

Reports of alleged fraud in Azerbaijan and Georgian elections

By [Global Research](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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Opposition alleges fraud in Azerbaijan election

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The official vote count and exit polls gave the ruling party the lead in Azerbaijan's parliamentary election Monday, but rights groups and monitors reported irregularities and the opposition vowed to fight to overturn what it called fraudulent results.

With votes from nearly 90 percent of the precincts counted, candidates from the ruling New Azerbaijan Party were leading in 64 races, with independents – who could include ruling party loyalists – ahead in 41 races and opposition candidates in eight, according to the Central Election Commission.

An exit poll conducted by the Mitofsky, Edison Media and CESSI organizations showed candidates of the ruling party winning 30 of the 125 seats and “leading-too close to call,” in 26 other races. It was unclear who sponsored the exit poll, which opposition figures alleged was being conducted under government auspices.

Hundreds of foreign observers who fanned out across the country to watch the vote were also following the count.

The opposition had said it would wait until after their statements to make its own assessment of the election's fairness, and the streets of Baku were quiet Monday morning following a tense campaign that featured nearly weekly opposition rallies that were often forcibly broken up by police.

But on Sunday night, Ali Kerimli, one of three main opposition leaders, said the voting was “clearly falsified.”

“These elections could not reflect the will of the Azerbaijani people,” he said.

Kerimli related reports of opposition members on local election commissions being detained. The deputy chairman of the Musavat party, Vurgun Eyub, said seven opposition party officials had been detained in a polling place outside Baku and that opposition observers had been thrown out of 23 stations just before polls closed.

Among complaints was ballot-box stuffing, and the Central Election Commission was looking into reports that one person was discovered entering a polling place with 15 ballots already marked.

Center for Election Monitoring representative Anar Mammadli said officials at some polling places were openly supporting specific candidates.

The ruling party's executive secretary, Ali Akhmadov, pronounced the elections "transparent, just and democratic." He said that whatever violations were recorded were not enough to affect the results.

The uneven campaign saw some opposition rallies banned and its activists beaten and detained, and many candidates withdrew from the race.

The election pitted President Ilham Aliev's New Azerbaijan Party against the Azadliq (Freedom) coalition, the New Policy bloc of technocrats, and an array of smaller parties and independent candidates.

Less than three weeks before the vote, Aliev's government announced the discovery of an alleged coup plot led by Rasul Guliyev, an Azadliq leader in exile. Several government ministers and other high-ranking officials were jailed, the AP reports.

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Group Alleges Fraud in Georgia Elections By Misha Dzhindzhikashvili

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Opposition leaders alleged Friday that Georgia's local and regional elections were riddled with fraud, but international monitors said the balloting was conducted "with general respect for fundamental freedoms."

President Mikhail Saakashvili told supporters that his United National Movement Party won "a minimum of 70 percent" across the country in voting Thursday.

The Central Election Commission said late Friday that preliminary results showed Saakashvili's party had won two-thirds of the vote in the capital, Tbilisi, where about 890,000 of Georgia's 3.2 million registered voters live.

It said a fuller picture of results would not emerge for several days.

The vote was seen as an important test of the pro-Western government's popularity at a time when the impoverished ex-Soviet nation faces a worsening confrontation with neighboring Russia.

Labor Party head Shalva Natelashvili, who hopes to unseat Saakashvili ally Gigi Ugulava from the post of Tbilisi mayor, said that the opposition had been subjected to tremendous pressure during the campaign.

"Those who didn't want to vote for Saakashvili were branded agents of another state," he said. "These elections failed, by European and international standards, and we will appeal to international courts to declare them false and illegitimate."

Saakashvili rejected charges of vote-rigging.

“We conducted democratic elections. ... And I want to say that we conducted clean elections despite our opponents’ pouring dirt on us,” he said.

The joint mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe offered a relatively positive assessment, although it noted that “the blurred distinction between the authorities and the governing party reinforced the advantage of the incumbents.”

Monitors pointed to “highly visible social aid programs” used by the ruling party, which paid out pension bonuses and provided temporary jobs.

Conservative Party leader Koba Davitashvili accused the government of dragging out the vote count in an effort to fix the results.

“Not even an hour passed after the end of elections that President Saakashvili said that his party had done better than in the past elections and got a minimum of 70 percent of the vote and now the electoral commission is trying to reach that figure,” he said.

Nearly three years after the Rose Revolution protests propelled him to power, the U.S.-educated Saakashvili has seen his popularity plunge with Georgians increasingly disenchanted at the weak economy and widespread poverty. The opposition tried to make political capital out of that disappointment in Thursday’s local elections.

Russia’s chilly relations with Georgia also have worsened steadily since Saakashvili came to power, vowing to take the country out of Russia’s orbit, rein in breakaway provinces and join NATO. Georgia accuses Russia of backing the separatists, which Russia denies.

Following Georgia’s arrest of four Russian military officers on spying charges, Moscow this week suspended air, sea, road, rail and postal links with its southern neighbor, paralyzing trade with economically dependent Georgia. Moscow also has cracked down on Georgian migrants and businesses in Russia.

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