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Kazakh Opposition Protests Vote Result

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ALMATY — Kazakh opposition leaders set fire to copies of voting results on Tuesday in a public repudiation of weekend elections that reinforced President Nursultan Nazarbayev's grip on power only a month after deadly clashes in a mutinous oil town.

Around 100 disgruntled voters held a peaceful protest in Kazakhstan's largest city to say they did not recognize the results of the elections, which were heralded by authorities in the republic as a democratic first.

In a rare provocative gesture, Social Democratic leaders set fire to a Nur Otan campaign poster and to photocopies of election papers showing results from individual polling stations in Almaty.

"We will no longer play by the rules of those in power," Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, a former parliamentary speaker and prosecutor general who switched to the opposition seven years ago, told protesters huddled in the snow behind Republic Square.

Nazarbayev, in power since Soviet days, cast the overwhelming victory of his Nur Otan party as an endorsement of national unity after his prized image of stability was dented by riots

involving fired oilmen in the western Mangistau region.

⊠Two parties will join Nur Otan in parliament for the first time in 20 years of independence.

⊠But both parties are broadly sympathetic to the government, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's observer mission said genuine opposition parties had been barred.

⊠Tuyakbai co-chairs the All-National Social Democratic Party, which says it was the only genuine opposition choice among seven parties on the ballot. It received 1.7 percent of the vote, but is convinced the real tally was higher.

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