2004 ELECTIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN: STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

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Elections to the Majilis, the country's lower house of parliament, were held on 19 September and 3 October (repeat elections took place in 22 of the 67 one-member districts), 2004. According to the Central Election Commission, nearly 5 million people participated in the voting

(56.5% of the active electorate). The names of 77 deputies—67 one-member and 10 party—are well known. Thirty members of the new parliament also belonged to previous deputy corps (a total of 49 balloted). Almost 80% of the parliament members are Kazakhs, and 20% are Russians and representatives of other nationalities, there are 69 men and 8 women, all of whom have higher education, with the average age being 51 (the youngest is 33 and the oldest 73). The party breakdown is as follows: Otan has 53 members (7 on the party list, 35 officially nominated by the party in one-member districts, and 11 self-nominees who are party members); the AIST bloc [abbreviation for the Agrarian-Industrialist Union of Workers, which in Russian means "stork"] has 14 members (one on the party list, 10 official one-members, 3 self-nominees); the Asar party, 4 (one on the party list and three official one-members); the Ak zhol party, 2

(one on the party list and one self-nominee); and the Democratic Party has one official member from a one-member district and 3 non-party deputies.[1]

The latest election campaign was distinguished by its interparty intrigues. After all, elections give a significant boost to inner party development, and the preparations for them have an impact on the breakdown in political forces in the country. Twelve political parties, comprising the format of a party system, competed for deputy seats. The configuration of this system was set forth in the Law on Political Parties which came into force in 2002.

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[1] See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, September-October 2004; S. Zhusupov, "Kakoi parlament my poluchili, ili Razmyshleniia posle vyborov," *Ekspert Kazakhstan,* No. 19, 11-24 October, 2004; D. Ashimbaev, "Novy Mazhilis: shtrikhi k portretu," *Strana i Mir,* 22 October, 2004.

Range of Party-Political Dispositions on the Eve of the Voting

As a rule, the success of any party largely depends on what the electorate thinks about its platform (election program). In their quest for clarity, voters usually ask: "What are the party's goals and values?" This is basically the crux of the matter, how a party views the key problems facing society.

Let us take a closer look at the platforms adopted at the congresses of those political parties registered as of June 2004 (in alphabetical order): the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan (APK), the Kazakhstan Civilian Party (KCP), the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK), the Democratic Party Ak zhol, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Kazakhstan Social-Democratic Party Auyl, the Patriot Party of Kazakhstan (PPK), the People's Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), the Republican Party Asar, the Republican Political Party Otan (the Homeland), Rukhaniiat.[2]

Party Goals and Values

Name	Goal	Values
APK	Movement toward a developed society of freedom and social justice in which favorable conditions are created for the people of Kazakhstan to engage in constructive labor.	Not specially noted. In the program text: social justice, equal opportunities for each and everyone, and freedom (of conscience).
KCP	Assistance in strengthening and developing Kazakhstan's statehood.	Not specially noted. In the program text: social justice,

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[2] See: Yu.O. Buluktaev, A.E. Chebotarev, *Politicheskie partii Kazakhstana, 2004. Reference*, Kompleks Publishers, Almaty, 2004.

Table (continued)

Name	Goal	Values
		national accord, civilian solidarity, political responsibility (of the state to the people), democracy.
AK ZHOL	An independent, prosperous, democratic and free Kazakhstan, a dignified life for each citizen of our country.	Independence, democracy, freedom, justice.
AUYL	Building statehood, strengthening the country's real sovereignty, equality for all citizens regardless of race or religion.	Freedom, justice, solidarity.
CPK	Creating conditions for building a society of freedom and social justice in the country based on the principles of scientific socialism. Supreme goal—building a just social structure in which everyone has equal opportunity and on the banner of which is written: "Personal freedom means universal freedom!"	Not specially noted. In the program text: justice (social), fraternity and solidarity of the workers, freedom.
DCK	Building a Society of Equal Opportunity	Not specially noted. In the program text: justice (social), equality, freedom, democracy.
PPK	Spiritual and cultural revival of society and creating conditions for raising the economy, increasing the country's prosperity and national wealth in order to resolve society's social problems.	Not specially noted. In the program text: universal ideas and values, moral values of society.
RUKHANIIAT	Helping to build a democratic and lawful state with a socially oriented market economy through moral and spiritual revival of the nation.	Not specially noted. In the program text: humanitarian ideals and values developed by mankind.
ASAR	Building an economically strong, democratic, lawful, and social state with developed institutions of civil society.	Prosperity, freedom, justice, solidarity.
OTAN	Building a contemporary democratic society.	Freedom, justice, solidarity, equality, and fraternity.
DPK	Retaining the Homeland's independence by building a lawful state based on the principles of genuine democracy, ethnic accord, political stability, a free market economy and supremacy of the law.	Freedom, law, justice, and accord.
CPPK	Movement toward a society of genuine people's power, social justice, broad	Not specially noted. In the program text: social and

Name	Goal	Values
	spirituality, freedom, and a prosperous economy based on scientific and technical progress and the principles of scientific socialism.	political equality, communism.

So, the APK, CPK, DCK, DPK, and CPPK placed the accent on movement toward a society of freedom and social justice, and a society of equal opportunity, the PPK chose universal ideas and values, while Rukhaniiat went for humanistic values developed by mankind. Auyl, Asar, and the CPPK mentioned equal opportunity in their programs, while the goal of the KCP, Auyl, and the DPK was strengthening and building statehood. Ak zhol, Rukhaniiat, Otan, and Asar declared their goal to be building a democratic state and society. Of course, this does not mean that the other parties are rejecting the democratic path of development. On the contrary, the words "democracy" and "democratic" are present to one extent or another in the program texts of all the parties. They just do not single them out as their main goal. For example, the KCP sets itself the task (but not the goal) of building a democratic state. The PPK's program also claims that "the country should move toward building a democratic state." All of these structures (although in the case of the CPK and CPPK this may be stretching the point, but there is such a thing as democratic socialism) can be classified as democratically oriented parties.

If we look at their differences from an abstract and theoretical viewpoint, the following parties placed a special emphasis on values in their programs: Ak zhol (independence, democracy, freedom, and justice), Otan (freedom, justice, solidarity, equality, fraternity), Asar (prosperity, freedom, justice, solidarity), Auyl (freedom, justice, solidarity), and the DPK (freedom, law, justice, and accord). The programs of the other parties also contain values, but they are not specially singled out.

Based on their declared dispositions and in relation to the powers that be, the CPK, CPPK, and DCK can be placed on the left flank, Ak zhol and Auyl can be considered leftist-centrist parties, and Otan, KCP, APK, PPK, Asar, Rukhaniiat, and DPK can be classified as centrist and rightist-centrist. This positioning is very provisional since their practical activity not only fails to confirm, but even refutes the priorities stated in their programs.

An analysis of the program provisions showed that the parties' goals are largely global and identical, and their values are all the same. So it is difficult to distinguish between them on the basis of their declared platforms. The voters find it much easier to identify them by their leaders: Otan—Nursultan Nazarbaev; Asar—D. Nazarbaeva; Ak zhol—B. Abilov, A. Baimenov, O. Zhandosov, L. Zhulanova, and A. Sarsenbaiuly; the CPK—S. Abdildin; the APK—R. Madinov; the KCP —A. Peruashev; Auyl—G. Kaliev; the PPK—G. Kasymov; the DCK—G. Zhakiianov; Rukhaniiat—A. Djaganova; the DPK—M. Narikbaev; and the CPPK—V. Kosarev.

Starting Terms

1. For an election campaign to be successful, it is very important to start preparing for it as early as possible, preferably even beginning its strategic planning one year to eighteen months in advance. But for several reasons, not all the parties followed this golden rule. As of September 2003 (one year before the elections), seven parties were registered: the Agrarian, Civilian, Ak zhol, the Communists, Auyl, the Patriots, and Otan. Of them, the APK, KCP, and CPK were registered as blocs by June 2004. Eight months before the elections, as of January 2004, another two parties were registered—Rukhaniiat and Asar (in October and December 2003), and the DCK, CPPK, and DPK in June 2004, only about three months before the voting. So most of the parties had very little time to prepare for the elections.

2. Unequal starting terms, primarily for the opposition parties, were predetermined during the formation of the election commissions. For example, Ak zhol, the Communist Party, and DCK nominated a total of about 15,000 of their representatives for membership on the election commissions. But only six people were appointed from these three parties to the district, as well as to the Astana and Almaty election commissions. The opposition obtained only 23 of the 259 seats on the city commissions, 106 of the 1,169 seats on the regional, and 29 of the 469 on the district commissions.[3] All of these commissions were made up primarily of representatives from the Otan party, which aroused criticism from the opposition organizations.

Strategy Choice

An election campaign strategy can be defined as a program of future party work aimed at achieving set goals. During the latest elections, the political organizations were faced with the problem of choosing either between acting under conditions of their own domination (on the pro-government field) or under the domination of their rivals (on the opponents' field). What is more, they had to take into account the following factors: opposition from the authorities; the population's level of awareness about the party; the degree of electorate support; the position of their rivals; and the availability of communication channels.

Among the parties which received more than 3% of the votes, the first strategy was used by Otan, Asar, and the AIST bloc, and the second by Ak zhol and the DCK-CPK bloc. All the parties and blocs used the strategy of winning political space and ensuring themselves a niche in it (regardless of the population category), which was dictated by the economic and social expectations of the voters. The goal pursued was aimed at attracting the attention of the electorate to those problems which the party felt it had the proficiency and ability to resolve (in which it felt superior to its rivals). In other words, parties tried to convince the voters of how competent and serious they were, thus ensuring themselves a place on the political market. For example, Otan posed as the party of the current head of state, the personality of which voters should associate with political stability, ethnic and confessional accord, and a further rise in the standard of living. Ak zhol proposed modernizing society's political system and ensuring a dignified life for each citizen, tying this to carrying out three tasks: eradicating corruption, reducing the gap between the rich and poor, and ensuring efficient use of natural resources. The Asar party and AIST bloc supported the president's reform policy. The DCK-CPK bloc put forward the slogan: "Oil money should serve the people!"

What is more, a strategy of political alliances was implemented. Four parties united into two blocs: the Opposition People's Alliance of Communists and DCK and the Agrarian-Industrial Union of Workers (AIST). Their creation was made legitimate by subsequent changes in the election law. In particular, it was stressed that any bloc which formed must register with the Central Election Commission, that any party may belong to only one bloc, and during elections, a bloc has the same rights as a political party.

As we know, the goal of any union of party forces is to win the election. Since it was impossible for the Agrarian, Civilian, Communist or DCK parties to achieve superior results independently, the creation of two blocs can be seen as a justified step.

According to experts, the Agrarian and Civilian party bloc (registered in June 2004) represented the interests of the rural bourgeoisie and industrial capital. There is the opinion that these pro-government parties formed from above were forced into this alliance by the political technologists also appointed from above. So it seems that neither the members of these parties, nor their leaders were particularly desirous of this union. We will note that both parties exceeded the 7% barrier at the 1999 elections, taking third and fourth place according to the party lists, respectively. Possibly the authorities were afraid that neither

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[3] See: SOZ, 16 September, 2004.

the Agrarians, nor the Industrialists would be able to achieve such results independently at the 2004 elections, but by pooling their resources they could become a serious rival, primarily to the opposition structures.

At that time, in June, the Opposition People's Alliance of Communists and DCK was registered. Some analysts forecasted that this alliance would mean partial loss of the CPK's (leader S. Abdildin) identity among its electorate. After all, it is the only party of the beginning-mid 1990s that has survived, and the only one that has participated in all the elections. In contrast to other parties, the CPK has its own social niche, the protest part of the electorate regularly voted for the communists, which they saw as their main resource. The communists took second place in the 1999 parliamentary elections, yielding only to the Otan party. If we keep in mind the constant pressure of the authorities on the CPK, the population's loss of interest in communist ideals, the emergence of another communist party (the people's), headed by V. Kosarev, on the political arena not long before the elections, the CPK was hard put to define its election strategy. In this respect, its political alliance with DCK appears justified, despite the discrepancies in their ideological platforms. One of the reasons for the very modest achievements of AIST and DCK-CPK in the rivalry on the party lists might be their late entry into the election campaign.

No more than twelve hours are needed to become thoroughly acquainted with the platforms of all the parties. And I doubt any normal voter would want to waste his time on this. So success will be achieved only by parties who can make their platforms eye-catching and memorable, without overwhelming the voters with too much information. Slogans play a powerful strategic role here. Of course, we can argue about how effective they are, but still, now that the elections are over, most people still associate the Otan party with: "So much has been done—let's go on together!" Ak zhol brings to mind: "A dignified life today for one and all!" Asar is: "Peace to all! Homeland, family, prosperity!" AIST raises a smile and people say, "It brings happiness!" And the DCK-CPK brings cries of: "Together with the people for the good of the people!" And no one pays any heed to the critics who say: "but we don't have storks in Kazakhstan;" "show us a prosperous family," "much has been privatized, shall we go on?" The parties accomplished their purpose—recognition, so they must have been using this strategic resource quite effectively.

And talking of recognition, we should pay attention to another strategic resource of the election campaign—the publication of public opinion poll results, which is an important source of information for voters, and which the parties use as techniques. Of course, the professionalism, honesty, and reputation of the various sociological services and agencies is a separate topic of conversation. It is no secret that some of them acted according to the principle of: "I'll scratch your back, if you'll scratch mine."

It was touching, for example, to hear about the high rating of Dariga Nazarbaeva, one of the leaders of the Asar party, regularly published since January 2004 in several mass media by the Central Asian Agency of Political Research, headed by former first deputy of the chairman of Asar, who is Dariga Nazarbaeva. For her these ratings were an ill service, since this person is known throughout the country anyway. Another example. On 31 August, the *Partia* newspaper published the results of a survey carried out by Komkon-2 Eurasia, a marketing, sociopolitical and media research company. It said: "[If an election were held today] more than half of the people of Kazakhstan, 53%, would vote for the Asar party, 33.5% for Otan, and only 5.5% for Ak zhol and AIST. The poll was conducted in 22 cities around the country, and 900 respondents participated."[4] But the Asar party gathered less than 12% of the votes (one seat on the party lists).

An article entitled "AIST's Sensational Flight" published on 14 September on the first page of the newspaper *ExpressK* looks just as curious. A certain East European Center of Structural Research (EECSR) "polled 2,500 Kazakhstanians, beginning with members of the rich class and ending with the republic's unemployed. According to the poll, Ak zhol obtained only 6.7% of the votes and dropped to fourth place. Asar withdrew to third place with 21.7% of the respondents' votes. Abdildin's Communist Party and Zhakiianov's DCK (the CPK and DCK bloc) obtained a rating within 2 (plus-minus 1) percent

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[4] *Partiia*, 31 August, 2004.

and fell way behind the leading five. Nevertheless, 35.8% of the poll participants gave their preference to Otan. So who is in second place? AIST is second! It will receive votes from 23.5% of the Kazakhstanians polled."[5] In the end, AIST barely made the 7% barrier, gathering 7.07% of the votes.

Individual parties and blocs used tactics aimed at neutralizing their rivals' campaign. For example, representatives of the AIST bloc attempted to remove their rivals, the DCK-CPK bloc, from the election race with the help of the Central Election Commission. They believed this bloc had violated legislation by airing a television advertising clip. Dirty tricks were also widely used: disseminating compromising information, putting doubles, people with the same name, on the voting lists, pasting their own propaganda over other people's leaflets and posters.

Certain parties also threatened to boycott the election, using this as a tactic to break relations with the Central Election Commission (that is, with the authorities) while the elections were being held in protest against violations of the game rules. Some experts thought that the opposition structures would declare a boycott. But this was avoided. The matter concerned not only the prospects of their further functioning (according to the Law on Political Parties adopted on 15 July, 2002, a political party can be disbanded by court decision if it fails to participate twice in a row in elections of deputies to the Kazakhstan parliament). It is much more important that the voters assess such a boycott as the refusal of the structures participating in it to engage in political battle, as a manifestation of their cowardliness and a violation of the right of each citizen to vote for the party he wants to. For nothing is more important for a party at an election than the electorate's vote. This is why this form of political struggle, according to the leaders of the opposition parties, would be detrimental to each of them.

The parties also made poor use of the strategy of winning over the "critical mass of voters," those who are still unsure, and of strengthening their position among the conquered electorate. Television debates between parties were poorly organized, and so did not produce the desired effect. Many of the parties underestimated the importance of their own participation in public discussions.

R e s u l t s   a n d   L e s s o n s

So the 7% barrier was surmounted by the following structures: Otan received 60.61% of the votes (7 seats out of 10); Ak zhol—12.04% (1 seat); Asar—11.38% (1 seat); the AIST bloc—7.07% (1 seat). The following structures did not make it: the Opposition People's Alliance of Communists and DCK—3.44%; the Communist People's Party—1.98%; the Auyl party—1.73%; the Democratic Party—0.76%; the Patriot Party—0.55%; and Rukhaniiat—0.44%. The distribution of deputy seats for party candidates from one-member districts looks as follows: Otan—35; the AIST bloc—10; Asar—3; and the Democratic Party received one seat.[6] This information does not include self-nominees who identified themselves with a particular party.

As should have been expected, assessments of the recent elections are ambiguous. Whereas the authorities and Central Election Commission considered them successful, the opposition parties, presenting numerous violations of the Law on Elections as proof, called them falsified and so illegitimate. Nor were the observers unanimous in their evaluation of the elections. Based on an analysis of the violations committed during the elections, the Republican Network of Independent Observers (RNIO) made the following statement on voting day: "The violations were of an organized and preplanned nature and were supervised from a single center." But several international observers from Poland, Turkey, India, and several CIS countries positively assessed the elections. What is more, the OSCE and U.S. government (in contrast to the American observers) believed that the election campaign did not correspond to generally accepted international standards.

Some analysts are still claiming that the opposition parties chose an incorrect strategy and tactics and that this was one of the reasons for their defeat. This does not appear to be the case. Whereas fal-

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[5] *ExpressK*, 14 September, 2004.
[6] See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda,* 28 October, 2004.

sifications really did take place, it was not the opposition that lost, but all the parties, all of society, all of Kazakhstan. The growing conflict and confrontational potential is already obvious, being manifested not only in power-opposition relations, but also in the ranks of the ruling elite. An example of this could be the sensational statements made by G. Marchenko, ex-assistant to the country's president (previously ex-premier) and Zh. Tuiakbai, Majilis speaker and deputy chairman of the Otan party. The first noted the unsatisfactory organization of the elections, the second minced no words by saying that they were "a farce unworthy of our country." In so doing, he underpinned his words with action and announced his withdrawal from the Otan party and unwillingness to continue working in the new parliament.

Without becoming embroiled in a detailed analysis of the technological chain of events accompanying the election campaign, we should acknowledge that all the parties, and not only the opposition (of course, depending on available resources), tried to clearly follow their strategies and employed quite intelligent, from the viewpoint of political theory, tactical steps and techniques. But their efficiency coefficient proved close to zero, because they were restricted by political game rules imposed on them under the name of "party democracy in Kazakhstan." After all, the country's parties are the hostages of its current political system, which was also manifested during the past parliamentary elections.

- First, this election campaign showed that the "Central Party" strategy won, that is, of that party which holds the controls of political decision-making and plays a dominating role in this process. In Kazakhstan, this role belongs to the presidential administration and akimats—executive power. And its strategy in this case was rather simple: pushing through "its own" candidates (from Otan and AIST) and "picking off" rivals from all the other parties, who turned out to be sparring partners, if not cannon fodder in this process. Judging from the reports in the mass media, the tactics here included the following: creating unequal conditions for parties during election agitation, plugging in the administrative resource in the form of the akims, bringing pressure to bear on the members of the election commissions, voting by coercion (mainly budget sphere employees and students from various higher education establishments).

- Second, the elections confirmed once more that ten seats on the party lists is far too few for 12 parties. This miserly amount is a product of "dosed out" ("controllable") democracy. In this context, plurality looks like props, like the dolled-up party façade of a supposedly democratic building.

    According to the law, each party had the right to spend up to 99 million tenge (approximately $740,000) during the entire campaign. So far, only one structure has published a report on the use of its election fund resources—the Opposition People's Alliance of Communists and DCK. Its total spending on these purposes amounted to 45,995,300 tenge. The leaders of this bloc say that according to the data of an investigation they carried out, the Otan, Asar, and AIST budgets were 4-5-fold higher than the maximum permissible level. A report by only one television channel, Eurasia-ORT, showed that between 1 and 17 September alone the Otan party and AIST bloc spent 20,139,000 tenge, and the Asar party, 10,195,000 tenge.[7] Their achievements (one seat each on the party lists for Ak zhol, Asar, and AIST) in no way corresponded with the financial, human, and moral resources they expended.

- Third, the elections showed that the country's political organizations must adapt to the far from perfect system format defined by the Law on Political Parties adopted in 2002. The matter primarily concerns the notorious 50,000 registration norm. At one time, experts and some deputies warned that this number (which is high even by international standards) could create favorable ground for misrepresentation and coercive enlistment of citizens into party organizations. The past elections again revealed this problem: according to their results, three political parties received between 20,000 and 36,000 bulletins, that is, members of these parties

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[7] See: *Panorama*, 15 October, 2004.

themselves (there should be no less than 50,000 members in each of them) did not vote for their own parties.

In so doing, the past election campaign showed that a full-fledged party system cannot be built on imitation, but must be based on real implementation of political reforms, which envisage, among other things, extending party representation in parliament.