

Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan: Disproportionate Results, Wasted Votes, Winners Not Chosen by the Majority

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Elections are one of the most important institutions of democracy. They ensure citizens' control over state governance. However, the way elections are conducted, that is, the electoral system itself, varies from country to country. Although every state includes its own elements in its electoral system, it is possible to group them according to certain indicators. In political literature, electoral systems are generally classified into four groups: majority/plurality, semi-proportional, proportional, and mixed systems.[\[i\]](#)

In Azerbaijan, elections to the National Assembly are held through a plurality system based on single-member constituencies.[\[ii\]](#) According to this system, the candidate who receives the most votes in a constituency is considered the winner. It is not necessary to obtain more than half of the votes. A candidate can win even with 20 percent of the vote if others receive less than that. Therefore, 125 single-member constituencies are created for parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, and in each constituency, the candidate who gains the most votes is declared the winner. This system is also widespread around the world. For example, in 2025, 24,1 percent of the world's countries held elections to their lower or single chambers through this system.[\[iii\]](#)

Both local and international observers have repeatedly reported that elections in Azerbaijan[\[iv\]](#) are neither free nor fair.[\[v\]](#) However, even if elections in Azerbaijan were free

and fair, the plurality system currently in use still has several negative aspects. In this article, I will show that the plurality system used in Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections produces disproportionality, causes significant vote loss, and in some cases, allows candidates not chosen by the majority of voters to represent them in parliament.

Open Data on the Electoral System in Azerbaijan

The organization of elections in Azerbaijan is carried out by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Therefore, information about elections in Azerbaijan can be obtained from the official website of the CEC and from the Infocenter portal under its supervision. However, these two portals provide very limited information about elections. For example, although the general boundaries of constituencies are shown on a single map, the exact borders are not indicated on it.[\[vi\]](#)

The first available information on elections provided in these portals concerns the 2010 elections. Data from 2005, 2000, and 1995 are not published. Even the information released since 2010 remains very limited. For instance, in the 2010 parliamentary elections, the number of votes each candidate received is not shown.[\[vii\]](#) The results of the 2015 and 2024 parliamentary elections are also presented in a highly fragmented manner. The names of winning candidates and the number of votes they received appear on one page,[\[viii\]](#) while information about their party affiliation is on another.[\[ix\]](#) Moreover, all this information is divided into individual precincts rather than presented in a single list. As for the 2020 elections, the number of votes received by the winning candidates is not published at all. Instead, the site includes protocols for each precinct that list the votes received by each candidate only at the precinct level.[\[x\]](#) To date, no source has presented the results of the parliamentary elections – such as the winning candidate, the number of votes received, and the party affiliation – in a unified form.

In this article, I compiled the information scattered across different pages of the Infocenter portal into a single dataset. In this database, I recorded the name of the winning candidate, the number of votes that candidate received in the constituency, and the candidate's party affiliation or independent status. I then calculated the disproportionality of election results using the Gallagher Index, which is explained below. Although the Infocenter portal includes data from the 2010 elections, it does not indicate the number of votes received by the winners, so that year is not included in the analysis. International observers produced reports on the 1995, 2000, and 2005 elections, but the data in those reports are limited.[\[xi\]](#) For that reason, this study analyzes only the parliamentary elections held in 2015, 2020, and 2024.

Negative Features of the Plurality System

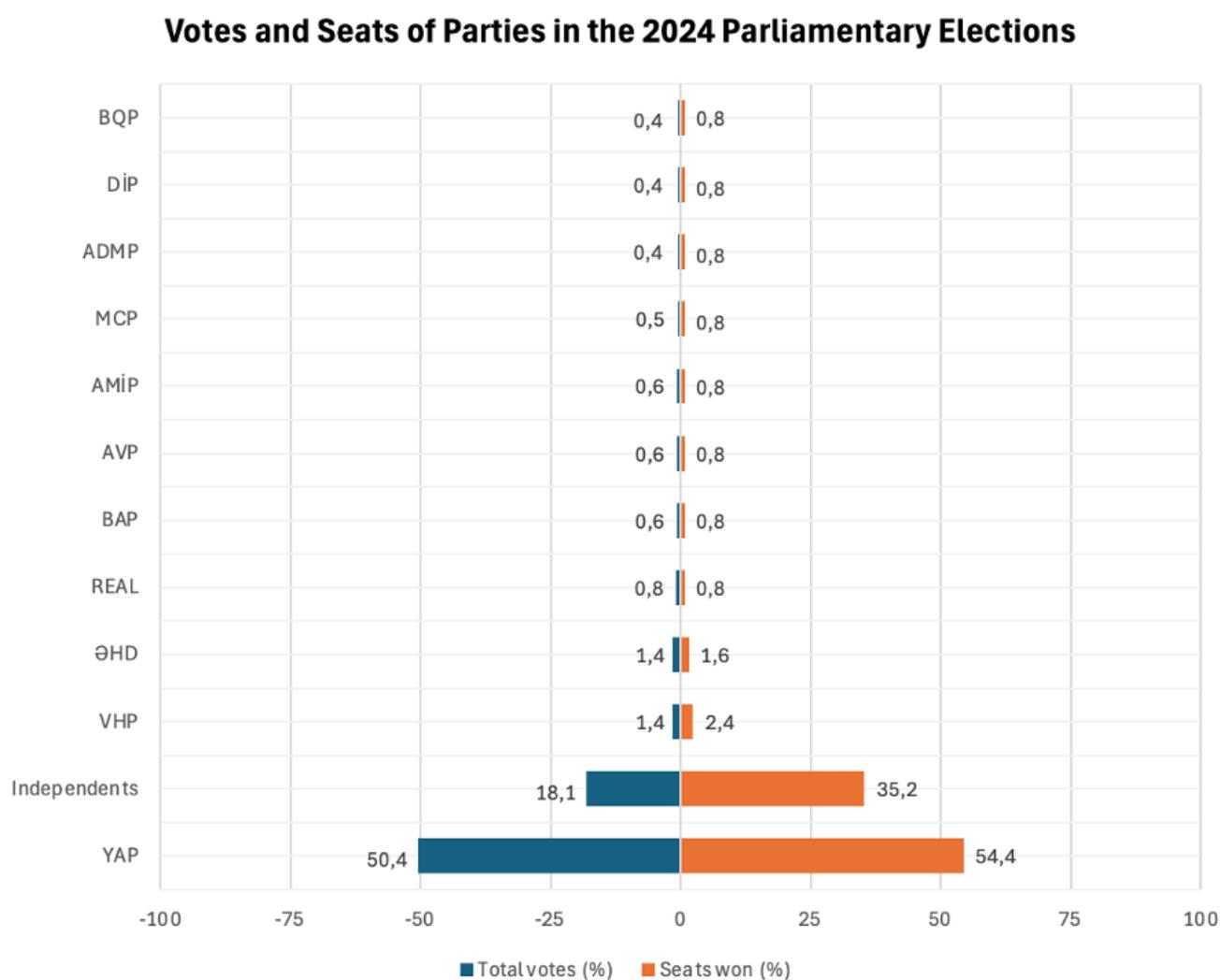
One of the negative aspects of elections held under the plurality system in single-member constituencies is the disproportionality between the votes received by parties and the number of seats they gain in parliament.[\[xii\]](#) In other words, the percentage of votes a party receives does not correspond to the percentage of seats it wins.[\[xiii\]](#) For example, Party A may receive 40 percent of the votes nationwide but gain 60 percent of the seats in parliament.

In some ways, this feature of the plurality system can be seen as an advantage. Parties can obtain more than half of the seats in parliament and form a government without winning more than half of the votes. This means that coalitions are rare under such systems, and governments tend to be more stable and accountable. In coalition governments, parties that make up the coalition can blame their partners for failures and avoid responsibility. In single-party governments, it is considerably more difficult to shift the blame for poor performance onto others.

However, this same feature also has negative consequences.

Some parties gain many more seats with relatively few votes, while others win fewer seats despite having significant voter support. For instance, in the 2024 parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party received 33,7 percent of the total votes but secured 63,3 percent of the seats in parliament, roughly twice as many. The Reform UK Party received 14,3 percent of the votes but only 0,76 percent of the seats.^[xiv] In general, disproportionality exists in almost every electoral system, except for rare cases.^[xv] Nevertheless elections held under the plurality method usually show the highest level of disproportionality.^[xvi]

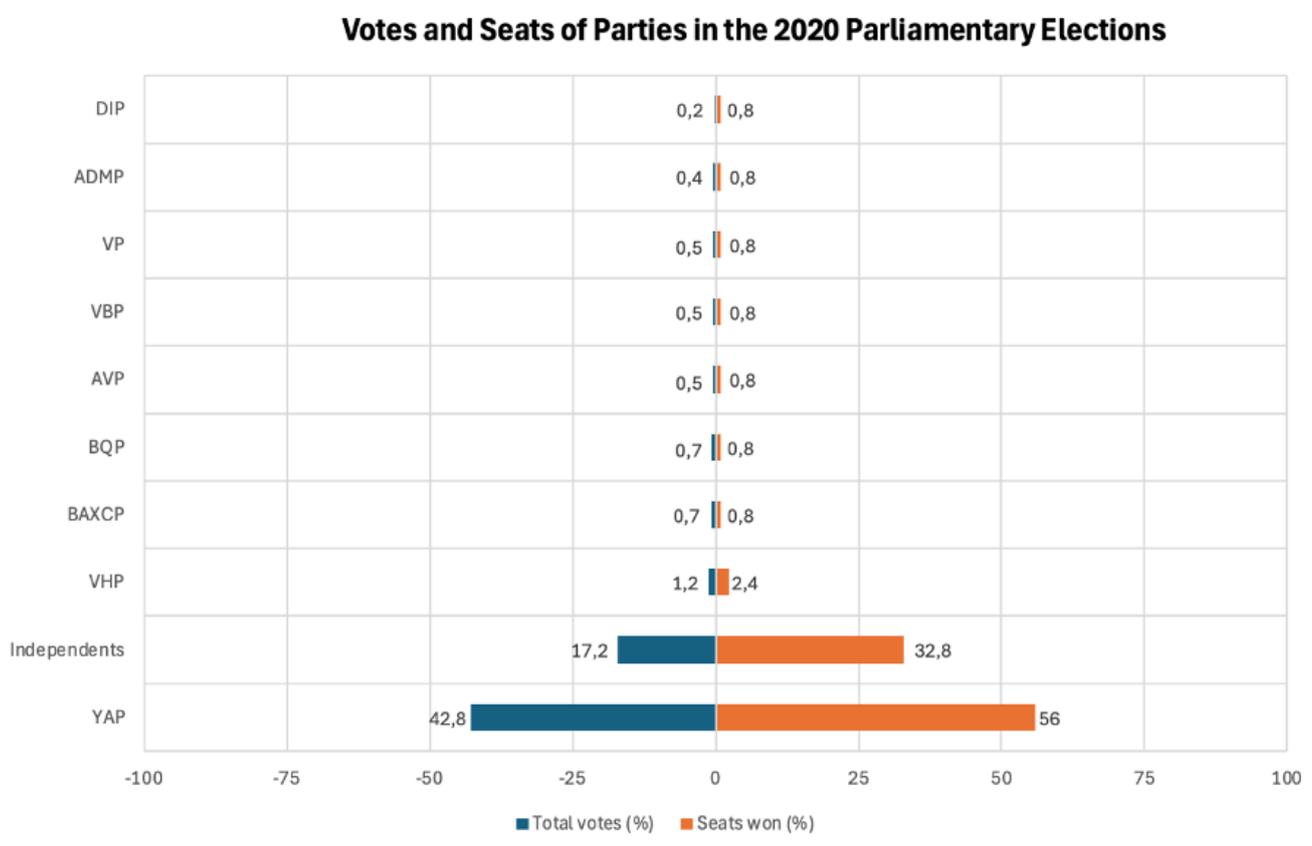
Table 1: Votes and Seats of Parties in the 2024 Parliamentary Elections^[xvii]



A similar situation can be observed in Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections. In the 2024 elections, 2,36 million

voters participated. The candidates elected from the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) won a total of 1,2 million votes and gained 68 seats in parliament. In other words, YAP received 50,4 percent of the votes and obtained 54,4 percent of the seats. Table 1 shows that parties, including independent candidates as a separate group, gained between 1,07 and 2,19 times more seats than their share of the vote.[\[xviii\]](#)

Table 2: Votes and Seats of Parties in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections[\[xix\]](#)

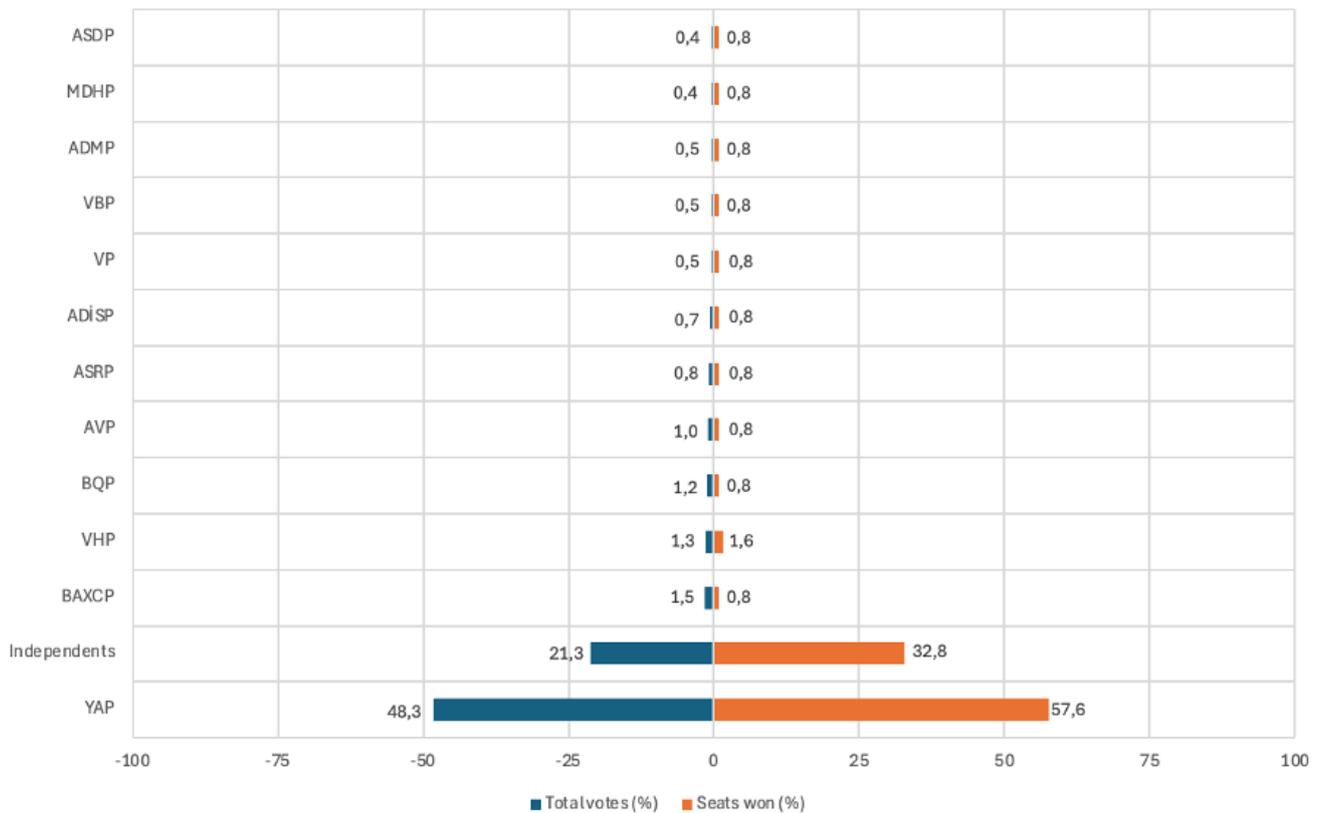


In the 2020 parliamentary elections, about 2,33 million voters participated. YAP received 997.304 votes and obtained 70 seats in the National Assembly. This means that YAP won 42,8 percent of the national vote and 56 percent of the seats, excluding the four annulled constituencies. Table 2 shows that in the 2020 elections, the winning parties, including independents, gained between 1,15 and 3,37 times more seats than their vote share.

Table 3: Votes and Seats of Parties in the 2015 Parliamentary

Elections [xx]

Votes and Seats of Parties in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections



In the 2015 elections, 2,85 million voters participated. YAP received a total of 1.382.499 votes nationwide and won 72 seats in parliament. This means YAP obtained 48,3 percent of the votes and 57,6 percent of the seats. Table 3 shows that in the 2015 parliamentary elections, the winning parties, including independents, gained between 0,54 and 2,03 times more seats than their share of the vote.

Thus, across the 2015, 2020, and 2024 elections, parties and independent candidates gained between 0,54 and 3,37 times more seats than their vote share. This shows once again that disproportionality does not only mean that a party with fewer votes gains more seats, as in the case of 3,37 times, but also that a party with many votes may gain fewer seats, as in the case of 0,54 times.

The most well-known measure of disproportionality is the Gallagher Index. [xxi] This index makes it possible to measure, through a single number, how unequal the relationship is

between the vote share and the seat share obtained by parties. The closer the index is to zero, the more proportional the election results are. The farther it is from zero, the more disproportional the results become.

$$LSq = \sqrt{1/2 * \sum (V_i - S_i)^2}$$

Where V indicates the vote share, and S indicates the seat share.

According to this index, the disproportionality scores of the 2024, 2020, and 2015 parliamentary elections are 3.67, 11.05, and 6.89, respectively. For comparison, in countries using proportional electoral systems, such as Denmark (1,13 in the latest election), the Netherlands (1,46), and Austria (3,24), this index remains much lower. [\[xxii\]](#)

The second problem with the plurality system is that votes cast for candidates who do not win are effectively wasted. Since only one candidate can win in each single-member constituency, votes for other candidates have no practical impact. For example, if candidates A, B, and C receive 40, 35, and 25 percent of the votes respectively, candidate A wins. The 60 percent of votes for candidates B and C have no significance beyond statistics. Wasted votes limit voter representation. Neither the candidate nor the party supported by those voters benefits from these votes in any meaningful way.

This situation was also evident in the 2024 parliamentary elections, even in constituencies where the winning candidates received the highest number of votes. For example, the candidate with the highest vote share in the 2024 elections was Asif Asgarov, who won 79,7 percent of the vote in Constituency No. 112 in Zaqatala. Yet even in this case, 20,3 percent of the votes were lost. Overall, the total number of votes received by all winning candidates in this election was

1.406.209, which equals 59 percent of all votes cast. This means that the candidates chosen by about 41 percent of voters did not win, and their votes were effectively wasted. In other words, the parliament formed as a result of the 2024 elections represents only 59 percent of voters, since the deputies collectively received only that share of the total votes. The amount of wasted votes was 44 percent in the 2020 elections and 32 percent in the 2015 elections. Therefore, the parliaments formed in 2020 and 2015 represented only 56 percent and 68 percent of voters, respectively.

The third negative feature of the plurality system is that a candidate only needs to receive more votes than others to win. This means that candidates who are not supported by more than half of the voters in their constituencies can still be elected. For instance, imagine that candidates A, B, and C receive 38, 35, and 27 percent of the votes, respectively. Under the plurality system, candidate A is declared the winner. However, the voters who did not support candidate A, meaning those who voted for B and C, make up 62 percent of all voters. As a result, the constituency is represented by a candidate who was not chosen by the majority of its voters.

In the 2024 parliamentary elections, in 18 out of 125 constituencies, the winning candidates received less than 50 percent of the votes. For example, in these elections, Fazil Mustafa won with 49,5 percent, Razi Nurullayev with 48,4 percent, and Tanzila Rustamkhanli with 45,9 percent. In the 2020 elections, 39 winners received less than 50 percent of the vote. In other words, about 30 percent of the 125 deputies elected in 2020 were candidates who were not supported by the majority of voters in their constituencies. For instance, Razi Nurullayev won with only 21,4 percent of the vote.

This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that Azerbaijan's Election Code does not set a minimum voter turnout threshold for constituencies. According to Articles 74–75 of the law on parliamentary elections adopted in 1995,

at least 50 percent of voters had to participate for the election to be considered valid.[\[xxiii\]](#) However, in the Election Code adopted in 2003, this provision was removed, and no minimum turnout requirement was retained. As a result, constituencies with both low turnout and low winning vote shares stand out.

For example, in the 2024 elections, Zahid Oruc won in Constituency No. 33, Khatai First, with 4.886 votes. The constituency had 50.800 registered voters, but only 8.429 participated in the election. Thus, voter turnout was only 16,6 percent. Zahid Oruc became an MP with the support of just 9,6 percent of all registered voters in his constituency. In other words, the MP representing Constituency No. 33 in the National Assembly was not chosen by 90,4 percent of its eligible voters.

Conclusion

In this article, I collected and analyzed data on the results of the last three parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, including the constituencies, winning candidates, their vote shares, and their party affiliations. The analysis once again shows that the plurality electoral system, consistent with global trends, contains a high level of disproportionality. The percentage of votes received by parties and the percentage of seats they gain in parliament differ significantly.

In addition, a large share of votes cast by citizens is effectively disregarded, which severely undermines the institution of representation. Moreover, since candidates can win elections with very small vote shares, individuals who are not supported by the majority of voters nevertheless emerge as winners.

Notes and References

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[iii] Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Electoral System".

[%20width="1100"%20height="1040"%20frameborder="0"%20scrolling="no"></iframe](https://data.ipu.org/compare-embed/?chart=pie&field=electoral_system®ion=0&structure=any_lower_chamber&year_to)

[iv] Three different types of elections are held in Azerbaijan: presidential, parliamentary, and municipal. Since this article focuses only on parliamentary elections, any reference to *elections* hereafter refers solely to parliamentary elections.

[v] Both the OSCE and the local observation organization SMDT (Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center) have repeatedly stated in their reports that elections held in Azerbaijan are neither free nor fair.

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[xiv] BBC.com. "UK General election 2024 Results". 2024.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/election/2024/uk/results>

[xv] Gallagher, Michael. Proportionality, disproportionality and electoral systems. *Electoral Studies* 10, no 1. (1991): 33-51, 33

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[\[xvii\]](#) BQP – Great Formation Party; ADMP – Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party; DİP – Democratic Reforms Party; MCP – National Front Party; AMİP – Azerbaijan National Independence Party; AVP – Motherland Party; BAP – Great Azerbaijan Party; REAL – Republican Alternative Party; ƏHD – Justice, Law and Democracy Party (former BAXCP); VHP – Civic Solidarity Party; YAP – New Azerbaijan Party.

[\[xviii\]](#) In the 2024 elections, 44 independent candidates won. For simplicity, I grouped them together under the label “Independents” and used this category in the calculations. I applied the same method for the 2020 and 2015 elections as well.

[\[xix\]](#) DİP – Democratic Reforms Party; ADMP – Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party; VP – Unity Party; VBP – Civic Union Party; AVP – Motherland Party; BQP – Great Formation Party; BAXCP – Whole Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (current ƏHD); VHP – Civic Solidarity Party; YAP – New Azerbaijan Party.

[\[xx\]](#) ASDP – Azerbaijan Social Democratic Party; MDHP – National Revival Movement Party; ADMP – Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party; VBP – Civic Union Party; VP – Unity Party; ADİSP – Azerbaijan Democratic Reforms Political Party (current Democratic Reforms Party); ASRP – Azerbaijan Social Welfare Party; AVP – Motherland Party; BQP – Great Formation Party; VHP – Civic Solidarity Party; BAXCP – Whole Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (currently ƏHD); YAP – New Azerbaijan Party.

[\[xxi\]](#) Gallagher, Michael, Proportionality, disproportionality and electoral systems, *Electoral Studies* 10, no 1, 33-51, 40

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Məclisinə seçkilər haqqında AZƏRBAYCAN RESPUBLİKASININ QANUNU”

<https://e-qanun.az/framework/9441>