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Elections in Georgia

2016 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Georgian election authorities as of October 5, 2016 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Who will Georgians elect on October 8, 2016?

Georgians will elect Representatives to the 150-member Parliament of Georgia¹ (*Sakartvelos Parlamenti*) through a mixed parallel electoral system. Seventy-seven members will be elected through a closed-list proportional representation system to serve four-year terms. The remaining 73 members are elected by majority vote in single-member constituencies to serve four-year terms.

If no candidate secures 50 percent of the valid vote in a single-member constituency, [a run-off election](#) is held two weeks after the official announcement of the first round election results between the two leading candidates. In the proportional representation tier, parties and blocs must pass a threshold of 5 percent. If no party, bloc, or pre-election coalition achieves 5 percent of votes cast, new elections are called. According to Article 125 (6) of the Georgian Election Code, parties that pass the 5 percent threshold will automatically receive six seats, which will allow them to form a parliamentary faction.

What is the current political situation in Georgia and why are these parliamentary elections important?

The upcoming parliamentary elections will be significant for several reasons, given the prevailing political situation in Georgia and the primary role Parliament plays in the Georgian political system. The last parliamentary elections held in 2012 were heralded as the country's first peaceful transfer of power since Georgia gained independence in 1991. Those polls saw the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition emerge as the ruling coalition, winning 85 seats in Parliament, soundly defeating the nine-year rule of the United National Movement (UNM), which won 65 seats. UNM formed the largest opposition bloc following the elections.

Among the top issues related to the political situation in advance of the 2016 polls are questions concerning Georgia's political orientation and its commitment to democratic principles and European structures, given fears of influence on the election and political process by outside actors. In addition, there are concerns that the electoral field is increasingly crowded, and fewer parties will be able to cross the minimum threshold for representation in Parliament. As was announced at the end of March 2016, the member parties of the former GD coalition are [contesting the election independently](#), in contrast to the unified bloc they formed ahead of the previous parliamentary elections. Georgian politics are

¹ Elections for the 21-member Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara will be held simultaneously with Georgia's parliamentary elections. Like the nationwide electoral system, Adjara's elections are also held under a mixed system: 15 seats in the Autonomous Republic's Supreme Council are allocated proportionally under the party-list contest among the parties and election blocs that clear the 5 percent threshold. Six members of the local Parliament are elected in the Autonomous Republic's six single-member districts; a candidate has to win over 50 percent of votes in order to be an outright winner in the first round, otherwise a second round will be held. By-elections for local self-governing bodies (*Sakrebulo*s) will be conducted in the local election districts of Tsalka, Chiatura, Abasha, Krtsanisi, Isani, Gldani and Zugdidi. In addition, the President of Georgia called for extraordinary elections for Mayors and *Gamgebelis* (the heads of local self-governing communities) in the election districts of Bolnisi, Akhaltsikhe City, Kharagauli, Chiatura, Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha.

traditionally very polarized, and these elections will serve as a referendum of sorts on the ruling GD's performance while also providing an indicator in which direction the political pendulum is swinging.

The security environment is also a concern for many political actors throughout the country, as a result of an incident earlier this year in western Georgia where [UNM party leaders were assaulted](#) outside of a polling station during the local by-elections in May. Likewise, other recent events, including ongoing legal disputes concerning the country's largest private broadcaster, and the emergence of pro-Russian parties have contributed to a backdrop of political tension in the pre-election environment.

When will the results be announced?

The Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC) has 19 days following Election Day to announce the official election results. After the polls close, Precinct Election Commissions (PECs)² finalize polling station results protocols and send scanned copies to the CEC. According to election legislation, the protocols are to be made available on the [CEC's website](#) upon receipt from PECs. Concurrently, the original copies, as well as other voting materials from the polling stations, will be delivered to respective District Election Commissions (DECs) for results tabulation. The DECs calculate and finalize the results for majoritarian races, while the tabulated proportional race results are sent to the CEC to process and finalize.

Who will monitor and observe the elections?

Both domestic and international organizations will observe the polls on Election Day. As of September 28, 90 domestic and 46 international organizations have been accredited by the Central Election Commission (CEC) to conduct observation activities. The accreditation process is straightforward, though it differs slightly for domestic and international organizations in terms of deadlines in advance of Election Day to file applications and other documentation such as observer lists.³

While there is significant interest among international organizations in observing the polls on Election Day, fewer organizations registered this year than were registered in 2012 ([54 organizations](#) in 2016 compared to [61 organizations](#) in 2012). In addition to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) observers, the Government of Georgia also invited observers from organizations including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [as well as official monitoring missions from 80 countries](#).

² The Precinct Election Commission is the lowest level election management body in Georgia. It is comprised of 13 members, six of whom are appointed by the District Election Commissions, while seven members are appointed by the seven political parties receiving the most state funding.

³ Domestic organizations must apply to the Central Election Commission (or relevant election management body) no later than 10 days in advance of Election Day, and submit the observer list no later than five days before the polls. For international organizations, the deadlines are seven and two days before the polls, respectively.

What bodies have legal and political authority in Georgia?

The elections are managed by three levels of election administration: the Central Election Commission, 73 District Election Commissions, and around 3,700 Precinct Election Commissions.

What is the legal process for electoral dispute adjudication?

The Election Code requires all complaints concerning procedural violations at the polls, as well as those concerning vote counting filed at Precinct Election Commissions on Election Day to be forwarded to the related District Election Commission (DEC) within two days.⁴ The application/complaint must be registered and addressed within two days of registration at the DEC level. DEC-level decisions may be appealed to the relevant court or to the Central Election Commission (CEC). According to Article 77 of the Election Code, the court or CEC's decision may be appealed to the Court of Appeals within one day of its delivery. Court of Appeals decisions are final.

What laws regulate the parliamentary elections in Georgia?

There are five key documents regulating parliamentary elections in Georgia:

- [Central Election Commission Regulations](#)
- [Constitution of Georgia](#)
- [Criminal Code of Georgia](#)
- [Election Code of Georgia](#)
- [Law on Political Unions of Citizens](#)

What are the rules that govern the media?

According to Article 51.5 (6) of the Election Code, “qualified”⁵ electoral subjects are entitled to receive free coverage on both private and public broadcasted channels. Qualified parties are also allocated public funds to use for paid advertising. The amount of funding allocated to each party depends on the number of votes obtained during the previous general election, but shall not exceed 600,000 GEL (approximately 270,000 USD). Under the law, electoral subjects must use at least 15 percent of the public funding allocated to them for pre-election advertising in at least seven regional and local broadcasters.

⁴ See Articles 73 and 74 of the Election Code. Applications/complaints may also be filed directly at the District Election Commission level.

⁵ “Qualified” electoral subjects are parties financed from the State Budget of Georgia, under Article 30 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Unions of Citizens, who received at least 3 percent of votes under the proportional representation system in the last parliamentary or local elections. “Unqualified” electoral subjects must demonstrate public support through public opinion polls in order to enjoy free airtime/space.

Additionally, general broadcasters must air pre-election debates in a non-discriminatory manner, with participation of all qualified election subjects in the course of the pre-election campaign within its coverage zone.

According to Article 51.5 (6), the airing of any election campaign advertising on either television or radio is prohibited on Election Day.

Who is eligible to vote?

All citizens of Georgia 18 years or older on Election Day are eligible to vote. Exceptions to this universal enfranchisement include any citizen declared incompetent by a court or those serving a prison sentence of more than five years.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Out-of-country voting is allowed, and will be enabled by the establishment of about 60 polling stations in Georgian diplomatic and consular representations abroad on Election Day.

How many registered voters are there?

Georgia's Central Election Commission has stated that [over 3.5 million voters](#) are registered to vote in the October 8 parliamentary elections.

The most recent [national census](#) included a figure of around 3.7 million Georgians living in country, however a sizable Georgian diaspora resides outside of the country's physical borders, though those individuals remain on the voter registry in accordance with the law.

Who is eligible to run for office?

Any Georgian citizen who meets the following criteria, is eligible to run for parliamentary office:

- Twenty-one years of age or older;
- Eligible to vote;
- Resident in-country for at least the last two years; and
- Possesses Georgian language capacity.

What is the state of political parties in Georgia?

Sixty-four political parties have requested registration with the Central Election Commission (CEC) to run in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Competing parties include the current ruling Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GDDG) party, as well as the former ruling and now main opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM). Out of 64, the [CEC rejected, annulled or cancelled registration](#) of 28

parties. Of 36 registered parties, nearly half formed six election blocs, while [19 parties will run individually](#).

The six registered election alliances consist of:

- UNM, the largest opposition party, which also includes the little-known, small party European Georgia;
- State for People bloc (*Paata Burchuladze*), led by opera singer Paata Burchuladze's State for People party, which also includes New Georgia (led by Member of Parliament [MP] Giorgi Vashadze) and the New Rights Party (led by former MP Mamuka Katsitadze);
- Democratic Movement (*Nino Burjanadze*), formed by former Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze's United Democratic Movement party with the little-known party Democratic Movement-United Georgia;
- Alliance of Patriots of Georgia-United Opposition (*Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi-Irma Inashvili*), an election bloc consisting of six parties, including Alliance of Patriots with Free Georgia, Traditionalists, Freedom Party, New Christian-Democrats, and the Political Movement of Law Enforcement and Armed Forces Veterans and Patriots;
- Our People-People's Party, an election bloc formed by two small, lesser-known parties; and
- Industrialists-Our Homeland, an election bloc formed by two parties, of which the Industrialists were a former member of the Georgian Dream coalition.

Therefore, there are 19 political subjects running independently:

- Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GDDG), the ruling party founded by billionaire former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili;
- Free Democrats, founded and led by former Defense Minister Irakli Alasania;
- Labor Party, led by its founder and chair Shalva Natelashvili;
- Republican Party, led by Speaker of the outgoing Parliament Davit Usupashvili;
- National Forum, led by former diplomat Kakha Shartava;
- For United Georgia, led by a former member of the GDDG, MP Tamaz Mechiauri, who quit GDDG in late May after criticizing the government's declared policy of NATO integration;
- People's Authority, one of the leaders of the party is Levan Mamaladze, who lives in Russia and was an influential governor of the Kvemo Kartli region. He fled to Russia after the 2003 Rose Revolution;
- For Georgia's Peace, led by former Defense Minister Davit Tevzadze;
- The Way of Zviad-In the Name of the Lord, led by 2013 presidential candidate Mikheil-Gela Saluashvili;
- Georgia;
- Communist Party of Georgia-Stalinists;
- Unified Communist Party of Georgia;
- Labor Socialist Party;
- Merab Kostava Society;
- Georgian Idea;
- Left wing Alliance, formed by former members of the Labor Party;
- Our Georgia;
- Georgian Assembly (*Kartuli Dasi*); and
- Progressive-Democratic Movement.

Additionally, out of 816 majoritarian candidates running in 73 majoritarian districts, 53 are nominated by initiative groups (independent) while 763 are nominated by election subjects.

What is the gender balance within the candidate lists?

Georgian legislation encourages gender balance within parties and provides financial incentives should parties meet established benchmarks. According to Article 30 (7) of the Law on Political Unions of Citizens, qualified parties will receive additional funding equivalent to 30 percent of the basic public funding,⁶ if that party's (or bloc's) candidate list is composed of at least 30 percent female candidates, and women are included in either the first, or second position, as well as every subsequent 10 candidates.

Within the current candidate lists, women constitute 17 percent of the majoritarian candidates and 37 percent of proportional candidates. Consequently, as of September 28, nine out of 25 electoral subjects qualified for the voluntary financial benefit outlined above. These parties consist of the Free Democrats, Labor Socialists, Patriots' Alliance, Labor Party, Republicans, Democratic Movement, People's Authority, Progressive-Democratic Movement, and Alliance of Leftists.

In general, there is room for improvement in women's participation as candidates, as evidenced by the fact that registered majoritarian and proportional list candidates are overwhelmingly male.⁷

Have there been any changes to the electoral rules and regulations since the last parliamentary vote in 2012?

While the legal electoral framework remains largely unchanged since the previous parliamentary elections, amendments made to the Election Code in December 2015 redrew the boundaries of single-member constituencies. The amendment was issued in an effort to address a significant discrepancy in the size of single-mandate constituencies. This [discrepancy was addressed](#) by merging some small districts together and dividing larger ones. As a result of these Election Code changes, the number of voters in each election district now varies from 41,598 in the smallest one to 54,168 in the largest. By contrast, prior to the redistricting effort, the number of voters in a constituency ranged anywhere between less than 6,000 in the smallest to more than 164,000 in the largest.

Additional changes include an increase in the threshold required for an outright victory in the first round of the majoritarian polls from 30 percent to 50 percent, and modifications to the allocation of free airtime. According to the previous rules, a political party that garnered at least 4 percent of votes in the previous parliamentary elections or at least 3 percent in the recent local elections, was eligible to receive free airtime for political ads during the campaign period. In case of an election bloc, only the top party of the bloc (registered as the number one member of the bloc) was eligible for free airtime. Under

⁶ Basic public funding is about 300,000 GEL.

⁷ Out of a total of 816 majoritarian candidates, 147 (roughly 17%) are women.

the new rule, all bloc members enjoy the benefit of free airtime, thus providing broader access to media.

What are the electoral authorities doing to accommodate voters with disabilities?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has committed itself to making the electoral process more inclusive for persons with disabilities through a variety of efforts in cooperation with disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) and other non-governmental organizations, as well as through a CEC-led working group on disability inclusion. The CEC's recently upgraded website includes improved navigation for blind and low vision users and all CEC videos include Georgian Sign Language interpretation, increasing access to election-related information for persons with disabilities.

Ahead of the parliamentary elections, the CEC and the Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Training Centre worked with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to develop a training module on access for persons with disabilities, and a reference guide for Precinct Election Commission members with guidelines on how to support the participation of all eligible voters on Election Day. This guide provides poll workers with helpful information on etiquette, relevant Georgian legislation, and international standards related to inclusion and disability rights.

Other CEC initiatives include [working to make precincts physically accessible to persons with disabilities](#); nearly one-in-three precincts nationwide are now physically accessible. Mobile ramps continue to be used in some locations without permanent access. More than twice as many magnifying sheets will be available in each polling place than were available during the 2012 elections. This assistive device, provided by the IFES, enables voters with low vision to mark their ballots independently.

How will security issues be addressed on Election Day?

Georgia has committed itself to better addressing security during the election campaign, as well as on Election Day by developing the capacity of the election administration and police to ensure that the upcoming national parliamentary elections are safe and secure. Members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), its Training Centre, and representatives of the law enforcement agency have undergone a training course, developed by IFES, which has helped them gain an understanding of electoral violence and security, and their complementary roles in ensuring security and safety on Election Day. Additionally, poll worker training now includes a module on electoral security, developed jointly by IFES and the CEC's Training Centre. The CEC and Ministry of Internal Affairs have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding, expanding their cooperation to joint training and staff/personnel workshops, exchange of information, and other measures to ensure a peaceful environment on the Election Day.

Resources

- [Central Election Commission Regulations](#) (English)
- [Constitution of Georgia](#) (English)
- [Criminal Code of Georgia](#) (English)
- [Election Code of Georgia](#) (English)
- [Law on Political Unions of Citizens](#) (English)