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**TECHNICAL ELECTION  
ASSESSMENT MISSION:  
GEORGIA 2020  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION  
INTERIM REPORT**

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GEORGIA 2020  
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INTERIM REPORT**

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*Technical Election Assessment Mission: Georgia 2020 Parliamentary  
Election Interim Report*

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# INTRODUCTION

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In June and July of 2020, the government of Georgia adopted significant constitutional and election reforms, including a modification of Georgia's mixed electoral system and a reduction in the national proportional threshold from 5 percent to 1 percent of vote share — presenting an opportunity for citizens to pursue viable third-party options and the possibility of a new coalition government after decades of single-party domination. The international community hailed the reforms as a step forward for Georgia, particularly as they were later coupled with electoral amendments that incorporated many recommendations of international and domestic observers following the 2018 presidential election.

On October 31, many Georgians showed their enthusiasm for democracy by going to the polls despite the potential risk of COVID-19 infection. The Central Election Commission (CEC) reported 56.1-percent turnout (a 5-percent increase from 2016) — signaling Georgians' eagerness to participate in a new electoral system created to ensure greater representation and diversity in parliament. The newly reduced threshold resulted in nine parties acquiring the requisite vote share to achieve parliamentary representation.

However, the spirit of the reforms — aimed at encouraging multiparty democracy and coalition rule — were affected by credible reports of irregularities in the campaign period and on Election Day. The most concerning irregularities reported by observers were allegations regarding the misuse of state administrative resources, vote buying, intimidation of voters and observer groups, manipulation of precinct-level summary protocols.

The elections were conducted according to prescribed laws and were generally held in a peaceful environment. However, from a procedural standpoint, a flawed results-management system that is susceptible to manipulation has further weakened public confidence in Georgia's electoral institutions and has exposed a trend of increasing citizen concern over the independence and professionalism of the CEC, particularly at the subnational level. In the long term, Georgia's new government will need to work together to enact further reforms to ensure future elections are conducted with greater integrity, there is time in the near term for Georgia to address shortcomings identified by credible observers and work to repair public trust prior to the November 21 runoff election.

In the spirit of international cooperation and continued support for electoral integrity in Georgia, the International Republican Institute offers the following **priority recommendations** to government, political actors, civil society and media to improve the political climate and quality of the runoff election:

- To facilitate a peaceful solution to the current political crisis, parties should refrain from heated rhetoric and encourage their supporters to abstain from violence, provocation or intimidation, and instead engage in constructive dialogue.
- State institutions adjudicating election-related disputes — especially appeals to recount or annul election results — should examine complaints expeditiously. Where evidence of manipulation exists and the integrity of the results count is in question, a recount of results and sanctioning of offenders should take place swiftly. In the long term, greater scrutiny of dispute-adjudication processes is needed to ensure more timely, effective and transparent resolution of election-related complaints.
- Law-enforcement agencies should investigate and guarantee the timely sanction of perpetrators of electoral intimidation and violence, including offenses against journalists and election observers.
- To ensure that the results of elections are accepted by the populace and are a genuine expression of the will of the people, the CEC should take immediate steps to improve its results-management processes, including enhanced training for precinct election commission members and — absent amendments to the Electoral Code — the adoption of alternative results-verification methods in line with democratic norms and practices. In the long term, the parliament must enact deeper reforms to address shortcomings in lower-level election commissions and results-management processes.
- To ensure that the rights of nonpartisan, independent observers are upheld and that they can work without interference, all election commission members — especially those responsible for registering complaints — should adhere to calls from the Public Defender of Georgia and eschew all forms of intimidation against observer organizations.
- To protect the health and safety of all Georgian voters, election officials, political actors, the CEC and public health authorities should continue to inform the public of COVID-19 voting procedures and safety and sanitation measures, and implore all political parties and their supporters to collectively adhere to health protocols before, during and after Election Day.
- Political candidates should refrain from provocative campaign rhetoric and should adopt public communications strategies that elaborate on their policy plans for addressing divisions within Georgian society. Parties should welcome and embrace opportunities to engage in constructive debate that focuses on issues concerning the Georgian populace, including the issues of ethnic-minority populations, and vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Political parties, electoral subjects and their coordinators should adhere to the Political Party Code of Conduct and the Interagency Commission on Free and Fair Elections recommendations to ensure their supporters do not interfere with the campaign activities or observation processes of their opponents, while publicly condemning the use of coercion, intimidation, bribery and gender-based cyberbullying.
- Political parties should eschew and publicly condemn the manipulation of social media to deliberately obscure party identities, foment discord and sow disinformation to confuse the electorate.

# POLITICAL CONTEXT

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Since its independence, Georgia has made impressive strides toward consolidating its democratic aspirations — reducing corruption, fostering a free and diverse media and cultivating a culture of political pluralism.

Since defeating former President Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement (UNM) party in 2012, the Georgian Dream — Democratic Georgia (GD) party and a coalition of six other parties have dominated Georgia's political space. Georgia's mixed-majoritarian electoral system, which tends to favor the party that wins the highest number of seats — but not necessarily the most overall votes — has deepened divisions between the ruling and opposition parties and their allies and inhibited new and emerging parties from establishing themselves as viable alternatives.

In recent years, political discourse has been characterized by vitriolic debate, with politicians utilizing the very real threat of malign foreign influence to paint political opponents as “pro-Russian.” Taking Georgia's geopolitical history into account — specifically the 2008 Russian annexation of the Tskhinvali Region and the years of creeping borderization by Russia — this has been particularly corrosive to the political culture. Mistrust of the CEC — especially partisan appointments of lower-level election bodies — has further undermined public confidence in institutions and political actors. Moreover, public trust in national media outlets is low. Private and public media are widely perceived as conduits of the two main political forces, and disinformation from internal and external malign actors has further exacerbated deep political divisions.

# PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

## Electoral System

Legislative amendments made in July and September 2020 provided the legal basis for an enhanced electoral system. Substantive modifications to ensure a more inclusive and diverse parliament included: a shift from the previous system of 77 proportional and 73 majoritarian mandates to a system of 120 proportional and 30 majoritarian mandates; a reduction of the requisite national proportional threshold from 5 percent to 1 percent; and a minimum requirement of 40 percent of seats of the proportional list to form a single-party majority. Additional legislative reforms pertained to composition of lower-level precinct election commissions, deadlines for resolving complaints of electoral offenses, provisions to limit Election Day interference from party activists, increased accessibility for wheelchair users and specific regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, among others.

## Election Administration

Pre-election processes were transparent, well administered and according to law. The CEC provided robust voter education through all types of media and made extensive use of outdoor advertising, social media and direct engagement with voters. Training precinct and district election commission (DEC/PEC) members, though occasionally underattended, was comprehensive and professional. Training materials in Georgian, Azeri and Armenian were disseminated and trainings were held online and in person.

Although the legislative reforms and conduct of the CEC in the pre-election period were mostly well received by domestic and international observers, the CEC has struggled to capture the broad trust of Georgian citizens. Some civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties with whom International Republican Institute (IRI) analysts met expressed doubts about the administration's neutrality and independence — particularly at the lower commission level where 1,483 GD party nominees were elected to executive posts in PECs while the combined total of heads, deputies and secretaries elected from the nominees of all opposition parties numbered just 13.

International and domestic observer communities recommended in previous election reports that the government of Georgia revamp the election and appointment process for DEC/PEC members; however, this was not addressed in either the June or July reform passages and remains a persistent threat to electoral integrity in Georgia. The fact that the government of Georgia failed to address this issue in the 2020 reforms represents a missed opportunity to have party members appointed to PECs in a manner more inclusive of opposition parties. Such a reform might have allayed public concerns that Georgia's ruling party continues to pull institutional levers to its advantage.

## Campaign Environment

Campaign rallies were less visible than in previous elections, though different forms of election campaigning such as door-to-door canvassing, community meetings, traditional media coverage (TV shows, debates and paid and earned political advertisements) and social media outreach continued. Populist messaging and negative social media campaigning undermined issue-focused campaign efforts, though in-person community-outreach events held by political parties tended to be more issue based. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) televised debates were one of the few broadcast debates in which the Georgian Dream party participated.<sup>1</sup> The persistent refusal of many political candidates to engage in issue-based dialogue was a missed opportunity for parties and candidates to communicate their policy positions to voters.

There were few reports of serious electoral violence; however, this increased closer to Election Day. Despite 40 political parties signing a Political Party Code of Conduct, the pre-election campaign period was marred by irregularities including assaults on campaign activists, destruction of campaign property and other provocations such as the recruitment of so-called “athletes” to intimidate voters.<sup>2</sup> Public servants campaigning during working hours, the abuse of state administrative resources, threats to withhold social services from opposition supporters and intimidation from local security services were also frequently reported.

The Interagency Commission for Free and Fair Elections (IACFFE), chaired by the Ministry of Justice, intended to enhance coordination among and between governmental agencies and political parties. However, it was boycotted by opposition parties who alleged that IACFFE acted in the ruling party’s interests, rather than its intended aim to prevent election malpractice and facilitate effective resolution of complaints.<sup>3</sup>

## Campaign Finance

Nineteen political parties were eligible for state funding. According to the State Audit Office (SAO) – the body responsible for campaign-finance oversight – the ruling GD party received more than 10 million Georgian lari (GEL), the highest amount among all parties. Similar figures were reflected in the GD’s expenditures for campaigning and political activities. While the opposition has alleged strong links exist between the ruling party and persons at business entities that won state tenders, the SAO does not have the capacity to fully investigate these links nor analyze the financial activities between the ruling party and businesses.

<sup>1</sup> From October 1 to October 29, the GPB organized four debates with qualified electoral subjects and, in addition but separately, four debates with other electoral subjects. The order and composition of the debates were decided by lottery.

<sup>2</sup> “Political Party Code of Conduct for the 2020 Parliamentary Elections.” Government of Georgia, 2020, [cesko.ge/res/docs/Parties-2020Eng29.09.pdf](https://cesko.ge/res/docs/Parties-2020Eng29.09.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> “Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) Re-established.” Government of Georgia, [gov.ge/print.php?gg=1&sec\\_id=186&info\\_id=30452&lang\\_id=ENG](https://gov.ge/print.php?gg=1&sec_id=186&info_id=30452&lang_id=ENG).



Following the August release of a private dossier, it was widely reported that the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) allegedly received funding from sources connected to Russian intelligence, as well as that APG received funds from Moscow-based POLITSECRETS, though these reports have never been confirmed by Georgian authorities.<sup>4</sup> As a result, some opposition parties appealed to the CEC to revoke APG's registration as a qualified electoral subject and urged the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia to open an investigation into APG for accepting funding from foreign entities. No punitive action was taken. In its October 30 interim report, Transparency International (TI) noted that the SAO lacks authority and legal agency to investigate allegations of foreign-funded political parties.<sup>5</sup>

In the pre-election period, the SAO filed eight protocols of administrative offense and imposed sanctions against some offenders of campaign-finance laws. However, the SAO — though positively assessed by civil society organizations and other stakeholders — was under-resourced and struggled to investigate direct and indirect campaign financing effectively.

## Media Environment and Disinformation

While television played a prominent role in the information space, trust in media overall is low. The persistent refusal of political actors to participate in broadcasted debates prior to Election Day prevented citizens from receiving information on party platforms, affecting citizens' ability to make informed choices. There were also reports involving threats against media professionals, as well

as a widely publicized incident in Marneuli in which a journalist was severely injured and a cameraman's equipment broken.

Foreign and homegrown disinformation remained a concern during the pre-election period. Several CSOs engaged in broadcast and online media monitoring including, among others, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE), the latter within the framework of the "Media Monitor" project by the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Two other projects — Myth Detector run by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) and factcheck.ge by Georgia's Reform Associates (GRASS) — were part of Facebook's third-party fact-check program.<sup>6</sup>

Some disinformation was related to COVID-19, the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the so-called "cartographers" case and the David Gareji monastery, and was often combined with anti-Western and anti-NATO statements. For example, some media outlets aligned with the APG party or those with a pro-Russian editorial policy published Turkophobic statements in the context of comparing Turkey's and Russia's roles in Georgia's history and presence. The potential impact of disinformation in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was of particularly sensitive nature, as both Azeri and Armenian minorities form part of Georgia's population.

<sup>4</sup> Neal, Will. "NGO Probe Finds Russia 'Directly Influencing' Georgian Politics." *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, 1 Sept. 2020, [occrp.org/en/daily/13042-ngo-probe-finds-russia-directly-influencing-georgian-politics](https://occrp.org/en/daily/13042-ngo-probe-finds-russia-directly-influencing-georgian-politics).

<sup>5</sup> "Funding of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia — Interim Report." *Transparency International*, 2020, [transparency.ge/ge/post/sakartvelos-parlamentis-2020-clis-archevnebis-kampaniis-dapinanseba-shualeduri-angarishi](https://transparency.ge/ge/post/sakartvelos-parlamentis-2020-clis-archevnebis-kampaniis-dapinanseba-shualeduri-angarishi).

<sup>6</sup> "Myth Detector and FactCheck Georgia Have Partnered with Facebook." *Mythdetector*, 17 Sept. 2020, [mythdetector.ge/en/myth/myth-detector-and-factcheck-georgia-have-partnered-facebook](https://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/myth-detector-and-factcheck-georgia-have-partnered-facebook).

ISFED's social media monitors analyzed 700 Facebook pages from June 1 to August 31 and 900 Facebook pages from September 1 to October 10. The monitors identified 69 pages that were disseminating anti-Western, xenophobic or homophobic information and operating in support of pro-Russian candidates.<sup>7</sup> In its October 2020 report on coordinated inauthentic behavior, Facebook reported that it had taken down 54 Facebook accounts, 14 pages, two groups and 21 Instagram accounts linked to two political parties in Georgia, namely the Alliance of Patriots and Georgian Choice.<sup>8</sup> According to Facebook, the networks were discovered after reviewing reports published by ISFED.<sup>9</sup> Facebook also confirmed that it had removed 50 Facebook accounts, 49 pages, four groups, eight events and 19 Instagram accounts linked to "Alt-Info" — a media outlet that local fact-checking programs had identified for publishing manipulative articles. Facebook later stated it banned Alt-Info from its platform.

## Campaign Finance

The continuation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh during the pre-election period diverted the attention of voters in the main ethnic-minority regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. While the embassy of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi turned down offers from local volunteers to join the fighting, the Armenian communities mobilized to collect humanitarian aid and cancelled large-scale political rallies. Although civil society groups reported that the campaign in Samtskhe-Javakheti was consequently calmer than in previous years, the GD majoritarian candidate was physically assaulted six days before the elections.<sup>10</sup> In the last two weeks, multiple incidents involving assault, threats and damage to property were reported in Kvemo Kartli.<sup>11</sup>

To make voting and information more accessible for persons with disabilities, the CEC translated informational videos into sign language; conducted an online course for PEC and DEC members on how to use frames for the visually impaired; adopted temporary procedures for the participation of voters using wheelchairs; and developed an interactive map of the 1,126 polling stations accessible to wheelchair users.

## Inclusion

In the pre-election period, a total of 17 ethnic-majoritarian candidates ran in two ethnic-minority constituencies, three of whom were women. Several political parties nominated candidates belonging to ethnic-minority groups on their party lists. The CEC took steps to ensure minorities had access to information, such as creating voter-education materials and multilingual ballots in Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian languages.

In 2020, a new mandatory gender quota obliged political parties to present proportional lists on which at least one of every four candidates were representing different gender. All 50 registered electoral subjects adopted the gender quota, with 29 qualifying for 30-percent additional state funding for having exceeded the requirement. The 2020 quota will ensure a more inclusive parliament for Georgian women, who comprise 53.7 percent of voters but currently hold only 14 percent of seats in parliament and 13 percent in local government.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid footnote 7

<sup>8</sup> "October 2020 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report." Facebook, Oct. 2020, <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/11/october-2020-cib-report/>

<sup>9</sup> "ISFED Has Released Its Interim Report on Social Media Monitoring II" [in Georgian]. ISFED, 26 Oct. 2020, [isfed.ge/geo/presrelzebi/ISFED-ma-sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringis-ii-shualeduri-angarishi-tsarmoadgina](https://isfed.ge/geo/presrelzebi/ISFED-ma-sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringis-ii-shualeduri-angarishi-tsarmoadgina).

<sup>10</sup> Karslyan, B. "The Incident in the Village of Samsar. Dream Candidate's Nose Broken." 2020, nor.

[ge/?p=157272&fbclid=IwAR088d80Rc4rPheo6QrEaq4wf3q7wE3sPJqRPx1qkqSl6ZECiw5DilqzeRA](https://www.nor.ge/?p=157272&fbclid=IwAR088d80Rc4rPheo6QrEaq4wf3q7wE3sPJqRPx1qkqSl6ZECiw5DilqzeRA).

<sup>11</sup> "Live Blog: Election Violations and Responses." Transparency International, 31 Oct. 2020, [transparency.org/en/blog/live-blog-election-violations-and-responses](https://www.transparency.org/en/blog/live-blog-election-violations-and-responses).

# ELECTION DAY

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## Election Administration

The October 31 parliamentary elections were competitive, conducted professionally and with respect for citizens' rights as prescribed in the constitution of Georgia.<sup>12</sup> The election administration met its legal obligations and, with the exception of the results-management process, managed the technical aspects of the elections effectively. While COVID-19 measures were implemented effectively in the pre-election period, health protocols were only loosely observed on Election Day.

The epidemiological situation in Georgia does not appear to have hampered voter turnout, with CEC reporting 56.11 percent — an increase from 2016. Election Day was mostly peaceful, though there were some isolated incidents of violence in Tbilisi, Gldani and Marneuli. However, reports from reliable domestic observers detailed numerous procedural irregularities on Election Day, such as not inking voters; photo taking in or near voting booths compromising the secrecy of the ballot; confusion over roles and responsibilities of PEC members that caused disruptions; inconsistent application of COVID-19 health protocols; and miscounting and/or manipulation of summary protocols by PECs.

Other irregularities reported by observer groups pertained to the voting atmosphere, such as overcrowding in polling stations by party proxies, excessive presence of party coordinators inside and outside of polling stations that interfered with PEC management and voting processes, alleged vote buying, carousel voting schemes and other flaws, including intimidation of domestic observers representing ISFED. Overall, the immense presence of party, citizen-observer and media representatives — of which the CEC registered 80,819, 46,981 and 5,971 representatives, respectively, to observe — contributed to a chaotic voting environment. In particular, the voluminous registration of media representatives in elections is a persistent alleged scheme used by electoral subjects to bypass the limit on the number of party representatives that each subject can have in a polling station.

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<sup>12</sup> IRI analysts did not conduct a systematic observation of polling stations or district election commissions, but have based this analysis on reports aggregated by reputable observer groups including TI, GYLA, ISFED, PMMG and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as superficial monitoring of select PECs and DEC in Tbilisi on Election Day.

## Election Results as of November 8

Party	% Vote Share	PR Seats	Majoritarian SMD Seats	Total Seats as of November 8
Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia	48.23%	61	13	74
United National Movement – United Opposition Bloc	27.17%	34		34
European Georgia	3.79%	4		
Strategy Agmashenebeli	3.15%	4		
Lelo	3.15%	4		
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	3.14%	4		
Girchi	2.89%	3		
Citizens	1.32%	1		
Labour Party	1%	1		

As a result of a reduced threshold, nine parties reached or exceeded the 1-percent minimum vote share on the proportional list required to achieve parliamentary status. The new electoral system (120 proportional list and 30 seats majoritarian, single-member districts) also resulted in a reduction of seats for the ruling GD party – down from 115 seats in 2016. As of November 8, GD had 74 seats in parliament. GD will have a maximum of 91 seats (74 proportional list seats as of November 8 and 17 majoritarian seats if they win all runoffs). Having achieved more than 40 percent of the vote share before the November 21 runoff, the GD secured the requisite 40 percent share to unilaterally form a government. In majoritarian districts, the GD received the most vote share in 29 out of 30 constituencies. In 13 constituencies, GD achieved more than 50 percent of the votes, which is sufficient to secure the seat without going to a runoff. However, the GD will contest the remaining 17 majoritarian constituencies in runoff elections on November 21 (eight of them in Tbilisi). Nine

runoff races outside of Tbilisi will be between GD and UNM candidates while, in Tbilisi, GD will compete with UNM (three constituencies), European Georgia (two constituencies), the Labour Party (one constituency), Girchi New Political Center (one constituency) and the Citizens Party (one constituency).<sup>13</sup>

## Results Management

For a variety of reasons, the DEC/PEC results management requires institutional improvement. Though the Election Day count was conducted smoothly, numerous irregularities – including an unprecedented number of mismatched and corrected summary protocols – were reported by parties and observer organizations.

Unintentional mistakes exist in every election. However, according to the CEC, the number of amended protocols was 1,167 (537 proportional and 594 majoritarian), roughly twice as many as there were in 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Districts in which there will be a runoff include: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 21, 23, 27, 28 and 30.

While many of the amended protocols were due to legitimate errors such as incorrect time signatures or small mathematical errors, some were not. In the aftermath of Election Day, IRI noted that the procedures in place for results management are not sufficiently transparent nor conducive to achieving credible results. An IRI evaluation of the CEC results-management systems – including a review of protocol forms, CEC guidelines for Election Day procedures, CEC guidelines for PEC members and the Election Code provisions – shows weak mechanisms to enforce and ensure that PEC-level results are adequately cross-checked, mathematically correct and verified before transmission to the DEC level.

DECs have a right, not necessarily an obligation, to verify and amend PEC protocols on the basis of Article 21e of the Election Code of Georgia and DECs have discretionary authority to make decisions regarding recounts. However, the Election Code does not sufficiently define the circumstances under which DECs are obliged to recount the results. Preliminary analysis of protocol summaries conducted by IRI and observer organizations indicates that some amended protocol summaries that reached the DECs were accepted based solely on “explanatory notes,” seemingly without deeper investigation. The practice of accepting amended protocols in this manner may undermine trust in lower-level election commissions further underscoring the essential need to reform and adopt new results-management systems, practices and guidelines.

Based on a sampling of protocols IRI accessed and analyzed from the CEC website, some anomalies included:

- PEC summary protocols where ballots cast exceeded the number of voter signatures.
- Instances of voters permitted to cast a ballot for a majoritarian candidate outside of their voting district.
- Protocol amendments without a stamp.
- Indications of deliberate falsification of summary protocols.
- Summary protocols with obvious mathematical errors, which were initially accepted by DECs.
- Instances of missing ballots.
- An instance in which the DEC positively verified results of a PEC proportional summary protocol where recorded votes for an opposition party were zero but were then corrected 15 hours later.
- An instance of coordinated reversing of digits and simultaneous correction of the number of invalid ballots.
- An instance of a high number of invalid ballots (10 percent) on a majoritarian summary protocol.
- An instance in which the number of voter signatures on the list did not match the results on the summary protocol.

IRI also analyzed majoritarian district 13 (exclusive of polling stations in Gardabani municipality) and found that in more than 33 percent of PECs (31 out of 91) there were amended protocols and explanatory notes from chairpersons and secretaries. Though most amendments concerned minor mistakes such as a wrong time stamp, without analysis of every summary protocol, it's difficult to ascertain the extent to which more serious anomalies occurred elsewhere.

According to a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) conducted by ISFED, there were instances of mismatched summary protocols in some polling stations where the number of ballots cast exceeded the number of voters on the list and the mismatch was significantly greater than in previous elections. ISFED's PVT indicated that mismatches of that scale were reported at 8 percent of polling stations, which may have influenced the results of some electoral subjects, though the PVT analysis also shows that its maximum impact on election results would be less than 4.1 percent.<sup>14</sup>

## Complaints and Appeals

Mismanaged results counting and verification, errors on summary protocols, lack of transparency in the process and general procedural issues underpinned some 1,900 complaints filed with DEC following Election Day. In particular, the abundance of mismatched summary protocols fueled hundreds of complaints and appeals, resulting in the

biggest credibility crises for the CEC. Among the irregularities that the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) noted pertaining to the results management was that DEC routinely corrected summary protocols based on the "explanatory notes" of PEC members, sometimes even before reviewing the complaint, and in such a manner that the sealed documents were not opened and the accuracy of the data in the explanations was not verified.

Despite a window of only two days to file a formal appeal, GYLA, Transparency International (TI), ISFED and Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG) filed 339 appeals against PEC decisions in which claimants requested a recount and/or results annulment. However, most were unsuccessful in their pursuit to recount or annul the results; of the four, GYLA had the highest success rate. As of November 11, recounts of 39 polling stations were conducted by DEC. Of the recounts that took place, six were initiated by the DEC, 14 were the result of a complaint and 19 were on the basis of a court decision.

Organization	Complaints Requesting PEC Level Results Recounted and/or annuled	Number of Complaints Satisfied	Percent of Complaints Satisfied	Number of Complaints Not Satisfied	Number of DEC Decisions Appealed
ISFED	162	10	6%	152	no data
GYLA	109	19	17%	79*	38
TI	62	3	4%	40**	42
PMMG	6	no data	no data	4***	4***

\*Two withdrew and nine were "unresolved" due to electronic submissions

\*\*Nineteen were not considered due to procedural reasons

\*\*\* At least four and all in Marneuli-Gardabani district

<sup>14</sup> "Results of Parallel Vote Tabulation." International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, 1 Nov. 2020, [isfed.ge/eng/presrelizebi/201101022808khmebis-paraleluri-datvlis-PVT-shedegebi](https://isfed.ge/eng/presrelizebi/201101022808khmebis-paraleluri-datvlis-PVT-shedegebi).

Another concerning issue on October 31 was the reported harassment and intimidation of observers on and after Election Day. According to the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, observer organizations reported that some DEC members were abusive and insulting, which exacerbated tensions during the post-election period, especially during the complaints and appeals process.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the Public Defender appealed to the CEC “to provide a pressure-free, business and ethical working environment for observer organizations in district commissions.” Negative experiences were also shared with IRI by other observers who reported that the DECs were unable or unwilling to provide specific information about corrections to protocols made in an opaque manner and during night sessions.

## Opposition Boycott

Twenty parties including the AOP rejected the results of October 31 parliamentary elections on the basis that widespread irregularities with summary protocols cast doubts on the credibility of the results. On November 3, 19 of the opposition parties signed an agreement refusing to participate in the November 21 runoff elections or join the next parliament — including all eight opposition parties that passed the 1-percent threshold — claiming that the October 31 elections took place under a number of significant violations and failed to express the will of the Georgian people.<sup>16</sup>

In response, the CEC took a defensive posture, rejected opposition parties’ claims and alleged that the parties were intentionally spreading disinformation to sow public distrust. The GD party also rejected opposition parties’ claims that a significant enough number of violations

occurred that it may have impacted the overall results.

Georgia faces a political crisis as a result of the impasse. On November 8, the opposition held a protest at which it made three demands: a new election, the resignation of the CEC chairwoman and the release of three alleged political prisoners.<sup>17</sup> As of November 9, it remains to be seen whether these demands will be met.

## Inclusion

GD and UNM met the minimum statutory gender quota, placing five women among the top 20 candidates on their party lists and three in the top 10.<sup>18</sup> Three of the nine winning parties placed six women in their top 20, while Strategy Aghmashenebeli included eight. The conservative Alliance for Patriots placed a woman at the top of its list, as did the United Georgia — Democratic Movement — one of very few parties led by a woman — which missed the 1-percent threshold required to enter parliament. Another smaller opposition party led by a prominent female politician, For Justice, nominated women for half of the positions on its list but did not come close to passing the threshold.

In total, 29 women were elected from the proportional lists, representing an increase from the current 14 percent to 19 percent of seats held by women in the Georgian parliament. The names of female members of parliament (MPs) from six parties have been announced, with 15 from GD, eight from UNM, two from Strategy Aghmashenebeli, one from Lelo, one from Girchi and one from the Alliance of Patriots. EG will allocate list numbers to its candidates after the runoff.

<sup>15</sup> Lomjaria, Nino. Accessed 3 Nov. 2020, [facebook.com/nino.lomjaria.1](https://www.facebook.com/nino.lomjaria.1).

<sup>16</sup> Signatories to the agreement were the United National Movement-led election bloc Strength in Unity, European Georgia, Lelo for Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Girchi, Citizens, Labor Party, Republican Party, State for People, European Democrats, Free Democrats, Free Georgia, Freedom party, United Georgia, Tribune-CDM, Victorious Georgia, For Justice party, Law and Justice, and the Christian-Democratic Movement.

<sup>17</sup> “PM Gakharia Says ‘No Alternative to Negotiations.’” Georgia Election Live Blog, 9 Nov. 2020, [civil.ge/archives/363949](https://civil.ge/archives/363949).

<sup>18</sup> Kincha, Shota. “Georgia’s Political Parties Ranked by Number of Women Candidates.” OC Media, 14 Oct. 2020, [oc-media.org/georgias-political-parties-ranked-by-number-of-women-candidates/?fbclid=IwAR2U8Jn6y\\_V69uXyRy5ug6vaBsGLg6z15sAEsFyrHknoz-gWAZ87N3AwQNk](https://oc-media.org/georgias-political-parties-ranked-by-number-of-women-candidates/?fbclid=IwAR2U8Jn6y_V69uXyRy5ug6vaBsGLg6z15sAEsFyrHknoz-gWAZ87N3AwQNk).

Of the 107 women who ran for the majoritarian seats — which are not subject to the gender quota — only one was nominated by the ruling party, which dominated the race. She will contest the runoff as the frontrunner in the southeastern region (Rustavi) of Kvemo Kartli. The UNM nominated three women, one of whom made it to a regional runoff while another will contest a seat in Tbilisi. Both female candidates have already been elected by proportional list. A prominent EG politician and joint opposition candidate in Tbilisi will be the fourth woman whose candidacy has been confirmed for the second round. She trailed the GD frontrunner by 6.7 percentage points. No women majoritarian candidates were elected in the first round.

Voter turnout in the first round of the parliamentary elections was higher, up 5 percent from 51.63 in 2016 to 56.11 percent in 2020. Of those who voted, 50.28 percent were women. According to the CEC, more than 56 percent of the accredited election observers were also women.

Although persons with disabilities could make use of informational material made available by the CEC to assist them in accessing the available services, the turnout among this group of voters has traditionally been low. Only 2.9 percent of persons with registered disabilities voted in the 2018 presidential election. Advocacy groups warned that the COVID-19 pandemic could suppress turnout among voters with disabilities, who might have been more motivated to participate had their issues featured more prominently in political-party programs and campaigns. The CEC confirmed that as few as 14 wheelchair users had contacted the CEC by Election Day to request access to an adapted polling station in their voting district.

As a result of the reduction in majoritarian districts and where smaller districts merged, the representation of ethnic minorities in parliament shrank from seven to six seats, or 4 percent of parliament, none of whom are women. The results upheld the long-standing trend of ethnic-minority support for the ruling party. Five representatives of the GD were elected, three from the party list and two as majoritarian candidates. One opposition candidate was elected from the UNM list.

Not all nine parties that crossed the 1-percent threshold included ethnic-minority candidates on their lists, and only one party placed one such candidate among its top 10. Another four parties included ethnic-minority candidates among the top 20 or 30 candidates, whereas most were placed after the 50th candidate on the party list.<sup>19</sup> Some 13 percent of the population in Georgia falls into ethnic-minority groups, but only members of the two largest, Azerbaijani and Armenian, will enter the new parliament.

Observers in the densely populated ethnic-minority regions reported violations of electoral procedures and health protocols on Election Day, but also cases in which voters were pressured inside and outside polling stations or the secrecy of the vote was not observed.<sup>20</sup> Several groups reported successful cases of carousel voting in Marneuli.<sup>21</sup> While the Human Rights Center noted that poor Georgian-language skills prevented PEC chairs from communicating with voters and observers in some ethnic-minority villages, IRI received reports that the widespread discrepancies in summary protocols in ethnic-minority regions could not be explained by any differences in the selection or training of PEC members compared to previous elections.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Final Report on Pre-electoral Environment Monitoring of the 2020 Elections." PMMG and USAID, 2020, [pmmg.org.ge/res/uploads/Final%20Report%20on%20Pre-electoral%20Environment%20Monitoring%20of%20the%202020.pdf](https://pmmg.org.ge/res/uploads/Final%20Report%20on%20Pre-electoral%20Environment%20Monitoring%20of%20the%202020.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Marneuli Precinct #13.22.65." Transparency International Georgia, 3 Nov. 2020, [facebook.com/TransparencyInternationalGeorgia/videos/marneuli-precinct-132265/2726185971002290/?\\_\\_so\\_\\_=permalink](https://facebook.com/TransparencyInternationalGeorgia/videos/marneuli-precinct-132265/2726185971002290/?__so__=permalink).

<sup>22</sup> "Summary Evaluation of the 2020 Parliamentary Election Day in Georgia [Press release]." Human Rights Center, [humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=20266&lang=eng](https://humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=20266&lang=eng).



## Media

Local observer organizations reported violence against journalists, interference in the work of journalists and widespread filming or photo taking of voters by representatives of media outlets. For example, IRI noted the media outlet Newpost was mentioned 13 times in observer reports from GYLA and ISFED for excessive photo taking of voters and potentially compromising the secrecy of the vote.

The most severe and widely covered incident happened in Gldani District, Tbilisi, where physical confrontations broke out between supporters of ruling and opposition parties. A journalist from online news site Publika who was filming the scene with his phone was assaulted and the phone broken. A second journalist, from TV Pirveli, was accidentally injured when reporting on the incident. According to observer reports, the situation in this district had been tense throughout the day. This was also confirmed in a conversation IRI had with a TV Pirveli journalist. Representatives of the ruling party, as well as the opposition, accused each other of having provoked the incident. In a subsequent press statement, the Ministry of Internal Affairs declared that the melee resulted in six people having been detained and criminal proceedings initiated.<sup>23</sup>

In a second incident, police reportedly prevented a TV Pirveli journalist from entering a polling station in the village of Karajala (Telavi) on the grounds that they would interfere with the election commission's work. The widely reported presence of representatives from a media outlet taking photographs of voters or filming them from a close distance (allegedly

with a device operating with a face-recognition program) gives reason for concern. According to information received by a local observer group, PEC heads reacted in most cases when observers filed a complaint on this issue. In some cases, the complaint was forwarded to the relevant DEC, where it was rejected due to technical reasons.

The Communications Council drew protocols of administrative offense against five television channels — namely Mtavari Arkhi, Imedi, Palitra and Ilion — for publishing a public-opinion poll within 48 hours before voting and against Formula television for failure to provide the information foreseen by law when publishing an opinion poll.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "Press Briefing of the First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs - Kakhaber Sabanadze." Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1 Nov. 2020, [police.ge/en/shinagan-saqmeta-ministris-pirveli-moadgilis-kakhaber-sabanadzis-brifingi/14096](https://police.ge/en/shinagan-saqmeta-ministris-pirveli-moadgilis-kakhaber-sabanadzis-brifingi/14096).

<sup>24</sup> "Communications Commission Draws Protocol on Mtavari Arkhi, Imedi, Formula and Palitra TV for Violation of Election Code, TV Pirveli and 4 Regional Broadcasters — No [in Georgian]." Communications Council, 5 Nov. 2020, [comcom.ge/ge/news/press-releases/komunikaciebis-komisiam-saarchevno-kodeqsis-dargvevistvis-mtvar-arxs-imed-formulas-da-palitra-tv-is-oqmi-sheudgina-tv-pirvels-da-4-regionuli-mauwyebels-ara.page](https://comcom.ge/ge/news/press-releases/komunikaciebis-komisiam-saarchevno-kodeqsis-dargvevistvis-mtvar-arxs-imed-formulas-da-palitra-tv-is-oqmi-sheudgina-tv-pirvels-da-4-regionuli-mauwyebels-ara.page).

# ABOUT IRI IN GEORGIA

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The International Republican Institute conducted a Technical Election Assessment Mission (TEAM) during Georgia's October 31, 2020, national parliamentary elections. This report is the second in a series of publications focused on analyzing the conduct and integrity of the electoral process in Georgia before, during and after the elections. The report is informed by six long-term analysts (LTAs) based in Tbilisi who interfaced with government authorities, political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), election-commission officials and other stakeholders to assess the election administration, the campaign environment, Election Day, results management, media and information space, inclusion and preparedness for holding elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IRI is signatory to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers and abides by guidelines and health-safety protocols set forth by the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) of Georgia.

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