which were mainly triggered by the party nature of the electoral procedure. Seven political structures took part in the 2007 parliamentary elections: the National Social-Democratic Party (NSDP), the Nur Otan People's Democratic Party, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK), the Auyl Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Rukhaniyat Party, and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK).⁴

One of the favorites in the election campaign was the leading party—the Nur Otan People's Democratic Party—which poses as the party in power. Its program focuses on support of the president's political-economic policy.

Another favorite was the National Social-Democratic Party, which was joined a little earlier by the Real Ak Zhol Party. The NSDP posed as the main opponent of Nur Otan and the government as a whole. It presented its goals as promoting a cardinal change in the republic's political and socio-economic policy, as well as dismantling the current system of state rule.

The leaders also included the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, to which representatives of the Adilet Democratic Party of Kazakhstan belonged. Ak Zhol, being a representative of the so-called "moderate" opposition, generally steered a constructive course, offering in so doing their own vision of the change in the country's development vector. Objectively, the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan, Auyl, and Rukhaniyat were labeled as outsiders. The popularity ratings of these parties are not high in society, and their activity is ineffective and barely tangible (this particularly concerns work in the regions). For these reasons, experts did not regard these players as potential victors.

² See: S. Akimbekov, "Goriachee leto?" *Kontinent*, No. 13 (198), 4-17 July, 2007.

³ See: Iu. Solozobov, "Kazakhstan—vazhneyshiy interfeys Rossii," RIA Novosti, 3 August, 2007, available at [www.rian.ru].

⁴ Parties were listed in keeping with their position in the voting bulletins.

A distinguishing feature of the proportional election system is the emphasis not on specific personalities, but on the competition of ideas and proposals, that is, on election platforms.⁵ In the election race, Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP can be singled out as the leaders in the election platform ratings. The program documents of the CPK, CPPK, Auyl, and Rukhaniyat were not very well developed, and it stands to reason that in order to gain the most votes, a party's program should primarily meet the interests of the electorate and encompass all the vitally important social problems.

Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP can be singled out from among all the political parties in terms of how systemically and comprehensively they presented urgent questions in their election platforms. For example, the election platforms of Auyl, Rukhaniyat, the PPK, and the CPPK are characterized by brevity and an emphasis on specific problems. In so doing, the CPPK and PPK did not develop a systems approach in presenting the main provisions of their programs.⁶ Another serious shortcoming of these parties is the absence of original ideas and proposals capable of arousing the electorate's interest.

If we look at the distinguishing features of the election platforms, we can ascertain significant differences between them. Nur Otan's program is extensive and encompasses the comprehensive development plans of the entire country.⁷ The NSDP's platform is distinguished by a high degree of radicality and is counterposed to Nur Otan's platform. The Ak Zhol Party put forward a program characterized by an unusual form of delivery, as well as by a creative approach.⁸

The platform of the Auyl Party concentrates exclusively on the agricultural problem, whereby other groups of voters and their problems are beyond the field of vision of this structure.⁹ A similar situation also developed in the Rukhaniyat Party. Whereas Auyl decided to focus on a limited electorate, Rukhaniyat concentrated in its platform on humanitarian issues. As for the CPPK and the Party of Patriots, their election platforms are reminiscent in form and content of pre-election leaflets. The platforms of these parties are presented in extremely condensed form and consist of separate theses.¹⁰

Nor can we ignore the fact that the elections were scheduled early, there was not much time to prepare for them, but they made it possible to distinguish between actually functioning party organizations and those parties that only lived "from election to election."

The 2007 campaign also had specific characteristics:

- (a) for the first time in Kazakhstan's political history, parliamentary elections were held according to party lists;
- (b) members of the Kazakhstan National Assembly were delegated to the country's representative body.

In so doing, parallel to the parliamentary elections, elections to the local representative bodies, maslikhats, were also held, but they simply went unnoticed against the background of the intense inter-party struggle.

Today, the foundations of power are undergoing active transformation in Kazakhstan, and parties are becoming the key actors in the political process. Participation of political parties alone in the political process is giving rise to de-personification of the electoral procedure and presumes

⁵ See: A. Tastenov, "Semero smelykh. S chem idut kazakhstanskije partii na vybory?" available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1186126800>].

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

competition of the programs and ideas contained in the election platforms. It is also generally accepted that the proportional system makes it possible to take into account all the political interests and help to ensure social stability where ethnic and other groups need to have representation in the legislative bodies.

As for the second specific aspect, it should be noted that this is Kazakhstani know-how, which does not have any analogues in world political practice. The fact that the Assembly acquired a constitutional status and the right to be represented in parliament is something new. The Assembly, which was created 12 years ago as an advisory body for harmonizing ethnic relations, has become a full-fledged institution of the political system.¹¹

It is important that the 2007 electoral process occurred peacefully, without any outrages or public unrest. This says that the government ensured equality and all the necessary conditions were created for honest and open competition. During the election campaign, all the participants in the election procedure strove to carry out their activity within the law, on the basis of mutual respect and objectivity. It is worth pointing out a certain illusion was created that the radical opposition had also been incorporated into the civilized political struggle.

And of course, Kazakhstan citizens have become more politically mature, competent, and discriminating in their partialities. It is also important to note that Kazakh society does not accept radical ideas. Therefore, as Russian political scientists believe, parties like the LDPR with Zhirinovskiy at the helm cannot expect support of the electorate.¹² During the many years of stability, society is steadily oriented toward positive initiatives and this, experts believe, is the key to understanding the electoral moods in Kazakhstan. The so-called “conservatism” factor is also present here, which, incidentally, exists in essentially every country with a blossoming economy. Psychologically, people do not want sudden changes capable of causing instability. Under these conditions, the opposition parties have to reject their old orientation toward extreme assessments and absolute criticism. As a result, the scenarios of a radical development of the electoral process have not justified themselves.

What is more, the 2007 election campaign was distinguished by unprecedented information openness and broad access of all the parties to agitation possibilities and resources. It must be admitted that this is indeed a great breakthrough in democratization compared with the previous election procedures. In order to ensure the equal access of political parties to the mass media and provide the voters with as much information as possible about their election programs, the format of open political debates was expanded.

In particular, subsidies from the republic’s Central Elections Commission provided political parties with live air time on the Khabar state television station during the popular Betpe-bet program, as well as with air time on Kazakh radio. In addition, the country’s two central newspapers, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda* and *Egemen Kazakstan*, provided print space at the CEC’s expense for publishing interviews with the leaders or representatives of political parties. And finally, many television channels set up “discussion courts” on their own initiative, where television debates were held with the participation of activists from all the political parties involved in the election procedure. During the campaign, party leaders held various Internet conferences. Incidentally, the use of various forms of Internet communication for agitation is another innovation of the past election race. In compliance with the Law on Elections, on 10 August, 2007, debates between political parties were also held on the Khabar TV channel.¹³

¹¹ See: “Glava gosudarstva prinial uchastie v zasedanii Soveta Assamblei naroda Kazakhstana,” available at [<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708070333>].

¹² According to the information of the RIA Novosti Information Agency, available at [www.rian.ru].

¹³ According to the data of the Kazakhstan Central Elections Commission, available at [www.election.kz].

At the same time, as the CEC notes, there was not one sufficiently justified complaint during the campaign about restricted access to the mass media. If certain parties were restricted in some way, this was done within the framework of the law and the interrelations between owner and client.

The results of the media monitoring on how often they featured parties during the election campaign show that the number of mentions of a particular party depended on the activity of the structures themselves.¹⁴ According to the monitoring results, the conclusions are unequivocal: the mass media did not give special attention to any one party and any complaints by the members of individual party organizations about “unequal” coverage of their activity were unfounded.¹⁵ Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP were the record-holders with respect to the number of times they were mentioned in the mass media. But this did not mean the mass media were loyal to these parties, just these three leaders held the largest number of image-making and propaganda functions.¹⁶

Society reacted quite calmly to the agitation-propaganda activity of the parties and possibly the population’s reticence, as well as its conscious views and moods, helped to minimize the level of black PR and political mud-slinging in the mass media. Although certain negative incidents did take place, they should be regarded as the attempts of individual players to draw society’s attention to themselves and somehow live up the election process. For example, certain members of the CPPK, who accused the NSDP of “destabilizing the political situation,” tried to do this. In particular, E. Abylkasymov noted in his statements in the mass media that “the NSDP is fully carrying out its plan, which was most likely hatched in the bowels of the Western special services. All of their latest actions were aimed at carrying out a strategy ultimately aimed at bringing people out into the streets and organizing mass unrest.”¹⁷ Mutual accusations followed, which generally remained unnoticed and did not have an effect on the campaign. The same E. Abylkasymov was later involved in another conflict, when he unexpectedly wished the Nur Otan Party victory, for which he was taken off the CPPK’s list. On the whole, acute wing-dings, arguments, and debates among the parties, as well as with the electorate occurred in virtual space, on popular web forums, rather than in the streets. Nevertheless, one important conclusion can already be made: the new (proportional) system of elections has significantly raised the culture of public discussions and the responsibility of the party leaders.

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As a result, 377 candidates from the seven aforementioned parties ran for 98 seats in the lower house of parliament. Another nine candidates were nominated by the Kazakhstan National Assembly (they participated in a separate voting).

On the whole, several weeks before the voting, both the leaders and the outsiders in the election procedure had been determined. It must be noted that according to all the sociological polls conducted, the Nur Otan Party should have received the greatest public support. The main intrigue was the fuss around which parties would gather the seven percent required to get into the Majilis of the country’s parliament. In so doing, according to experts’ preliminary estimates, the Nur Otan Party was supposed to receive up to 80% of the seats in parliament, and at least another two oppo-

¹⁴ See the weekly monitoring reports at [www.zonakz.net].

¹⁵ See: Vyborny: monitoring SMI, available at [http://ndp-nurotan.kz/?f=show&ft=27&type=11&id=29084504659].

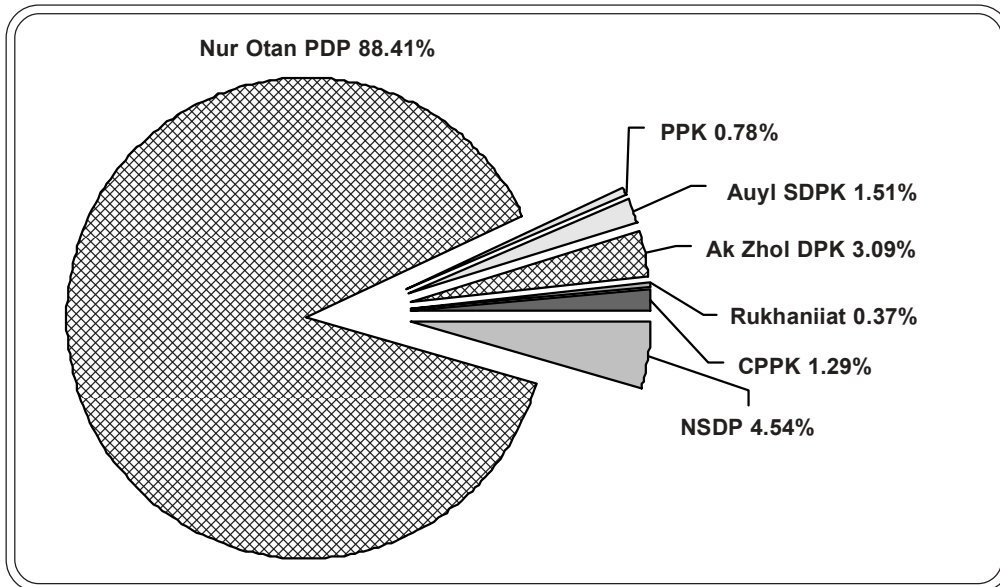
¹⁶ The third session of a permanent round table organized by the CEC was held in Astana with the participation of representatives of political parties on the topic “On the Course of the Election Campaign and its Coverage in the Mass Media,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-2007081002].

¹⁷ “Chlen KNPK obviniaet OSDP v ‘destabilizatsii politicheskoi obstanovki,’” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708100329].

sition parties were to obtain proportional representation.¹⁸ It was presumed that they would be Ak Zhol and the NSDP, which could have livened up the political process in the republic, but these forecasts were not justified.

On 18 August, at 7:00 local time, 9,728 polling stations opened in every region of the country, in 1,512 of which the Saylau electronic voting system operated as planned. By 21:00, the voting was over, and at 22:00, the final information was available about how many Kazakhstanis had voted at the special election of deputies to the Majilis of the parliament and at the regular elections of deputies to the maslikhats of all levels: 5,726,544 voters (or 64.56 percent of the electorate) carried out their right to vote.

Percentage Ratio of the Voting Results¹⁹



The results of the recent elections shattered all the forecasts of political scientists: only one political organization—Nur Otan—obtained seats in the Majilis of the fourth convocation. The other six parties that participated in the parliamentary elections could not overcome the 7-percent barrier. On the eve of the elections, no one in Kazakhstan or beyond the republic doubted that the party in power would win, but the fact that not only third, but also second place were not filled came as a complete surprise to everyone. No one objectively expected this kind of result, neither the government, nor the opposition, nor the experts, nor the observers.²⁰

In addition to the unexpected election results, specialists also noted the unprecedented activity of the Kazakhstan electorate at elections of this level, which shows the desire of the country's citizens to be involved in the changes going on in the state.²¹ Throughout the entire republic,

¹⁸ According to the data of the Institute of Comparative Social Studies "CESSI-Kazakhstan," available at [www.e.gov.kz/sailau2007?lan=ru].

¹⁹ Appendix to the resolution of the Kazakhstan Central Elections Commission of 22 August, 2007, No. 113/242, available at [www.election.kz].

²⁰ See: I. Nevolin, "Rezultaty golosovaniia prevzoshli vse ozhidaniia," *Liter*, 20 August, 2007.

²¹ See: L. Tusupbekova, "Tolko vmeste! Tolko vpered!" *Kazhkhstanskaia pravda*, 22 August, 2007.

8,891,561 citizens featured on the voter lists, 6,082,430 of whom participated in the voting, or 68.4 percent. Outside the polling stations, 185,979 voters cast their votes. According to the Kazakhstan CEC, the largest number of voters came to the polling stations in the Almaty (90.12%) and North Kazakhstan (75.03%) regions. The lowest turnout was registered in the country's two main cities, Astana and Almaty.

Distribution of Electorate's Votes²²

Political Parties	Number of Votes
National Social-Democratic Party	269,310
Nur Otan People's Democratic Party	5,247,720
Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan	46,436
Auy! Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan	89,855
Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan	183,346
Rukhaniyat Party	22,159
Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan	76,799

According to some data, CEC employees note that this time the electorate was so organizationally consolidated that the leaders of the NSDP could only obtain seats in the Majilis if the election results were falsified. The CEC simply would not permit such violations of the law in favor of falsely understood plurality of the parliament.²³ On the whole, the voter turnout at the current elections was higher than the index for previous years. In 2003, 56.4 percent participated in the elections of deputies to the maslikhats, in 2004, 56.8 percent of the voters participated in the elections of Majilis deputies.²⁴ Today, we can point to the main reasons for the electorate's high activity.

- First, there was a very powerful information background accompanying the elections. The current election campaign was much more extensive than the 2004 parliamentary elections in technological and emotional scope. What is more, the republic's CEC, in turn, took a whole series of systemic steps in order to help the political parties bring their election programs to the voters.
- Second, those political parties for which each vote was important in order to overcome the 7-percent barrier made numerous addresses to the voters. This is another plus of the proportional election system. If, in the past, the fate of deputy mandates was resolved in certain districts where, due to local specific features, the candidates were not always interested in voter activity, now a high turnout was a determining factor in the success of all the election participants.
- And third, the parliamentary elections received significant support from nongovernmental organizations, which set themselves the task of drawing as many people as possible into the voting process. The widespread campaign "Your Vote—Your Future" and the multitude of

²² According to the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

²³ See: S. Mekebaev, "Togo, kto vyshel iz naroda, obratno ne zamanish," *Vremia*, 23 August, 2007.

²⁴ According to the data of the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

billboards and posters naturally played their role.²⁵ In so doing, the elections also gave a strong boost to the development of a civil society as such in Kazakhstan, which was particularly seen in the active interaction between the parties and nongovernmental organizations.

On 20 August, elections of candidates to the Majilis from the Kazakhstan National Assembly were held at one national polling station. The voter list featured 364 citizens—members of the KNA Council—of whom 337 participated in the voting, or 92.58 percent. What is more, 9 candidates for deputy to the Majilis of the parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan participated in the elections, who were representatives of the German, Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian, Kazakh, Uzbek, Bulgarian, Uighur, and Korean ethnic groups.²⁶

**Voting Results of
the Kazakhstan National Assembly Council²⁷**

Name	Number of votes	%
M. Akhmadiev	312	93.13
V. Vishnichenko	310	92.54
E. Kappel	300	89.55
L. Pitalenko	314	93.73
R. Polishchuk	295	88.06
K. Sadvakasov	297	88.66
R. Khalmuradov	314	93.73
L. Khochieva	310	92.54
V. Tsoi	304	90.75

Deputies from the Assembly will be called upon to be “friendship envoys,” the activity of whom will be aimed at further improving government policy in the interests of the people of Kazakhstan. It should be emphasized that this practice has no analogues, and so it is still too early to talk about how effective this step will be and forecast its prospects. As for the rest, the idea of ethnic representation in the parliament is aimed at further developing the Kazakhstani model of ethnic and confessional peace and consent in the country.

The election campaign was held with a previously unprecedented number of international observers from among international organizations and some states of the Near and Far Abroad. On the whole, the number of accredited international observers was estimated at 1,129. There were 448 observers in the CIS Mission from six Commonwealth member states, 13 observers from the SCO Mission, 137 from seven foreign states, and 71 from international organizations.²⁸ The ODIHR/OSCE Mission had 460 accredited observers from 28 OSCE member states. In so doing, the latter appointed Canadian senator Consiglio Di Nino as its Special Coordinator and Head of the OSCE Election

²⁵ According to the information of the Khabar Information Agency, available at [www.khabar.kz].

²⁶ See: “Upolnomochennyye etnosom,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708070332].

²⁷ Appendix to the resolution of the Kazakhstan CEC of 22 August, 2007, No. 113/242.

²⁸ According to the data of the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

Observation Mission at parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan, which indicates the high interest in the republic.

After the election results were announced, the OSCE Observer Mission published its first preliminary assessments. The document noted “progress worthy of approval,” but it was also said that “several international standards were not observed—in particular, certain elements of the new legislation and vote-counting process:” in 40% of the polling stations visited by observers, the latter was evaluated “negatively due to insufficient transparency.”²⁹ An evaluation of the elections by the above-mentioned Mission might add to the doubts about the possibility of the OSCE’s positive decision at the end of this year of Astana’s application for the right to chair in this organization in 2009.

According to observers from the Russian Federation, PRC, the U.S., Turkey, Israel, the CIS, PACE, and the SCO, all the necessary conditions were created in Kazakhstan for holding an honest and transparent election campaign.³⁰ According to their evaluations, organization of the elections met all the requirements of democracy. The observers noted that the political parties ran a correct election campaign, were given equal access to the mass media, and that a calm political atmosphere reigned in the country. The measures undertaken in the republic aimed at ensuring equal conditions for all the political parties in the election campaign were also positively assessed. In particular, the observers are sure that all the measures undertaken should give rise to frameworks and rules for freer and more honest elections. In their opinion, the current political changes are a step in the right direction.³¹

To be objective, it should be noted that no one in fact needed this landslide victory of one party, since it did not fit into the framework of the political reforms that have begun. Why was it necessary then to disband the parliament and make amendments to the legislation if the opposition members were unable to gain a single seat in the new composition of the Majilis? This is never talked about openly, but everyone understands very well that the special elections were held to a certain extent to please the government’s opponents, who have been insisting for the past two years that they “are not allowed to sit in the driver’s seat anywhere,” while they consider themselves long grown up. Akorda, by making concessions to the opposition, made preparations to integrate the latter into the state management mechanism. It created various structures, such as the Permanent Assembly on Democratization, the National Democratization Commission, and State Commission for Specification of the Democratic Reforms, which sooner or later were to lead to real political modernization. In this respect, the arguments of the leaders of most of the political organizations that they were not ready for the elections sound rather absurd today.³²

On the whole, the election race took such an unexpected turn due to the combination of several circumstances. These circumstances include the main reasons for Nur Otan’s success: there can be no doubt that the personality of the party leader, Nursultan Nazarbaev, was the most important factor in the victory. Nur Otan’s sensational spurt ahead of all the others was due to Nursultan Nazarbaev’s image, which was projected onto the image of the party. In so doing, the party largely repeated the result of the 2005 campaign.³³ The party is distinguished by a well-developed and broad ideological base, which can briefly be characterized as reformist, since it suggests that the voters preserve all the achievements reached during the years of independence and their determination to continue the policy of comprehensive reform. In the election campaign, Nur Otan placed the em-

²⁹ A. Dubnov, “Kazakhskaiia SSR,” available at [www.vremya.ru].

³⁰ See: D. Popazov, “Proverka reform proshla uspešno,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 August, 2007.

³¹ See: “Politiki SShA o vyborakh v Kazakhstane.” According to the information of the Khabar Information Agency of 15 August, 2007.

³² See: I. Nevolin, *op. cit.*

³³ According to the results of the presidential election in 2005, Nursultan Nazarbaev gathered 91.15% of the votes.

phasis being positive: under the conditions of economic growth and personal prosperity, a positive mood during the election campaign is the most efficacious, since it fully coincides with the optimistic mood of the electorate.³⁴

Despite the fact that, according to the experts' forecasts, either the moderate opposition party, Ak Zhol, or the team of prominent Kazakhstani oppositionists, NSDP, were supposed to obtain seats in the lower house, neither of them was able to overcome the 7-percent barrier. It was very logical to expect the government to prepare early for these elections, but it was difficult to believe that the opposition would be so unprepared this time. Today, many arguments can be found to justify this situation, but saying there was not enough time to run the election race is tantamount to admitting complete helplessness.³⁵

Now it is clear that the Kazakhstan opposition essentially flopped the latest parliamentary elections. During the 2005 presidential election, it showed much better results. But this time, the opposition forces revealed themselves in a more than unconvincing light, and there are objective reasons for this. I think it would be best to start with the least promoted name, after all it is clear that not all the opposition-minded voters were so politically well-versed to understand the difference between Ak Zhol and the NSDP, particularly since the matter concerned the former associates of a previously united opposition brand. The conflict image of the opposition leaders again worked to their disadvantage: while touching on particular problems they always placed their stakes on the negative. A fundamental mistake of the opposition is also that if it unites, it does this on a destructive rather than a creative foundation—not “for,” but “against.”³⁶

It was unproductive on the part of the radicals from the NSDP to present their alliance as a way of fighting the current government, posing as opponents of the head of state. After all, any sociological poll will show that society is very supportive of Nursultan Nazarbaev's policy. In so doing, the opposition set itself against most of the electorate.

It is also unfortunate that the opponents of the highest leadership concentrated their efforts not on developing their own program of action and bringing its content to the population, but on searching for shortcomings in the organization of the elections and exposing the government's “conspiracies” against the opposition. It is thought that the defeat of many political organizations at the 2007 parliamentary elections was graphic evidence for all the Kazakhstani parties that the voters' trust can only be won by consistent and systematic activity, and the elections are only the concluding phase of this work.³⁷ The opposition spent time that could and should have been used to work with the electorate during the election campaign on various intrigues, which ended up making the images of some of the political figures and formations very unattractive.

As Director of the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies B. Sultanov believes, Kazakhstan's opposition parties could not obtain seats in the Majilis because they underestimated the level of political awareness of the voters and the changes going on in the country after the previous parliamentary elections. According to him, “you used to be able to count on support after promoting some PR project and supporting it with media resources and foreign funding.”³⁸

As most political scientists note, alienation is the greatest weakness of the radical Kazakhstani opposition: for this reason, it had neither unconditional unity, nor “breakthrough” projects or progressive programs. The inability to achieve a “common denominator” is prompting the alienated and ambitious members of the opposition to enter all kinds of politically unnatural unions.

³⁴ See: “Piat prichin pobedy. Pochemu partiia vlasti vyigrala vybory,” available at [<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=151&pub=8035>].

³⁵ See: B. Karimov, “Sistemnyy krizis kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708030328].

³⁶ E. Ertysbaev, “Slagaemye pobedy,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 22 August, 2007.

³⁷ See: “Piat prichin pobedy. Pochemu partiia vlasti vyigrala vybory.”

³⁸ “Avtoritno,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 August, 2007.

Minister of Culture and Information E. Ertysbaev called the opposition a “mixture of high expectations and many years of unfulfilled hopes,”³⁹ and it should be said that, despite the high emotionality of his statement, it is true. The Kazakhstani opposition does not want to change in compliance with the new realities and demands of the times, while the government has already long spurred ahead.

After losing, the opposition leaders began actively accusing the highest leadership of unfair elections, electoral machinations, and falsification of the voting results. For example, the leaders of the NSDP claimed that they gathered approximately 30% of the votes at the election of deputies to the Majilis. “We are sure that we gathered up to 30%, but we see how elections are always held in our country, although we are promised they will be honest and transparent. But this doesn’t happen,” emphasized the party’s co-chairman B. Abilov. The oppositionists also stated that they have sufficient prove of many violations and even of falsification of the results.⁴⁰

It will be very disappointing if the opposition parties devote the next five years not to “working on their mistakes” and establishing close contacts with the electorate, but to criticizing and opposing the government. At present, such parties as Ak Zhol and the NSDP should review their own approaches to party activity, make corresponding changes in their work, and create a competitive program of action. The elections revealed all the weaknesses and mistakes of these parties, and now it is time to start living not “from election to election,” but on a permanent and professional basis. Otherwise, the electorate, the political culture and socioeconomic priorities of which are constantly growing and changing, will not support the opposition at the next election in 2012 either. The 2007 electoral test showed that the opposition was unable to keep up with the development trends in Kazakhstan’s current political processes, or skillfully apply the new opportunities to their own interests.

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As we have shown, the elections were ambiguously evaluated. On the one hand, they were organized openly, but the results definitely surprised everyone, the government itself, society, and the international experts. Foreign specialists immediately drew attention to the fact that the voting results differed from the goal announced by the government to make the political system more open with the help of the constitutional reforms being carried out during the year. It seems to me that the foreign mass media took up the argument without completely understanding the essence of the question and without delving into the specifics of the political process in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Kazakhstani society itself supports the changes going on and is this not what a democratic society requires? So the entire “information scandal” raised around the results of the campaign only arouses confusion, as well as mistrust in the competence of the critically-oriented international experts.

Kazakhstan’s experience has drawn the attention of its neighbors. For example, the head of Russia’s CEC noted that the Russian delegation regarded its observation function during the elections in Kazakhstan as a chance to gain experience before the upcoming parliamentary elections in Russia. Another goal of the current election season in the republic is to bring Kazakhstan’s and Russia’s electoral cycles into alignment. Its priority task is to synchronize the development of the political systems of the two countries, and it should be said that certain progress has already been made in this matter: this year will pass under the sign of parliamentary elections in both Kazakhstan and Russia. It is expected that more synchronization will be possible as early as 2012, when each country will be holding a presidential election. After this period, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation will follow parallel

³⁹ E. Ertysbaev, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ See: I. Azar, “Legitimnyy nурсultanat,” available at [www.gazeta.ru].

courses, looking over their shoulders at each other, which will raise their special strategic cooperation to a new, higher level.⁴¹

It is thought that under the current conditions, the prospects of a second party in power appearing from the constructive segment of the opposition, Ak Zhol, have been reduced to naught. But now the government is clearly encountering problems concerning Nur Otan's political management, the domination of which will lead to two results: either to rapid degeneration of the newly matured "party in power" into a "parliamentary bog," or to a controlled split into "leftist" and "rightist" factions, which is absolutely inevitable during serious parliamentary activity and natural during imitation of this work.⁴²

Many experts predict that the parliament of the fourth convocation will not be dynamic enough. Political scientist D. Satpaev believes in general that "from now on the fate of the Majilis will be to obediently stamp the president's draft laws."⁴³ Nevertheless, the emphasis should be placed on another special feature of the future elections. According to their results, not only will the parliament be formed, but also the government, for, according to the constitutional amendments, the party that wins the upcoming elections to the Majilis will form the government, define the republic's development program, and be responsible for implementing this policy.

The fact that only one party obtains seats in the parliament in no way means that party-building in Kazakhstan has been put on hold or taken a step back in its development. In my view, the vectors of further improvement in party work in the mid-term have been clearly defined. This is also important for Kazakhstan, since there are no political parties, which have been in demand more than ten years here, that have been through more than one election campaign and have experience working with the voters. Such structures are not formed overnight, but they are precisely what a contemporary, strong, and competitive democratic state needs. This is why it is important not only for the parties themselves, but also for the country and society as a whole, that they find their niche and strengthen their own position.

⁴¹ See: Iu. Solozobov, *op. cit.*

⁴² See: A. Karavaev, "Nur Otan" vosparil nad realnostiu ("Edinaia Rossia" dolzhna zadumatsia)," available at [www.ia-centr.ru/public_details.php?id=798].

⁴³ V. Iadukha, "Stepnaia demokratiia," RBK Daily, 20 August, 2007.