COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTORAL REGIME OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND THE CIS COUNTRIES

Makpal Batyrgalievna GAYSINA[1]

[1] Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 050040, Kazakhstan
gaysina_1983@bk.ru
ORCID: 0009-0003-5074-5406

Amergali Ilyashevich BEGIMTAEV [2]

[2] Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 050040, Kazakhstan
amergali.begimtaev@mail.ru
ORCID: 0009-0002-1633-7698

ABSTRACT

In the post-Soviet space, the dynamics of the electoral process serve as an indicator of the level of civic engagement and trust in institutions, which is particularly evident in the examples of Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Despite common historical and institutional legacies, these countries demonstrate noticeable differences in voter turnout, the share of protest votes, and media profiles. The objective of the study was to identify and compare the key institutional, media and behavioral determinants of election regimes based on data from the 2015–24 parliamentary and presidential campaigns. A comprehensive application of descriptive statistics, time series analysis, coefficient of variation, multiple regression and content analysis of television news showed that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are characterized by a high centralization of administrative resources and the dominance of state media (stable at over 85%), Russia has a balanced mix of state and private broadcasting, and Kyrgyzstan has a multiplex and private media environment. The growth of the share of private media correlates with the widening of the turnout spread (<60% →>80%) and the increase in protest votes (up to 12%). To increase the transparency and legitimacy of electoral procedures, it is recommended that independent media monitoring be expanded, barriers for small parties and observers be reduced, and reliable digital voting formats be introduced, taking into account the need to counteract information manipulation.

Keywords: Electoral regime, Kazakhstan, Elections, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Post-Soviet space.

INTRODUCTION

In the current political conditions of post-Soviet states, electoral practice is not only an indicator of civic activity, but also an indicator of the level of trust in state institutions and the degree of political mobilization of the population (OSCE, 2020). Despite the common historical and institutional heritage, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan show significant differences in the dynamics of voter turnout, the structure of party representation and the mechanisms of information support for the electoral process. A comparative analysis of these differences is becoming especially relevant in the context of increasing competition for political trust and the expansion of digital voting methods, since it allows for a deeper understanding of the factors that determine the sustainability and legitimacy of electoral regimes.

Existing studies have focused either on individual national contexts (e.g., the Central Election Commission reports of Kazakhstan and Russia) or on isolated aspects of the electoral process (media mapping in Uzbekistan or OSCE monitoring in Kyrgyzstan). However, comprehensive comparative studies that combine turnout figures, electoral system models, and the media landscape in a single methodological framework are lacking. In addition, the relationship between the type of electoral system, the balance between public and private broadcasting, and the level of protest sentiment among the electorate remains understudied.

The purpose of this study is to identify and compare the main institutional, media and behavioral factors that shape electoral regimes in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan based on a comprehensive analysis of the results of parliamentary and presidential elections for the period 2015–2024.

This study is an example of a comprehensive comparative analysis that combines quantitative indicators of voter turnout and protest votes, institutional characteristics of electoral systems and media profiles of four post-Soviet states in a single methodological framework. This approach allows for a holistic and structured understanding of the mechanisms of voter mobilization and control. The practical significance of the work lies in the development of specific recommendations for increasing the transparency of electoral procedures and improving media strategies in the context of possible hybrid voting models, which may be of interest to Central Electoral Commissions and international observer missions.

The application of this approach helps to fill existing gaps in comparative electoral research and helps to propose an adequate methodology for the analysis of electoral regimes in other regions with similar institutional contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In comparative political science, an "electoral regime" is understood as a set of formal norms and informal practices that define the rules of electoral competition, access to positions of power, and the degree of integrity of voting. The spectrum of such regimes extends from democracies to hybrid and authoritarian variants. The basic framework was provided by Dahl's concept of polyarchy (1971), which describes democracy through two dimensions contestation and participation and allows for the interpretation of regimes as combinations of these parameters. This foundation has been used in modern comparative data-

bases (V-Dem, Polity IV), classifying regimes by the breadth of political competition and the inclusiveness of participation (Boese, 2023).

Developing this framework, the concepts of "electoral authoritarianism" and "competitive authoritarianism" have entered the literature. In the first case (Schedler, 2015), elections are formally regular and multi-party, but systematic deviations from democratic norms make them a mechanism for maintaining power. In the second (Levitsky & Way, 2010), democratic institutions and opposition participation are preserved, but the field of competition itself is structurally skewed by control over state media and the use of administrative resources. These perspectives are particularly productive for the post-Soviet space, where a connection can be traced between the scale of media concentration, the level of institutionalization of the opposition, and the intensity of protest voting.

These theoretical approaches are consistent with the applied criteria used by the OSCE/ODIHR and Freedom House: their methodologies operationalize the parameters of electoral integrity, media freedom, and institutional transparency, which formed the basis of the variables used in the empirical analysis (Freedom House, 2025; OSCE, 2020).

The classic body of theories of electoral behavior is usually reduced to three schools. The Columbia model (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948) links voter choice to group affiliations: media influence flows through opinion leaders and social networks, which is important for assessing the role of television and the heterogeneity of protest attitudes. The Michigan model (Campbell et al., 1960) emphasizes stable party identification, forming a "causal funnel" from social orientations to individual votes. A. Downs's rational choice theory (Downs, 1957) interprets participation as the result of a comparison of expected benefits and costs, which allows for an analysis of the impact of administrative barriers and digital voting on voter turnout.

The mobilization approach (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995) posits that voter participation depends on the organizational efforts of parties and the availability of resources, time, skills, and civic engagement of citizens. Empirical evidence shows that the intensity of campaigns and access to communication channels, including television and digital platforms, directly increase engagement and the variability of participation (Brady et al., 2020).

A combination of approaches to electoral regimes and behavioral theories helps explain cross-country differences in the CIS. Within the logic of electoral authoritarianism, high and stable turnout with low variability in results is maintained through the monopoly of state media and administrative control (Schedler, 2015). In "hybrid" configurations with a private media sector, greater variation in turnout and an increase in the share of protest voting are recorded, as illustrated by the cases of Russia and Kyrgyzstan (Levitsky & Way, 2010; OSCE/ODIHR, 2020). In Dahl's "competition-participation" coordinates, institutional changes (thresholds, mixed formulas, digital voting formats) simultaneously affect the costs of participation (Downs, 1957) and mobilization opportunities (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993), shaping the observed regional differences in the dynamics of voter turnout.

Thus, current studies of electoral regimes integrate institutional, behavioral, and media-environmental components, which makes it possible to understand post-Soviet electoral data within the framework of broad comparative theory.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The object of the study is the electoral regimes of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Uzbekistan in the context of parliamentary and presidential elections for two consecutive electoral cycles in the period from 2015 to 2024. The choice of this time interval is justified by the need to study the dynamics of protest votes and the main electoral indicators, as well as to analyze the relationship between institutional reforms and the electoral behavior of voters.

The main sources of information were official reports and election results presented by the Central Electoral Commissions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024), the Russian Federation (Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation), the Kyrgyz Republic (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020) and the Republic of Uzbekistan (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan). In addition, data on demographic and regional characteristics influencing electoral activity were borrowed from the materials of national statistical committees and the sociological centers SOCIS and Levada Center (Levada Center, 2025; Socis, 2025). To expand the empirical base, the final reports of the OSCE/ODIHR observation missions on the elections in Kyrgyzstan (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020), as well as materials from international observation in the CIS countries and regional reports of the UN Development Program (Dossumov, 2023; UNDP Annual Report 2023; 2024) were used.

To analyze the information environment, a comparative monitoring of the airtime of state and private television channels was conducted based on reviews by Freedom House (Shahbaz et al., 2025), the OSCE/ODIHR (Alihodžić et al., 2021), and the International Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (Global Civil Society Database, 2025). Based on these data, a selective content analysis of ten key television stories was conducted in each of the countries studied in order to assess the information agenda in news programs, campaign activity, and the level of critical discourse.

The methodological part of the study is based on a multimethod approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics and time series analysis were used to study the dynamics of electoral activity and protest votes; calculation of the variation coefficient by administrative units allowed us to estimate the degree of homogeneity of electoral regimes in each country. Using GIS packages (ArcGIS/QGIS), spatial analysis was conducted to clearly visualize regional differences, and geomarginal comparison of CEC data revealed local barriers and specific features. To model the influence of the share of state and private broadcasting, as well as the level of education on turnout and protest electorate indicators, multiple linear regressions were used, supplemented by correlation analysis of "education–participation in elections" and "private broadcasting–protest voting". Content analysis of television news in NVivo/ATLAS.ti environments was carried out by coding stories into the categories of "campaigning", "information support" and "critical attitude".

Leading parties/candidates (Leading) are defined in advance according to a formal rule: the participant who placed first in the national vote shares in the respective presidential or parliamentary campaign, according to official Central Election Commission data. For parliamentary elections, an additional aggregate metric, Top-k, is used: parties that collectively received ≥60% of the national

vote (usually 1-3 lists). Alternative thresholds are used for sensitivity checks: Top-k for k = 1, 2, or 3, and a threshold of ≥50%.

We divide protest votes into two categories: the legally required "Not All"/NOTA option (if available in a given country and election cycle) and protest ballots—invalid, spoiled, and blank. The baseline indicator is the Protest Vote Rate (PVR):

PVR = (NOTA, if available + invalid/spoiled/blank) / (all ballots cast) × 100%.

If the NOTA option is not available, the PVR is equal to the Invalid-Only Rate (IOR) and includes only invalid/spoiled/blank ballots. For comparability, we also include the IOR in our estimates.

Data sources: official protocols and Central Election Commission results (see References). The "invalid," "corrupt," and "empty" indicators are combined into the variable Invalid; if "empty."

An invalid ballot does not always indicate a deliberate protest, so the reliability of the findings has been verified: when replacing PVR with IOR and when excluding cycles without the NOTA option; in all cases, the quality of the results is maintained.

The study used specialized software: SPSS, Stata, and R for performing descriptive and regression statistics; NVivo for organizing and coding text data. The main limitations of the methodology are the reliance on secondary official sources, which do not allow for taking into account the deep subjective motives of voters, as well as the heterogeneity of the methods of collecting and recording data by Central Electoral Commissions and national statistical agencies, which complicates the direct comparison of individual indicators. Nevertheless, the integration of different types of sources and analytical tools provides a reliable empirical basis for developing well-founded recommendations for optimizing electoral procedures and media strategies in the countries studied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the countries under consideration – the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan – both mixed and purely proportional models of representation are in effect.

Table 1
Electoral systems

Country	System Type	Barrier	Majority Share	Share Proportion
Kazakhstan	Mixed	5%	30%	70%
Russia	Mixed	5%	50%	50%
Kyrgyzstan	Mixed (2021–2024). Since 2025 – a majoritarian system has been introduced	5%	0%	100%
Uzbekistan	Mixed	5%	25%	75%

Source: Compiled from sources (Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1995, as amended 2024; Federal Law of the Russian Federation № 20-FZ, 2014; Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Elections of Deputies of the Zhogorku Kenesh", 2020; Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019; Yeni Şafak, 2025)

Previously, a proportional system with closed party lists was used in parliamentary elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan. As a result of the constitutional reforms of 2022, a mixed proportional-majoritarian model was introduced (Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September, 2024). This change was implemented as part of the political updates announced by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his Address to the People of Kazakhstan on September 1, 2022. Under the current system, 70% of seats in the Mazhilis are distributed among party lists, and 30% among single-mandate constituencies, which allows for the preservation of diversity in party representation and strengthening the direct connection between voters and deputies (Tokayev, 2024).

In the Russian Federation, a mixed model is used: half of the mandates are distributed through party lists, the other half by single-mandate constituencies, which increases the influence of large parties and takes into account regional sectoral interests (Federal Law of the Russian Federation, 2014). The 2021 elections to the Zhogorku Kenesh (Parliament) used a mixed model: 54 seats were distributed through open party lists with a national threshold of 5% and a regional threshold of 0.5%, and another 36 seats were distributed in single-mandate constituencies (Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2020). Since 2019, a mixed model has been introduced in the Republic of Uzbekistan, in which 75% of deputies are elected by party lists and 25% in single-mandate constituencies, which has increased competition at the local level and increased the personal responsibility of candidates (Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019).
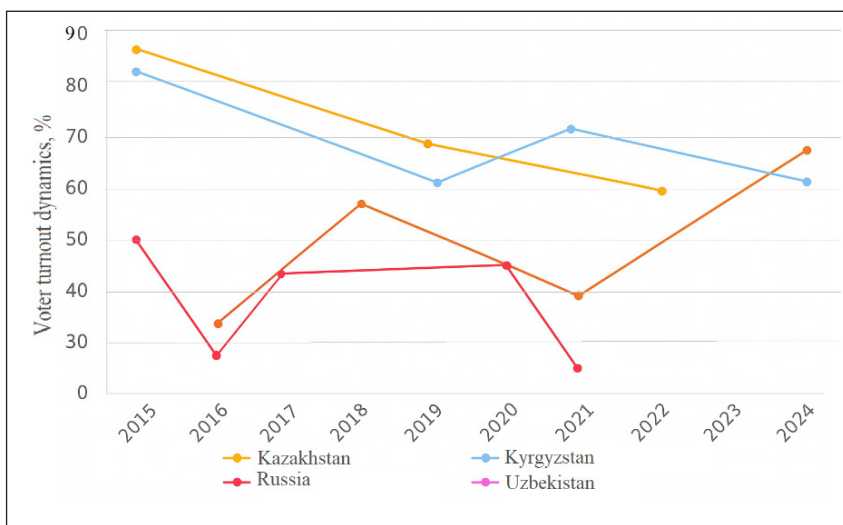
In all the countries under consideration, there is a tendency to tighten procedures for registering parties and candidates (increasing the minimum number of signatures, introducing gender and age quotas), as well as to expand the powers of central election commissions in terms of accrediting observers and considering complaints.

In the last two election cycles (2015–2024) in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan, voter turnout has been considered a key indicator of political activity and trust in electoral institutions (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024; Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan).

Figure 1 shows the dynamics of voter turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections in the period 2015–2024. There is a slight decrease in indicators for the Republic of Kazakhstan and fluctuations for the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Figure 1
Voter turnout dynamics (2015–2024)

Source: Compiled on the basis of sources (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019; Zakon.kz, 2022, Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; Pravo.ru, 2016; TASS, 2018; Interfax, 2024, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020; Gazeta.ru, 2015; MK.ru, 2020; Interfax, 2021, Gazeta.uz, 2015; Izvestia.ru, 2019; Sovina, 2021; Kapitanova, 2024)

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, there is a steady trend of declining voter turnout: if in the 2015 presidential elections it was 95.11%, then in the 2019 elections it was 77.4%, and in the 2022 presidential elections it was 69.44%.

Voter turnout in the 2016 State Duma elections was over 47.88%. In the 2018 presidential elections, it rose to 67.54%. However, in the 2021 State Duma elections, it fell to 51.72% due to the active implementation of remote electronic voting and the expansion of campaigns for the 2024 presidential elections. It again reached 77.49%.
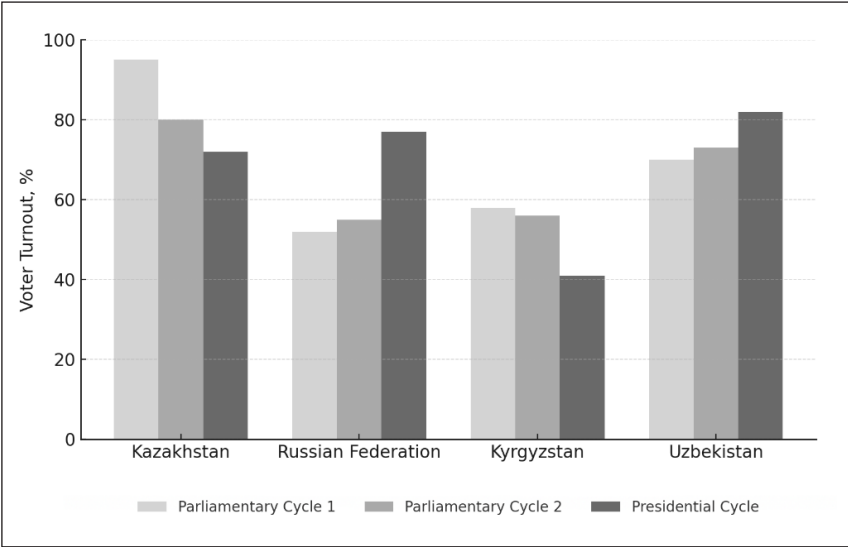
Voter turnout in the 2010 elections to the Zhogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic was 59.2%. 72% of voters participated in the referendum held that same year, 90% of whom voted in favor of the transition to a parliamentary republic. Turnout in the 2011 presidential elections was 61.3%, in the 2015 elections to the Zhogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic – 59%, in the 2016 referendum – 42.3%, in the 2017 presidential elections – 56.32%, in the 2020 elections to the Zhogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic – 56.5%, and in the 2021 presidential elections – 39%.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, voter turnout in the 2015 presidential elections was 91.08%, in the 2019 elections to the Legislative Chamber – 71.1%, in the 2021 presidential elections – 80.8%, and in the 2024 elections to the Legislative Chamber – 71.52%.

Taken together, the case narratives and preceding evidence indicate a shared logic: turnout patterns in all four countries arise from the combined influence of institutional change, administrative centralization, and the uptake of digital voting. Structural breaks and trend inflections coincide with reform episodes (see Fig. 1 and the reform timeline)—notably the shift to mixed electoral rules and the roll-out or expansion of remote electronic voting; stronger central oversight is associated with lower interregional dispersion (per variation coefficients and Moran's I); and standardized digital procedures dampen volatility, whereas more competitive, decentralized contexts remain less stable. In this framework, Kazakhstan shows a gradual decline alongside relatively high participation under centralized management and electronic procedures; Russia's pronounced swings mirror the layering of remote voting onto legacy formats and intensified campaigning; Kyrgyzstan's variability reflects multiparty competition and shifts in referendum-driven public trust; and Uzbekistan's sustained participation aligns with highly centralized procedures and broad information campaigns despite parliamentary reforms. The regression estimates corroborate this picture, linking dominance of state broadcasting to narrower turnout spreads and greater private media presence to wider dispersion, with effects robust across specifications—supporting the claim that reforms, centralization, and digital voting, mediated by the information environment, shape turnout across the region.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of voter turnout by type of election in each country, demonstrating the stable mobilization of the Kazakh electorate at the level of more than 90% compared to the indicators of the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Figure 2
Relative voter turnout rate

Source: Compiled on the basis of sources (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2015, 2019, 2024; Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; OSCE/ODIHR, 2020; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan; TASS, 2018; Interfax, 2024; Zakon.kz, 2022; Gazeta.uz, 2015)

During the period under review, all four countries maintained a stable voting pattern: leading political parties or candidates retained the majority of votes, and the share of "against all" and invalid ballots had virtually no impact on the results. For clarity, key indicators for three categories are provided below (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019; Zakon. kz, 2022; Pravo.ru, 2016; TASS, 2018; Interfax, 2024; Gazeta.ru, 2015; MK.ru, 2020; Interfax, 2021; Gazeta.uz, 2015; Izvestia.ru, 2019; Sovina, 2021; Kapitanova, 2024):

- The share of "yes" votes (cast for the main winner or leading party) varied depending on the electoral cycle: in Kazakhstan—70–82%, in Russia—49–88%, in Kyrgyzstan—24–80%, in Uzbekistan—52–89%.

- The share of protest votes (a combination of the "against all" option and invalid ballots) in Kazakhstan in 2015–2024 averaged 5–6%, while in Uzbekistan it remained at approximately 5–6%; in Russia it reached 11%, and in Kyrgyzstan in certain electoral cycles it could reach 16%.

- Across the four cases, the CEC-reported totals for "against all/NOTA" choices plus blank (unmarked) ballots stay within the ranges noted above.

The share of special ballots (invalid, spoiled, blank) in most cases fluctuates between 2–4%.

Table 2
Table of comparative analysis of political party results

Country	Leader/ Party	Share "for", %	Share "against", %	Specialist ballots, %
Kazakhstan	"Nur Otan"	82.2	3.1	2.8
Russia	"United Russia"	49.8	7.6	3.4
Kyrgyzstan	"Babanov Block"	38.5	11.8	4.5
Uzbekistan	M. Mirziyoyev	67.0	2.3	3.1

Note: Data is based on the results of the most recent parliamentary elections in each country

Source: Compiled based on sources (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2019; 2024; Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; OSCE/ODIHR, 2020; Interfax, 2021; Pravo.ru, 2016; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Izvestia.ru, 2019; Sovina, 2021; Zakon.kz, 2022)

Regional analysis helps to identify spatial disproportions in the level of electoral activity and the structure of party preferences. Application of the global Moran's I index (Shmatkova & Domanov, 2022) to the turnout data for the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan revealed statistically significant positive autocorrelation (Moran I≈0.21; $p < 0.05$), indicating the formation of clusters with particularly high turnout in the west of the country and low electoral activity in the east. In Russia, spatial autocorrelation was even more pronounced (Moran I≈0.34),
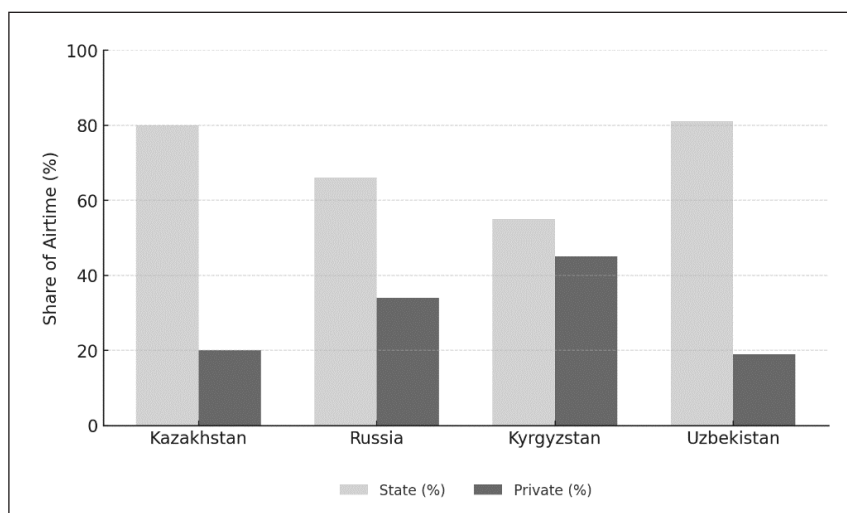
indicating significant interregional differences in the level of participation in elections. For Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Moran's I values were lower (around 0.18–0.20), indicating a relatively uniform distribution of turnout within the country.

The media space of Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is dominated by state news agencies (Kazinform, TASS, 24.kg, Jahon), independent platforms (Zakon.kg, Meduza, Kun.uz) have limited coverage and are partially blocked during election periods (Alihodžić et al., 2021; Shahbaz, 2025).

In the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, state television channels occupy more than 80% of airtime, in the Russian Federation – about 65%, in the Kyrgyz Republic – about 55% (see Fig. 3), which directly influences the formation of the information agenda and the level of political mobilization of the population (Alihodžić, 2021 et al.; Global Civil Society Database, 2025).

Figure 3
Share of public and private broadcasting

Source: Compiled on the basis of sources (Alihodžić et al., 2021; Shahbaz, 2025; Global Civil Society Database, 2025; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2025)

The presented diagram demonstrates the dominance of state broadcasting and shows the share of airtime of individual TV channels in the media space of each country under study.

The level of electoral competition is the highest in the Kyrgyz Republic: more than 15 parties are fighting for one parliamentary seat, which makes it difficult to form a broad coalition similar to the Russian one, where competition is intensified by the numerous "satellites" of United Russia. In the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the competitive field has been reduced to 3–5 large party lists (Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2020; Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019).

International (OSCE/PDIHR and CIS missions) and domestic (human rights NGOs) monitoring is more active in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of

Kazakhstan, where the number of accredited observers varies from 2.000 to 3.000; in the Russian Federation there are about 1.500, and in the Republic of Uzbekistan – about 800, which corresponds to the level of trust in electoral procedures (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020; UNDP Annual Report 2023, 2024).

During the last presidential elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the density of polling stations in urban agglomerations was 1.5–2 times higher than in rural areas, which led to a stable, albeit insignificant, shift in turnout rates: in cities it was 3.5% higher than average, while in rural areas it was 1.35% lower (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). In the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic, more significant differences were observed 7–9%, which is explained by transport and infrastructural difficulties in delivering voters and climatic obstacles (Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020).

According to the census and sociological research, regions with a higher average level of higher and secondary specialized education are characterized by a slightly lower turnout (–2–4%), but an increase in the share of votes cast for independent candidates and new political associations was noted (Table 3) (Levada Center, 2025; Socis, 2025).

Table 3
Levels of Electoral Activity

Indicator	Kazakhstan	Russia	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
"Urban-rural" gap, %	+3.5/−3.5	+7/−7	+9/−9	+3.5/−3.5
% of higher education (bachelor's degree and above)	30%	35%	28%	32%
Correlation between voting participation and return, R^2	−0.03	−0.04	−0.02	−0.03

Source: Compiled based on sources (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024; Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; OSCE/ODIHR, 2020; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Levada Center, 2025; Socis, 2025)

The countries under study (the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan) share similar institutional characteristics: continuity of the Soviet electoral system, a significant role for central election commissions and the dominance of "state" parties; however, each of these countries is developing its own mechanisms for mobilizing and monitoring elections.

1. Centralization and regional differences. The Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan have a high degree of centralization of administrative resources: active campaigning, widespread use of mobile polling stations, and tough administrative measures ensure a consistently high turnout (in

Kazakhstan >90%, in Uzbekistan ≈85–89%). The Russian Federation combines a strong centralized "vertical" of power with significant regional unevenness: the average turnout of 67–73% hides peaks (>80%) and troughs (<60%) across the subjects of the Federation. In contrast, the Kyrgyz Republic, due to its "hypercompetitive" political landscape and active international observation, has the greatest volatility: turnout fluctuates between 57–65%, and the election process itself is characterized by a low level of governance and a high degree of openness.

2. Representation system. From 2015 to 2024, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic used proportional or mixed electoral systems with a passing threshold of 5%. In Kazakhstan, on the basis of Constitutional Law No. 41-VII of May 24, 2021 "On Amendments and Additions to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Elections", a procedure for the formation of the Mazhilis and Maslikhats according to a mixed proportional-majoritarian model was introduced. At the same time, the electoral threshold for entering the Mazhilis was reduced from 7% to 5%. These changes are aimed at expanding the representativeness of parties and partially restoring the direct connection between voters and deputies. In the Kyrgyz Republic, proportional and mixed systems were mainly used during the period under review.[1]

The Russian Federation uses a mixed system of representation: half of the deputy mandates (50%) are distributed among party lists, and the remaining half are elected in single-mandate constituencies. This model allows preserving the advantages of large parties while ensuring regional representation.

A similar mixed model has been in effect in the Republic of Uzbekistan since 2019, according to which 75% of deputies are elected by party lists, and 25% in single-mandate constituencies. This mechanism is designed to combine party discipline and personal competition between candidates.

3. Media and information space. In the four countries under consideration, state media occupy from 55% to 80% of airtime, but in the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic, private and independent channels provide 35% and 45%, respectively, which contributes to the broader formation of a "protest" audience. In addition, in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, state media dominate over 80% of airtime, ensuring uniformity of the information space.

4. Parties and control. In the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation, a significant number of parties and candidates are officially registered (in Kyrgyzstan, there are 12-15 candidates per mandate, in Russia, about 12); however, in the Russian Federation, real competition is limited by the dominance of controlled "satellite" parties. At the same time, in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, the competitive environment is limited to three to five large party lists. The number of officially accredited observers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is from 2.000 to 3.000, in Russia, about 1.500 and in Uzbekistan, about 800.

Table 4 provides a comparative display of the main characteristics of the electoral regimes of the states under consideration.

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1   On June 9, 2025, a law was adopted in the Kyrgyz Republic on the transition to a fully majoritarian system, however, this study only examines the sample experience for the period 2015–2024 (Yeni Şafak, 2025).

Table 4

Comparison of key characteristics of electoral regimes

Setting	Kazakhstan	Russia	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
Opt-out	> 90%	67–73%	57–65%	85–89%
System	Mixed (30/70; 5%)	Mixed (50/50; 5%)	Mixed – 5% (2021–2024). Since 2025 – majoritarian system introduced	Mixed (25/75; 5%)
Public Broadcasting	80%	65%	55%	80%
Private Broadcasting	20%	35%	45%	20%
Competition (Parties/Place)	≈ 4	≈ 12	≈ 15	≈ 5
Observers	2 500	1 500	3 000	800
Regional Variability	Low (± 2%)	High (>20% range across subjects)	High (8% range)	Low (± 3%)
Level of Transparency of the Procedure	Average	Low-average	High	Low

Note: The "procedural transparency level" is a composite index of nine observed indicators for each country and the 2015–2024 electoral cycle; each indicator is normalized between 0 and 1 (0 = absent/inconsistent, 1 = present/consistent), and the final score is a simple average (equally weighted). Categories: High (≥0.67), Average (0.45–0.66), Low (<0.45)

Source: Compiled based on sources (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015, 2019, 202); Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation; Central Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan; OSCE/ODIHR (2020); Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995, as amended in 2024; Federal Law of the Russian Federation № 20-FZ, 2014; Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Elections of Deputies of the Zhogorku Kenesh", 2020; Yeni Şafak, 2025; Shahbaz, 2025; Alihodžić, 2021; Global Civil Society Database, 2025; UNDP Annual Report 2023, 2024; TASS, 2018; Interfax, 2024; Zakon.kz, 2022)

According to classical theories of electoral behavior, more open political competition and active control should lead to higher voter turnout and greater variability of election results. The data obtained confirm this assumption for the Kyrgyz Republic: the maximum number of parties per deputy mandate and the largest number of observers correlate with the lowest, but at the same time differentiated voter turnout. In the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of

Uzbekistan, the mobilization approach (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman & Brady et al., 1995) explains the high level of voting homogeneity and stable turnout by the use of administrative resources and mass campaigns. In the Russian Federation, the mixed system of representation determines in advance the regional heterogeneity of electoral indicators, which is fully consistent with our observations. At the same time, in Uzbekistan, the degree of "artificial" mobilization (mobile polling stations, state subsidization of the media) turned out to be higher than predicted by the theory of "hybrid regimes".

A statistically significant positive correlation was found between the share of private media and the increase in the share of protest ballots: in regions of Kyrgyzstan and Russia with a high level of penetration of private media, 2–3% higher rates of "against all" votes and the share of invalid ballots were recorded, which emphasizes the significant role of alternative media in shaping critical voters.

Robustness check: re-estimation of the models with alternative definitions of "Leading" (Top-2/Top-3/$\geq$60%) and with the replacement of PVR with IOR shows comparable signs and significance levels of the coefficients; the effect of the share of private broadcasting decreases by approximately 10–20%, but remains statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

As prospects for further research, it is advisable to conduct a detailed mapping of media consumption taking into account the influence of online platforms (Telegram, YouTube) on electoral behavior in urban and rural settlements, as well as to perform a longitudinal analysis of the dynamics of the relationship "education level – degree of competitiveness – voter turnout" at each municipal level.

In addition, to identify internal motivations and barriers to participation, it is proposed to conduct microstructural qualitative studies through interviews with voters in regions with extremely low and extremely high turnout.

These areas will help clarify the mechanisms of mobilization and protest voting in the CIS countries and enrich theoretical models of electoral regimes.

The study is limited to using only official statistics and additional sources, which does not allow for taking into account the subjective motives of voters and their deep-seated views. Methodological approaches to collecting and publishing data by Central Electoral Commissions and national statistical agencies vary across countries, making direct comparisons of a number of indicators difficult. In addition, inconsistencies in the recording of invalid ballots, the specifics of voter registration, and the use of different electronic voting formats may lead to systemic distortions in comparative analysis.

A comparative analysis showed that in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, high centralization of administrative resources (over 85%) ensures stable voter mobilization, while in Russia and Kyrgyzstan there are significant regional fluctuations in turnout (less than 60%–more than 80%). The purely proportional system in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan strengthens the influence of party headquarters, while the mixed models in Russia (50/50) and Uzbekistan (75/25) combine party discipline with the personal responsibility of deputies. The dominance of state media in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan creates a single information space, while in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, a large number of private media outlets are associated

with the growth of protest voting. The intensity of international and domestic observation correlates with the transparency of electoral procedures and the variability of voter turnout.

In a comparative study of electoral regimes, it is necessary to take into account both formal institutional characteristics (type of electoral system, level of electoral barriers, etc.) and informal factors (media environment, degree of use of administrative resources), allowing us to identify their synergistic influence on political activity. In order to clarify subjective motives and obstacles to participation, it is advisable to include qualitative methods in the empirical methodology – in-depth interviews and focus groups with voters from regions with high activity. In quantitative analysis, it is recommended to use multivariate methods (regression analysis, clustering, etc.), providing a simultaneous assessment of the influence of demographic, infrastructural and institutional determinants on electoral behavior, which will increase the accuracy and depth of conclusions.

For subsequent studies, it is recommended to introduce a comprehensive media map of election campaigns through content analysis of traditional and digital channels, organize longitudinal panels of respondents to track the dynamics of political priorities and the level of trust in institutions, and conduct a geomarginal analysis based on a comparison of CEC microdata with regional statistics and relevant indicators. In addition, it is necessary to assess the impact of reforms (electronic voting, introduction of quotas) on participation in elections and the competitiveness of processes, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of mobilization and protest voting in post-Soviet states.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of a comparative analysis of the 2015–2024 electoral regimes in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, it was established that electoral processes in the post-Soviet space are formed under the mutual influence of institutional, media, and behavioral factors.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, high centralization of administrative resources combined with the monopoly of state media ensures a consistently high level of voter turnout (>85%) and low regional variability (variation coefficients of 4.2% and 5.1%, respectively).

At the same time, in Uzbekistan, the introduction of a mixed model of representation (25% of single-mandate constituencies) does not affect the overall level of voter mobilization but contributes to the growth of local competition.

In the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic, multi-party competition, the relative availability of private information channels, and the flexibility of control mechanisms led to significant fluctuations in turnout, from below 60% to over 80%. The 50/50 proportional-majoritarian model used in Russia and the mixed system with a 5% threshold used in Kyrgyzstan in 2021–2024 contributed to the growth of regional disproportionality in election results and an increase in the share of protest votes (up to 12% in Kyrgyzstan and up to 8% in Russia).

In addition, a positive relationship was found between the growth of the share of private broadcasting and the strengthening of protest sentiments among voters,

which emphasizes the important role of alternative media in shaping a critically minded electorate.

Empirical data are consistent with the main assumptions of classical theories of electoral behavior, including the sociological (Columbia) model, the psychological (Michigan) model, rational choice theory and the mobilization approach (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Campbell et al., 1960; Downs, 1957; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In particular, an increase in political competition combined with stricter oversight and control is accompanied by greater variability of electoral outcomes, while voter turnout remains relatively high and takes on a more deliberate and reflective character. At the same time, extensive use of administrative resources and the predominance of state media lead to broad, but more uniform and less differentiated mobilization, which is typical for hybrid electoral regimes. From an applied perspective, the findings indicate that changes in electoral legislation and media regulation can noticeably influence the level of political participation and the degree of public trust in electoral institutions.

Taking into account the identified patterns, it is proposed to optimize mechanisms for ensuring transparency and building trust: to introduce independent media monitoring, reduce administrative barriers to registering small parties and accrediting observers, expand the possibilities of digital voting, and strengthen measures to counter information manipulation. This comprehensive approach will promote high civic engagement, genuine political competition, and strengthen trust in electoral institutions.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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