

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

Dates of Elections: 26 March to 23 May 1989 (Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR)
26 and 27 May 1989 (Supreme Soviet of the USSR)

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats of the new Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR provided for in the 1988 amendments to the 1977 Constitution* and, subsequently, for the new bicameral Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Characteristics of Parliament

Pursuant to the 1988 constitutional amendments, the national parliamentary system of the USSR underwent radical change in the spring of 1989. The former system with a bicameral Supreme Soviet consisting of 750-member Houses was replaced by a Parliament with a 2,250-member Congress of People's Deputies, which chooses from among its members a bicameral 542-member Supreme Soviet. As before, the latter's seats are equally divided between the two Houses having equal rights: the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities.

Of the 2,250 Deputies, 750 are elected from territorial electoral districts, 750 from national-territorial electoral districts and 750 from all-Union public organizations. All Deputies have 5-year terms of office. The Congress annually re-elects one-fifth of the Supreme Soviet members.

Electoral System

All USSR citizens who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote for electoral district Deputies, with the exception of the insane, persons declared incompetent by a court of law, prisoners and those undergoing compulsory treatment.

All voters exercise the franchise on an equal footing. In every electoral district, voters indicate their preferences for two candidates by crossing out names of candidates they are voting against on two separate ballots - one for the territorial constituency and one for the national-territorial constituency.

* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 18.

Qualified electors who are at least 21 years old are eligible to sit as People's Deputies of the USSR. Members of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (with the exception of the Chairman), heads of government departments, the Chairman and members of the Supreme Court, the Chief State Arbitrator and state arbitrators, and the Chairman and members of the USSR Committee for Constitutional Supervision cannot simultaneously be People's Deputies of the USSR.

Officials elected or appointed by the Soviets of the People's Deputies cannot hold their posts for more than two consecutive terms.

Nomination of candidates for election as People's Deputies of the USSR from electoral districts is made by work collectives, public organizations, meetings of voters in their place of residence and meetings of servicemen in their military units. Nomination of Deputies from public organizations is made by their all-Union or republican bodies, which take into account the proposals of local bodies, grass-root collectives and members of these organizations. There is no limit to the number of candidates.

The 750 Deputies from territorial electoral districts each represent roughly equal numbers of voters. The 750 Deputies from national-territorial electoral districts and the country's recognized ethnic groups have the following representation: 32 Deputies from each Union Republic, 11 Deputies from each Autonomous Republic, 5 Deputies from each Autonomous Region and one Deputy from each Autonomous Area. To be declared elected, a district candidate must receive more than 50% of the votes cast in his or her constituency. Short of this, run-off voting is held between the two best-placed candidates. Fresh elections, including the whole preliminary process, take place in constituencies with two candidates who failed to achieve the required absolute majority. No district poll is valid unless at least 30% of the eligible voters participated therein.

The 750 Deputies elected from public organizations are chosen by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), trade unions, co-operative organizations, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, organizations of women, war veterans, retired workers, scientists, creative unions and other organizations formed in accordance with the law and having all-Union or republican organs. Deputies of public organizations are chosen by delegates to their congresses or conferences, or participants in the plenary meetings of their all-Union or republican bodies. Each delegate to a congress or conference of a public organization has one vote.

As mentioned above, the 542 members of the Supreme Soviet are elected by the totality of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR by absolute majority vote. The Soviet of the Union is elected from among the People's Deputies representing territorial electoral districts and the People's Deputies representing public organizations, taking into account the size of the electorate in a Union Republic or region. The Soviet of Nationalities is elected from among the People's Deputies representing national-territorial electoral districts and the People's Deputies representing public organizations on the basis of the following representation: 11 Deputies from each Union Republic, 4 Deputies from each Autonomous Republic, 2 Deputies from each Autonomous Region and one Deputy from each Autonomous Area. Within each category, those candidates obtaining the most votes over the required 50% are successful. Run-off voting is held if necessary.

Should a seat in the Congress of People's Deputies become vacant between general elections, a by-election is held within three months in the constituency concerned.

Background and Outcome of the Elections

At its 29 November to 1 December 1988 session, the then Supreme Soviet not only approved constitutional amendments and a law on electoral reform but also set the March 1989 general election date.

The month-long nomination of candidates for the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR (CPD) lasted until 24 January 1989. For the next month, selection among the 7,531 district nominees took place at meetings organized by constituency-level electoral commissions. On 7 March, a final list of 5,074 candidates (one in 399 constituencies, two in 953 constituencies and three or more in 163 constituencies) was published; approximately 85% of these were members of the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and 17% were women.

In the two weeks prior to the 1500 district polls, elections to fill the 750 reserved seats of public organizations, contested by 880 candidates, were held. Of these seats, 100 were allocated to the CPSU, 100 to the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, 75 to the Communist Youth Union (*Komsomol*), 75 to the Soviet Women's Committee, 75 to the War and Labour Veterans' Organization, and 325 to other organizations such as the Academy of Sciences. The selection process was ultimately completed in April.

In the 26 March general elections, voter participation was reported at 89.8%. With this polling, 1,958 - including 1,225 district seats - of the 2,250 CPD seats were filled. In the district races, run-off elections were held in 76 constituencies on 2 and 9 April and fresh elections were organized on 20 April and 14 to 23 May in the 199 remaining constituencies where the required absolute majority was not attained.

At its first session commencing on 25 May, the CPD proceeded to choose the 542 Supreme Soviet members from among 573 candidates. Final results were announced on 27 May. The Supreme Soviet, a "permanent legislative, administrative and central body of state authority of the USSR", is to be convened annually by its Presidium for its recurrent spring and autumn sessions to last, as a rule, three to four months each.

The Supreme Soviet was convened for its first session on 3 June. On 21 July, the composition of the new Council of Ministers, headed by Mr. Nikolai Ryzhkov, was announced.

Statistics

1. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex*

	Congress of People's Deputies	Supreme Soviet
Men	1,897	448
Women	<u>352</u>	94**
	2,249*	542

* Plus one vacancy.

** 39 in the Soviet of the Union and 55 in the Soviet of Nationalities.