

The Impact of The Mixed Electoral System on Political Party Competition in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article provides a scientific-theoretical and practical analysis of the impact of Uzbekistan's transition to a mixed electoral system on political party competition, quality of representation, electoral accountability, and party modernization processes. The study examines the mixed electoral system not merely as a technical voting method, but as an institutional design that reshapes the relationships between voters, parties, candidates, parliament, and government. The article explains the theoretical essence of the mixed system based on Harold Lasswell's approach to the distribution of power resources, Maurice Duverger's law on the relationship between the electoral and party systems, and the research of Douglas W. Rae, Giovanni Sartori, Arend Lijphart, Matthew Shugart and Martin P. Wattenberg, Robert G. Moser and Ethan Scheiner, Pippa Norris, and International IDEA. Uzbekistan's experience is analyzed in the context of the 2023 constitutional-legal reforms, the 2024 parliamentary elections, the distribution of mandates through 75 single-mandate districts and 75 party-list seats, the seven-percent electoral threshold, the increase of the gender quota to 40 percent, and the two-tiered competition between party-list and district candidates. The research findings indicate that the mixed system creates an opportunity for parties to strengthen their national brand, programmatic platform, the quality of regional candidates, electoral communication, and the accountability of parliamentary factions. At the same time, its transformation into genuine competition is directly linked to the party registration environment, media pluralism, transparency of election financing, intra-party democracy, citizen observation, and the informed choice of voters.

Keywords: Electoral system, mixed electoral system, majoritarian system, proportional system, political party, party competition, parliamentary election, electoral design, institutional reform, party list, single-mandate constituency, representation, accountability, gender quota, election campaign, political modernization, Uzbekistan, Oliy Majlis.

Introduction: In modern statehood, elections are the primary mechanism for ensuring the legitimacy of government, institutionalizing the political will of citizens, and channeling party competition into a legal framework. In a democratic political process, the electoral system is not merely a matter of simple calculations or the format of a ballot; it is a crucial set of institutional rules that determine how political forces are represented in parliament, the extent to which parties engage in policy-based competition, the means by which voters express their interests, and the level of the government's accountability to society.

Explaining politics through the definition of "who gets what, when, and how", H. Lasswell views parties and elections as the central arena for the distribution of power resources [1]. From this perspective, changing the electoral system is a profound political reform aimed at altering the logic of relations between political institutions.

The electoral and legal reforms implemented in Uzbekistan during 2023-2024 initiated a new stage in the country's political system. As a result of the constitutional and legal changes and amendments to the electoral legislation adopted in 2023, a mixed

system combining majoritarian and proportional elements was introduced for electing deputies to the Legislative Chamber [13; 14]. For the first time in Uzbekistan's history, the parliamentary elections on October 27, 2024, were held under a new system in which 75 of the 150 parliamentary seats were distributed through single-mandate districts, and the other 75 were allocated based on party lists in a single nationwide district [15; 17]. This development has enhanced the potential for political parties to shift their activities from a majoritarian competition, which relies solely on the reputation of individual candidates, to a competitive arena grounded in the national party brand, programmatic positions, information-communication strategies, and party accountability.

The relevance of this topic is determined by several factors. Firstly, the party system in Uzbekistan was long formed under the conditions of a majoritarian electoral system. In such an environment, voters often made their choice based on the personal reputation, administrative or social resources, and local recognition of the candidate nominated in a district, rather than on the platform of a specific political party. Secondly, the mixed system tasks parties with competing on two fronts: promoting strong candidates in territorial districts and credibly presenting the party's ideological and programmatic image on a national scale. Thirdly, the strengthening of genuine competition between parties depends not only on changes to the electoral system but also on political pluralism, the openness of party lists, intra-party selection, media freedom, civil society observation, and the transparency of election financing.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of the mixed electoral system on political party competition in Uzbekistan based on the criteria of institutional design, representation, accountability, party modernization, and electoral communication. Based on this purpose, the theoretical essence of the mixed system, its legal and institutional foundations in Uzbekistan, the results of the 2024 parliamentary elections, new opportunities and existing limitations for parties, as well as the system's impact on the democratization process will be examined.

ANALYSIS OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

The relationship between electoral systems and party competition is considered one of the most studied areas in political science. M. Duverger argued that the majoritarian electoral system encourages two-party competition, while the proportional system creates institutional conditions for multi-party representation [2]. Duverger's law is significant not as an absolute deterministic rule, but as a theoretical framework that

explains the strategic behavior of parties, voters' calculations regarding "wasted votes", and the logic of district-level competition. D. Rae empirically analyzed the influence of the electoral system on the number of parties in parliament, the degree of disproportionality, and government formation [3]. G. Sartori emphasizes that party systems should be measured not only by the number of parties but also by the ideological distance between them, the degree of polarization, and their coalition potential [4].

In his analysis of the relationship between the electoral system, consensus democracy, and inclusive representation, A. Lijphart demonstrates that proportional mechanisms help ensure political stability in societies with ethnic, territorial, and social diversity [5]. R. Taagepera and M. Shugart conducted an in-depth study of the mathematical-institutional relationship between electoral system parameters, district magnitude, the mandate distribution formula, and the number of parties in parliament [6]. M. Shugart and M. Wattenberg characterize mixed electoral systems as the "best of both worlds", arguing that they attempt to combine the local accountability of a majoritarian system with the party-based representation of a proportional system [7].

In subsequent research on mixed electoral systems, they are studied not as a single type but as a collection of several models. Scientific literature distinguishes between the mixed-member proportional system and the mixed-member majoritarian, or parallel, system. In the first model, seats distributed via party lists compensate for disproportionalities in district-level results. In the second model, district mandates and party-list mandates are calculated independently, meaning the proportional component does not fully compensate for the overall result [7; 8]. By comparing the experiences of different countries, R. Moser and E. Scheiner demonstrated that the effects of mixed systems are linked to the political context, party institutionalization, administrative resources, and the strategic behavior of voters [8]. B. Michalak discusses the question of whether to classify the mixed system as a hybrid design or a distinct family of electoral systems, emphasizing that its institutional characteristics vary sharply from one country to another [9].

P. Norris analyzes the relationship between electoral engineering, party competition, and democratic quality, arguing that electoral rules can expand or limit political participation [10]. The International IDEA handbooks assess the choice of an electoral system as one of the most important institutional decisions in the process of democratization; the electoral system determines how parties campaign, for whom citizens vote, who enters parliament, and who participates in

governance [11]. Research edited by M. Gallagher and P. Mitchell shows that electoral systems are “mechanisms for converting votes into seats” that influence political outcomes [12].

In literature pertaining to Uzbekistan, the transition to a mixed electoral system, the 2024 parliamentary elections, and party strategies have recently emerged as distinct research topics. According to the Central Election Commission, the constitutional law adopted on December 18, 2023, is aimed at improving the procedures for conducting elections and referendums, introducing a new model for electing deputies to the Legislative Chamber that combines elements of majoritarian and proportional systems [14]. IFES describes the 2024 elections as the first parliamentary and local elections in Uzbekistan to be based on a mixed system, drawing attention to the fact that half of the 150 parliamentary seats were filled through majoritarian districts and the other half through party lists [15]. The OSCE/ODIHR final report noted that while the elections were technically well-prepared and there were positive changes in gender representation, problems remained in areas such as party registration, a genuinely competitive environment, independent candidates, campaign finance, and the publication of results at the precinct level [16].

METHODS

This article employed historical-institutional, systematic, comparative, normative-legal, and content analysis methods. The historical-institutional method was used to explain Uzbekistan's transition from a majoritarian electoral practice to a mixed system, the phased formation of the party system, and the electoral-legal reforms of 2023–2024. The systematic method enabled the analysis of the interconnectedness between the electoral system, parties, parliament, voters, media, civil society, and the electoral administration as a holistic political process.

Through the comparative method, international models of the mixed system—specifically compensatory and parallel models—were generalized, along with their institutional differences in the experiences of Germany, New Zealand, Japan, Russia, Hungary, and other nations. The normative-legal analysis focused on studying the amendments to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the 2023 constitutional law, the decisions of the Central Election Commission, and official data on the 2024 election results. The content analysis method was applied to systematize political science monographs, scholarly articles, reports from international organizations, analytical materials related to elections, and theoretical sources on party competition.

Two types of data were used in this study. The first type includes the theoretical works of classic and modern researchers such as Duverger, Rae, Sartori, Lijphart, Taagepera, Shugart, Wattenberg, Moser, Scheiner, Norris, and International IDEA. The second type includes official and analytical sources on the 2024 parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan, party lists, single-member districts, the electoral threshold, gender quotas, parties' share of mandates, and assessments from international observers. On this basis, the article evaluates the impact of the mixed electoral system on party competition not only at the level of legal norms but also through the activities of practical political institutions.

DISCUSSION

The central feature of a mixed electoral system is its combination of two types of representation. Single-member districts strengthen the territorial proximity between voters and deputies, responsibility for local issues, personal reputation, and direct accountability. The proportional component, based on party lists, ensures that voters can choose a party's program, political direction, and ideological platform at the national level [19, 23]. In this way, the mixed system turns the voter into a subject of a two-level political choice: they support a specific candidate in the district and a political party at the national level. This two-tiered system requires parties to have not only high-quality regional candidates but also a national political brand and a clear programmatic position.

In terms of its institutional features, the model introduced in Uzbekistan closely resembles a mixed-parallel system. This is because while 75 deputies are elected in single-mandate districts, the remaining 75 mandates are distributed in a single nationwide district based on votes received by the parties; the proportional component does not fully compensate for the disproportionality in the district-level results. Therefore, this system simultaneously activates the logic of majoritarian districts and the logic of party lists. In elections, parties can no longer rely solely on locally well-known candidates; they must now form a nationally recognizable political image, a programmatic direction, mechanisms for working with social groups, and an information campaign in the minds of the voters.

This system influences political party competition primarily by increasing the importance of the party brand. In a majoritarian system, the personal prestige of a candidate in their district can take precedence over the party's overall program. With the introduction of the party list, voters begin to evaluate a party's name, ideological orientation, national program, stance on

government policy, the activities of its parliamentary faction, and its public accountability. This creates an institutional incentive for parties to maintain constant political communication, work with the public between elections, and develop specific proposals for various sectors and regions.

The second significant effect relates to the internal selection of candidates within parties. To succeed in single-mandate constituencies, parties must nominate candidates who are respected locally, known to the community, understand the issues, and are prepared for parliamentary work. Party lists, on the other hand, allow for the institutionalization of personnel policy at the national level, bringing together experts, women, youth, regional activists, industry specialists, and individuals who represent the party's ideology into a single system. This process becomes even more effective if intra-party democracy is strengthened. Otherwise, compiling the lists may remain at the discretion of the party elite, limiting the influence of voters and party members.

The third area of focus involves strengthening the programmatic competition among parties. A mixed system requires parties to move beyond general slogans and present programs that include specific figures, mechanisms, and implementation deadlines for economic growth, social protection, tax policy, entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, ecology, regional development, gender equality, youth policy, and combating corruption [21]. When voters cast their ballot for a party list, they are supporting that particular party's vision for governing the country. Therefore, the rivalry between parties must shift from personal relationships to programmatic competition.

The fourth impact pertains to electoral communication technologies. In a mixed system, parties must integrate their regional and national campaigns. A district candidate works on local issues, while the party's central office focuses on national strategic directions. This dynamic fosters the development of a party's PR strategy, digital communication, social media activity, voter segmentation, debate culture, and rapid public relations. The OSCE/ODIHR report notes that although parties used social media, the campaign was low-key and the programmatic debates lacked sufficient intensity [16]. Thus, while the mixed system has communicative potential, its actual effectiveness is determined by the political activity of the parties, the media environment, and voter access to information.

The fifth impact is a change in the quality of representation. The proportional component expands the opportunity for smaller parties and specific social groups to have their interests represented in

parliament. In Uzbekistan's 2024 elections, all five parties surpassed the seven-percent threshold and received mandates from their party lists [17]. Concurrently, the increase of the gender quota to 40 percent influenced the composition of political representation. According to OSCE/ODIHR data, women constituted 45 percent of the candidates, and 57 of the 150 deputies in the new Legislative Chamber are women [16]. This demonstrates that the mixed system affects not only party competition but also social representation within the parliament.

The 2024 election results show that the mixed system slightly reshaped the distribution of mandates among the parties. According to the Central Election Commission, the 75 seats from the party-list vote were distributed as follows: the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan won 26 seats, the "Milliy Tiklanish" Democratic Party 14 seats, the Ecological Party of Uzbekistan 10 seats, the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan 13 seats, and the "Adolat" Social Democratic Party 12 seats [17]. When combined with the results from single-mandate districts, the overall composition was: the Liberal Democratic Party with 64 seats, "Milliy Tiklanish" with 29, "Adolat" with 21, the People's Democratic Party with 20, and the Ecological Party with 16 seats [17]. These figures demonstrate that the share of mandates varies when party-list and district results are combined, and that strong district candidates significantly influence the overall outcome.

Although a mixed system has the potential to strengthen party competition, its effects are not automatic. The electoral system creates institutional incentives for parties, but genuine competition is contingent upon the ability of parties to register, the openness of the political environment, an independent media, civil society observation, campaign finance transparency, and voters' access to free information. In its final report on the 2024 elections, the OSCE/ODIHR noted a restrictive political environment, a lack of genuine choice for voters, burdensome party registration requirements, no legal provisions for independent candidates, and a scarcity of critical debate during the campaigns [16]. These observations indicate that there is a distinction between the legal implementation of a mixed system and the political substance of party competition.

In Uzbekistan, the most significant opportunity a mixed electoral system presents for political parties lies in strengthening the accountability of parliamentary factions. Deputies who enter parliament through party lists are considered accountable not only to their own constituency but also to the party's broader electorate. This situation can strengthen factional discipline, ensure the party's program is reflected in lawmaking,

and improve the monitoring of election promises, as well as parliamentary inquiries and oversight functions. A mixed system will enhance the social legitimacy of parties if they institutionalize the practice of submitting annual reports on their electoral platforms, publicly announcing factional initiatives, and establishing regular dialogue with voters.

In this context, the issue of the seven-percent electoral threshold warrants separate evaluation. The electoral threshold serves to prevent the parliament from becoming overly fragmented into small parties, to ensure a stable factional structure, and to maintain a working relationship between the government and the parliament. However, a high threshold may limit the ability of new political forces and small social groups to enter parliament. In Uzbekistan's case, all five official parties cleared the threshold in the 2024 elections [17]. Nevertheless, for new parties to emerge and for party competition to deepen ideologically and programmatically in the long term, it is crucial that the requirements for registration and electoral participation align with democratic standards.

Another institutional issue of a mixed system is whether party lists are open or closed. A closed list strengthens the role of the party leadership in candidate selection, ensures party discipline, and helps form a group of deputies loyal to the national program. However, it limits the voter's influence over the individuals on the list [22]. Open or semi-open lists can increase a voter's influence on the ranking of candidates within the party. In the future, strengthening mechanisms for internal primaries, regional conferences, public discussion, and voting by party members in the formation of party lists in Uzbekistan will enhance the democratic effectiveness of the mixed system.

The competition between political parties is not measured solely by the votes on election day. Genuine competition is formed by parties acting as permanent political entities in society, expanding their membership base, representing the interests of social groups, working with the expert community, and serving as a vehicle for political advancement for youth and women [25]. A mixed system can encourage this process, as the party prepares a common program for the national list, studies local problems for the districts, and reports to voters through its parliamentary faction. In this respect, a mixed system has the potential to elevate parties from being merely electoral machines to the level of social and political institutions.

Comparative experience shows that the results of a mixed system are strongly dependent on a country's political culture and institutional environment. In

countries like Germany and New Zealand, the compensatory mixed system has served to strengthen proportional representation, bring smaller parties into parliament, and foster a culture of coalition-building [24]. The experience in Japan and some post-socialist states shows the parallel system introduced elements of national competition through party lists while preserving the dominance of major parties. Since the Uzbek model also has parallel features, it is likely to maintain the dominance of strong parties in local districts while simultaneously opening a new arena for programmatic competition through party lists.

RESULTS

The research findings indicate that the introduction of a mixed electoral system in Uzbekistan will affect party competition in five main areas. The first outcome is related to the transition of party competition to a two-tier model. The majoritarian component demands a candidate's personal potential within the district, knowledge of local issues, and direct engagement with voters. The proportional component brings the party brand, programmatic platform, nationwide communication, and factional accountability to the forefront. Therefore, parties must now approach candidate selection and program development not as separate processes, but as two branches of a single electoral strategy.

The second result is related to the institutionalization of parties. Party-list voting compels parties to strengthen their permanent membership base, regional organizations, expert groups, policy documents, media strategies, and parliamentary faction activities [18]. If a party fails to maintain contact with its electorate after the election, it risks losing votes in the next election. This mechanism creates an incentive to transform parties from seasonal campaign organizations into stable political institutions.

The third result pertains to the quality of representation. The party list expands the opportunity to bring various social groups, industry specialists, women, and youth into parliament. The increase of the gender quota to 40% and the rise in the number of female deputies to 57 in the 2024 elections demonstrate that a mixed system and candidate policies can influence the composition of representation [16].

The fourth result is manifested in the changing quality of political communication and election campaigns. Parties must develop a national image for their party list, address local problems for regional districts, provide timely information for the digital space, and articulate a clear political position for the media. In this process, it is advisable for parties to use electoral

marketing not only as a campaigning tool but also as a mechanism for studying voter needs, segmenting the interests of social groups, preparing legislative initiatives, and ensuring parliamentary accountability.

The fifth finding relates to the limitations of the mixed system. Although the electoral system creates an institutional opportunity for party competition, genuine competition is determined by the freedom of party registration, the issue of independent candidates, the transparency of campaign finance, media pluralism, civic observation, and a culture of political debate. As noted in the OSCE/ODIHR report, the political environment in the 2024 elections was restrictive, campaigns were low-key, and programmatic competition between parties was not sufficiently strong [16]. Therefore, while the institutional potential of a mixed system exists, its democratic outcome is inextricably linked to additional political and legal reforms.

CONCLUSION

The transition to a mixed electoral system in Uzbekistan marks a qualitatively new institutional stage in the country's electoral practice and party competition. It combines the advantages of a majoritarian system, such as territorial accountability and proximity between candidates and voters, with the opportunities for party representation and programmatic competition offered by a proportional system. The 2024 parliamentary elections were the first practical test of this system, creating new requirements for parties regarding national lists, territorial districts, gender quotas, election campaigns, and the activities of parliamentary factions.

Analysis shows that a mixed system creates both opportunities and responsibilities for political parties simultaneously. The opportunity lies in the parties' ability to strengthen their brand at the national level, establish an ongoing dialogue with the electorate, refine their programmatic platform, improve the selection process for regional candidates, and link the activities of their parliamentary factions to campaign promises. The responsibility is that voters will now evaluate not only the individual candidate but also the party's overall political image and practical platform. This raises the demand for the parties' openness, accountability, and political professionalism before society.

At the same time, the impact of a mixed electoral system on competition is not limited to its legal design. Its democratic effectiveness depends on the openness of party registration, internal party democracy, the transparency of party lists, an independent and pluralistic media, public oversight of campaign

financing, citizen observation, the publication of results by individual polling stations, and a culture of debate. If these factors are developed, the mixed system will serve to institutionalize Uzbekistan's party system, improve the quality of parliamentary representation, and expand citizens' political participation. If these conditions remain weak, the mixed system may remain a formal change, and the substance of party competition may not deepen.

Based on this, several practical recommendations can be put forward. First, when forming party lists, mechanisms such as internal primaries, member voting, regional conferences, and public discussions should be expanded. Second, parties must prepare annual open parliamentary reports on the implementation of their electoral programs. Third, it is advisable to strengthen the open digital reporting platform for campaign finance, media expenditures, and the parties' use of state funds. Fourth, a culture of debate, independent analysis, media formats that compare party programs, and civil society observation should be institutionally supported. Fifth, parliamentary factions should be evaluated based on clear criteria for their work with constituents, legislative initiatives, and representation of regional interests.

In conclusion, the mixed electoral system creates a significant institutional opportunity to elevate political party competition in Uzbekistan to a new level. The effective use of this opportunity will yield tangible results when supported by the political culture of the parties, informed voter participation, legal guarantees, and an open political environment.

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