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Elections in Georgia

2018 Presidential Election

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 elections authorities as of October 22, 2018, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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When is Election Day?

Georgia is scheduled to hold its presidential election on October 28. The president will be elected by absolute majority and must secure over 50 percent of all valid votes cast on Election Day. The results of the first round will be announced no later than November 17, 2018. In the event that no candidate receives the required number of votes (more than 50 percent), a run-off election between the two candidates who received the highest percentage of votes will take place no later than December 1.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Georgians will cast their ballots to elect the next president of Georgia. The president is the head of state and will serve one six-year term. This will be the seventh and last direct presidential election in Georgia since the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The last presidential election, in October 2013, resulted in the election of Giorgi Margvelashvili. The term of the next president was extended to six years in order to sync with the holding of the 2024 parliamentary elections.

Why is the presidential election important?

This election is another significant step toward the normalization of inclusive, competitive politics in a country that saw its first peaceful political transition through the ballot box six years ago during the October 2012 parliamentary elections.

Further, this election is a contrast between party politics and candidate personalities as the dominant force driving voter support. In the past, personality and political presence played an important, perhaps key, role in Georgian presidential elections. At the same time, factors such as increased political competition and citizen participation, improved election management body administration, heightened trust in the voter list, and a proactive civil society contributed to the continuation of successful electoral practice.

Georgia's recent electoral experience demonstrates the viability of participatory democracy as a vehicle for change. Georgian institutions charged with administering the electoral process, namely the Central Election Commission, gained increased legitimacy and the confidence of voters due to their professional, impartial and equitable administration of elections.

This election is of particular importance as, following amendments to the Constitution in 2017, the 2018 elections will be the last direct presidential vote. After 2018, presidents will be elected by the 300-member College of Electors. In lieu of these changes, the president will be elected for a term of six years instead of five. This will ensure a presidential mandate until 2024, when a newly-elected Parliament (all 150 members of Parliament) along with other 150 electors (all members of the Supreme Councils of Adjara and Abkhazia in-exile as well as electors from Municipal Councils) will elect the new president.

What is the current political situation in Georgia?

Since 2014, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party has been criticized by the media, political parties and civil society organizations for shadow governance performed by its billionaire founder Bidzina Ivanishvili.

In early 2018, Ivanishvili came back to the political arena and GD as chairman to reiterate the importance of the party.

In 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and condemning Russia's occupation of historic territories of Georgia. In addition, the United States (U.S.) Congress adopted a resolution affirming U.S. support to the nations of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in their effort to retain political sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, such increasing support from the West has been undermined by the statements delivered by the GD-backed presidential candidate and current member of Parliament Salome Zurbishvili, who has accused the previous government of starting the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, and argued about the possible negative role of the West in triggering the conflict. These remarks by the government-backed candidate raised concerns within and outside the country that Russia might be playing an important role in an incumbent electoral process.

Based on the recent amendments to the Constitution of Georgia, 2018 will mark the last direct presidential elections in which the country will elect a head of state by popular vote. Current President Giorgi Margvelashvili was a cabinet minister of the ruling GD party in 2012 and in the following year became a presidential candidate. In spite of Margvelashvili's official political affiliation, he soon distanced himself from the party. As president, Margvelashvili has acted as an independent and non-biased arbiter, thus detaching the executive office from party affiliation and influence. The new Constitution will enter into force following the presidential election in 2018.

Will there be public candidate debates ahead of the election?

During the pre-election period, the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) decided to use three types of programming to present presidential candidates to the audience. One of the key types is live, televised debates between presidential candidates.

The debate is held in a "challenge-based" format, which enables a candidate to challenge one or more of their fellow candidates and upon acceptance of the challenge, the GPB will allocate its studio space and format to the respective candidates.

The first televised debate took place on October 8, 2018. The next debate is between an independent and Georgian Dream (GD)-backed presidential candidate and member of Parliament (MP) Salome Zurbishvili, MP David Bakradze from European Georgia party and Grigol Vashadze from Strength in Unity (comprised of 10 parties, including the leading and former ruling party, United National Movement). This debate will take place on October 24. It shall be noted that MP Zurbishvili challenged the two other candidates and approached the GPB with an official request to host the respective debate.

A full schedule of the debates to be aired by GPB was announced for the following dates: October 8, 11, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24 and 25; every debate starts at 10:00 p.m. and is one-hour long.

When will the results be announced?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) will officially announce results of the first round of elections no later than November 17, 2018. Under the Election Code of Georgia, the CEC has up to 20 days after Election Day to announce the official results and publish them through the press. At that time, if no candidate has secured more than 50 percent of all votes cast, the CEC will announce a second round of elections. This run-off will be held exactly two weeks after the official announcement of first round results, no later than December 1, 2018, between the top two contenders.

While November 17, 2018, is the deadline for the CEC to officially announce election results, the unofficial results will be available sooner. Once final results are tallied and certified, the CEC must publish this unofficial result on its website by November 16, 2018. A summary protocol of the CEC approved by a CEC ordinance shall be published in the official legislative herald of Georgia (www.matsne.gov.ge) on November 19, 2018.¹ It has an additional day to convey the information to the press and other mass media. Within 60 days thereafter, the CEC must submit the full election results report to the Parliament of Georgia.

What if there is a second round?

If no one candidate receives the majority of all votes cast on Election Day, the Central Election Commission (CEC) will call a second round of elections. In this scenario, the two candidates who received the highest percentage of all votes cast will participate in a run-off election. The second round of elections takes place two weeks after the CEC announces the official election results, which this year means a second round would take place by December 1, 2018.

What laws regulate the presidential elections in Georgia?

There are five key documents regulating presidential elections in Georgia:

- Constitution of Georgia
- Election Code of Georgia
- Law on Political Unions of Citizens
- Central Election Commission Regulations
- Criminal Code of Georgia

Who is eligible to run for office?

According to the Constitution of Georgia, any Georgian citizen who is 35 years old and has lived in Georgia for at least five years may be elected president of Georgia. Moreover, candidates for president must have lived in Georgia for the last three years before the elections.² To be eligible, a candidate may not hold dual citizenship.

¹ Article 76 (7), Election Code of Georgia

² Article 70 (2), Constitution of Georgia

If a candidate meets the above criteria, that individual must collect at least 25,923 signatures (0.75 percent of the total number of voters) and submit this list of supporter signatures to the Central Election Commission prior to the deadline, which for the 2018 presidential elections was on September 18, 2018.

Who are the candidates for president?

On September 23, 2018, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced that 25 candidates are registered for the presidential election.³ While the deadline for candidate registration was set for September 28, 2018, the CEC was able to check the required lists of supporter signatures for each candidate and complete the registration process five days early. To be approved, lists needed a minimum of 25,923 valid supporter signatures⁴.

Of the 25 registered candidates, 19 represent political parties. They are:

- Mikheil Antadze, Movement State for People
- Akaki Asatiani, Union of Georgian Traditionalists
- Zviad Baghdavadze, Civic Platform - New Georgia
- Davit Bakradze, European Georgia - Movement for Liberty
- Levan Chkheidze, New Christian-Democrats
- Vakhtang Gabunia, Christian-Democratic Movement
- Irakli Gorgadze, Movement for Free Georgia
- Zviad Iashvili, National-Democratic Party
- Zurab Japaridze, Girchi
- Gela Khutsishvili, Political Movement of Armed Veterans and Patriots of Georgia
- Kakha Kukava, Free Georgia
- Giorgi Liluashvili, Political Party Sakartvelo
- Zviad Mekhatishvili, Christian-Conservative Party of Georgia
- Otar Meunargia, Industry Will Save Georgia
- Shalva Natelashvili, Labor Party of Georgia
- Mikheil Saluashvili, Union of Recovery of Justice, Voice of the People: The Lord Our Righteousness
- Tamar Tskhoragauli, Tavisufleba - Zviad Gamsakhurdias Gza
- Davit Usupashvili, Free Democrats
- Grigol Vashadze, United National Movement

Additionally, six of the 25 candidates were registered by initiative groups. They are:

- Giorgi Andriadze
- Kakhaber Chichinadze

³ <http://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/114936-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-archevnebisvis-25-prezidentobis-kandidatia-registrirbuli>

⁴ <http://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/114119-gantskhadeba-archevnebsi-chartuli-mkhareebisvis>

- Vladimer Nonikashvili
- Teimuraz Shashiashvili
- Besarion Tediashvili
- Salome Zourabishvili

These 25 registered candidates were approved from a field of 46 applicants who submitted materials to the CEC. Due to various legal issues in the application materials, the CEC refused to register 21 applicants. Reasons for refusal varied. According to the CEC, 19 applicants were rejected because they did not submit signatures of at least 25,923 citizens by the September 18 deadline. One was rejected due to not correcting an error in electoral documentation, while another was nominated by a party which was not registered by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia.

A presidential candidate may withdraw his or her candidacy from the election no later than October 16, 12 days before Election Day. After October 12, all remaining candidates will appear on the ballot, even if later withdrawn.

What is the difference between “qualified” and “non-qualified” candidates? How will this affect the elections process?

Presidential candidates are considered “qualified” if their political party – alone or as part of a bloc – received at least three percent of votes under the proportional representation system in the last parliamentary elections held in 2016, or at least three percent of votes in the last local elections (the given number of votes is calculated based on the number of votes cast in the elections held under a proportional system in the entire territory of Georgia). Having qualified status entitles presidential candidates to free televised commercial time and participation in televised debates on public broadcasters. Candidates nominated by initiative groups cannot meet the criteria for qualified status. However, a presidential candidate could be considered “qualified” by a broadcaster based on public opinion polls, under conditions described in the Election Code, Article 51 (8).

There are 16 candidates with qualified status:

- Mikheil Antadze
- Akaki Asatiani
- Zviad Baghdavadze
- Davit Bakradze
- Levan Chkheidze
- Vakhtang Gabunia
- Irakli Gorgadze
- Zviad Iashvili
- Gela Khutsishvili
- Kakha Kukava
- Zviad Mekhatishvili
- Otar Meunargia

- Shalva Natelashvili
- Tamar Tskhoragauli
- Davit Usupashvili
- Grigol Vashadze

What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

There are two women running for president of the 25 registered candidates. They are Salome Zourabichvili, nominated by an initiative group but openly supported by the ruling Georgian Dream, and Tamar Tskhoragauli, nominated by the political party Tavisufleba - Zviad Gamsakhurdias Gza (Freedom - a Path of Zviad Gamsakhurdia).

Of the original 46 candidates who applied, five were women.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia is the supreme election management body of Georgia. The CEC is principally responsible for ensuring preparation and conduct of presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections, as well as referendums and plebiscites. The CEC is also tasked with ensuring that eligible Georgian citizens have the right to vote and run for office in Georgia.

In its activities, the CEC is guided by the Constitution of Georgia, the Election Code of Georgia and other laws that pertain to elections.⁵ The CEC is headquartered in Tbilisi and is held accountable by the Parliament of Georgia.

The CEC has authority over numerous facets of elections in Georgia, including the ability to:

- Make the final decision in presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections, as well as *Sakrebulo* (local self-governance body), referendums and Tbilisi mayoral elections;
- Appoint extraordinary re-run and by-elections, second ballot and second round of elections;
- Establish timetables and dates of elections that meet terms established in the Election Code of Georgia;
- Register candidates, political parties and initiative groups to participate in elections;
- Establish the ballot form, type of ballot boxes and other materials used to inform candidates and voters of an upcoming election;
- Form and maintain a unified voter list;
- Accredite domestic and international election observers;
- Oversee and conduct activities of the district election commissions and precinct election commissions;
- Determine rules and distribution of election finances, including campaign finance for eligible entities;
- Perform election dispute resolution and adjudication;

⁵ <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/reglamenti.pdf>

- Determine when a violation to Georgian electoral legislation has occurred; and
- Implement other authorities granted by the Election Code, when applicable.

The CEC is currently composed of 13 members: Chairwoman Tamar Zhvania, Deputy Chair Giorgi Sharabidze, Secretary Giorgi Javakhishvili, and nine other members. Five of the 12 members are appointed by Parliament based on their professional background and experience. Six members are appointed by the parties that were registered by the CEC chair independently or through an electoral bloc for participation in the parliamentary elections, which were granted the mandates of members of the Parliament of Georgia under Article 125 (4-9) of the Election Code, and which set up a parliamentary faction.

The CEC chair is appointed upon nomination from the president by CEC members. A complete guide to the structure of the CEC can be found on the CEC's website.⁶

How many people are registered to vote on Election Day?

According to figures published by the Central Election Commission on September 6, 2018, there are 3,503,113 registered voters, of whom 46.3 percent are men and 53.7 percent are women. This number is lower than the 2013 presidential elections, when the total number of voters was 3,537,719.

For this poll, 57,758 voters will be able to vote in 59 precincts abroad. During the 2013 presidential elections, 48,458 voters were registered abroad.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Yes. Georgian citizens who are abroad on October 28 may vote in the presidential election in 44 other countries. While Greece will have the most out-of-country voting sites with six locations, Georgians may also cast their ballot at multiple polling stations in the United States (three), Azerbaijan (three), Turkey (three), Ukraine (three), Germany (three), and Spain (two).

There are approximately 1.5 million Georgian citizens living abroad, although citizens residing in or traveling to countries without polling stations will not be eligible to vote. Georgians residing in Russia will not have the opportunity to vote due to the absence of diplomatic representation in the country.

⁶ <http://cesko.ge/eng/static/1545/struktura>

Table 1: Georgian Out-of-Country Polling Locations by Country

Country		Region	Number of Polling Stations Operating	Cities
1	Armenia	Europe	1	Yerevan
2	Austria	Europe	1	Vienna
3	Azerbaijan	Europe	3	Baku (3)
4	Belarus	Europe	1	Minsk
5	Belgium	Europe	1	Brussels
6	Bulgaria	Europe	1	Sofia
7	Canada	North America	1	Ottawa
8	China	Asia	1	Beijing
9	Cyprus	Europe	1	Nicosia
10	Czech Republic	Europe	1	Prague
11	Denmark	Europe	1	Copenhagen
12	Egypt	Middle East	1	Cairo
13	Estonia	Europe	1	Tallinn
14	Finland	Europe	1	Helsinki
15	France	Europe	1	Paris
16	Germany	Europe	3	Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt
17	Great Britain	Europe	1	London
18	Greece	Europe	6	Athens (3), Thessaloniki (3)
19	Hungary	Europe	1	Budapest
20	Ireland	Europe	1	Dublin
21	Israel	Middle East	1	Tel Aviv
22	Italy	Europe	1	Rome
23	Japan	Asia	1	Tokyo
24	Jordan	Middle East	1	Amman
25	Kazakhstan	Asia	1	Astana
26	Kuwait	Middle East	1	Kuwait
27	Latvia	Europe	1	Riga
28	Lithuania	Europe	1	Vilnius
29	Moldova	Europe	1	Kishinev
30	Netherlands	Europe	1	The Hague
31	Norway	Europe	1	Oslo
32	Poland	Europe	1	Warsaw
33	Portugal	Europe	1	Lisbon
34	Qatar	Asia	1	Doha
35	Romania	Europe	1	Bucharest
36	Slovakia	Asia	1	Bratislava
37	South Africa	Africa	1	Pretoria
38	Spain	Europe	2	Madrid, Barcelona
39	Sweden	Europe	1	Stockholm

40	Switzerland	Europe	1	Bern
41	Turkey	Europe	3	Ankara, Istanbul, Trabzon
42	Ukraine	Europe	3	Kiev, Odessa
43	United States	North America	3	New York (2), Washington, D.C.
44	Uzbekistan	Asia	1	Tashkent

Out-of-country voting is important to Georgia due to the existence of a significant Georgian diaspora. A complete list of election precincts, polling stations and addresses is available on the Central Election Commission website.⁷

Who will be observing during Election Day?

There are currently 58 local and 45 international organizations registered with the Central Election Commission to observe the upcoming elections.

As of October 17, the following organizations were registered:

Local Observer Organizations:⁸

- American Support League
- Analytical International Democratic Institute
- Apriori
- Association of Constitutional Democrats of Georgia
- Association of Development of Guria
- Center for Development and Democracy
- Center for Social-political Development
- Civil Alliance for Development
- Civilian Control Group of the Armed Forces
- Civil Society and Democracy Development Center
- Club Free Zone
- Civil the Public Advisory Council
- European-Georgian Institute
- Faith in Justice
- Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights
- Free Choice
- Georgian Barristers & Lawyers International Observatory
- Georgian Democratic Principles and Human Rights Defense Union
- Georgian Immigration and Diaspora Institute
- Georgian Orden

⁷ <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/20180929162026sazubnmis.pdf>

⁸ <http://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/114125-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-sagartvelos-prezidentis-archevnebisvis-tseshkshi-registrirbuli-adgilobrivi-damkvirvebeli-organizatsiebi>

- Georgian Parliamentarians' Society
- Georgian Professional Educational and Qualification Staff Trade Union of Workers and Students
- Georgian Veterans' NGO for Strong United Georgia
- Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)
- Good Governance Institute
- Green Earth
- Human Rights Center
- Hope for the Future 2016
- Initiative for Civil Society
- Institute for Political Studies
- Institutional Development and Monitoring Centre
- International Centre for Democratic Initiatives (ICDI)
- International Co-operation of Human Civil Rights Protection
- International Network for Civil Development
- International Society for Free Elections and Democracy (ISFED)
- Law Enforcement Reform Center
- Monitoring Center – Mediator
- Movement for Unity and Consolidation of Georgia
- Multi-ethnic Unity
- New Generation Democratic Elections
- New Generation for Democratic Georgia
- New Vision - Georgia
- New Word
- Observatory of Politics and Law
- Public Advocacy
- Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG)
- Reforms and Civic Development Center
- Regional Center of Development and Democracy
- The Light of the Future
- Transparency International Georgia
- Union 21st Century
- Union of Georgian Young Intellectuals - Lazare
- Union of Unified Youth of Georgia
- Unity for Civic Rights
- Women's Association Bazaleti
- Young Generation
- Youth Center – Our Generation 1921
- Youth for European Future

International Observer Organizations:⁹

- British Embassy in Tbilisi
- Central Commission for Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus on Elections and Holding Republican Referenda
- Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan
- Central Election Commission of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- Central Election Commission of the Republic of Moldova
- Central Election Commission of Ukraine
- Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia
- Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania
- Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania
- Election Commission of India
- Election Commission of Maldives
- Embassy of the Czech Republic to Georgia
- Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands to Georgia
- Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tbilisi
- European Parliament
- Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
- General Election Commission of Mongolia
- Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor Office
- Independent Election Commission of Jordan
- Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy (SILBA)
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems
- International Republican Institute
- Monitoring – Analytics Group (CIFRA)
- National Democratic Institute
- National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea
- National Election Committee of Hungary
- National Electoral Commission of the Republic of Poland
- National Electoral Committee of Estonia
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
- Permanent Electoral Administration of Romania

⁹ <http://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/114190-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-sagartvelos-prezidentis-archevnebisvis-tseskoshi-registrirbuli-saertashoriso-damkvirvebeli-organizatsiebi>

- Senate of the Republic of Poland
- State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia
- State Election Commission of the Republic of Slovenia
- Supreme Election Council of Turkey
- The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior
- The DELIAN Project
- The Embassy of the United States of America to Georgia
- The International Service for Human Rights
- The German Marshall Fund of the United States
- The National Electoral Institute of Mexico

What are the rules governing the rights of international observers?

According to Article 41 of the Election Code of Georgia, international observers may observe sessions of the election commissions and be present at the polling place at any time during Election Day. They may move without restriction within the precinct territory and observe all stages of the polling process from any point of the precinct in a free, unhindered manner.

An observer may take part in the inspection of ballot boxes before they are sealed and after they are opened. They may also observe registration of voters, issuance of ballot papers and special envelopes, and certification without disrupting the polling process.

Unlike previous elections, the amended Election Code specifically determines that it is prohibited to photograph and film or otherwise process the information or data that, according to the Election Code, is not considered public information, except when the photographing, filming or processing is allowed by the law.

Conversely, an international observer is prohibited from interfering with the functions and activities of the election commissions. They may not exert undue influence upon the free expression of will of voters, wear symbols or signs of any election subject, nor may they breach other requirements of the Election Code.

What is the legal process for electoral dispute adjudication?

The new Election Code requires all complaints regarding violations of polling procedures to be filed at precinct election commissions (PEC) on Election Day. Polling day complaints must be “resolved immediately” by the PEC, while complaints related to the vote counting process are to be forwarded to district election commissions (DEC) within two days.¹⁰

The 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 the Central Election Commission. The decision

¹⁰ See Articles 73 and 74 of the Election Code. Complaints may also be filed directly at the district election commission level.

of the court may be appealed within one day of its delivery to the Court of Appeals.¹¹ Decisions by the Court of Appeals are final.

What are the rules that govern the media?

In the course of the pre-election campaign, a broadcaster must remain fair and impartial, pursuant to the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, the Code of Conduct of Broadcasters.

A general broadcaster intending to broadcast the pre-election campaign must transmit pre-election debates in a non-discriminatory manner with the participation of all qualified election subjects in the course of the campaign, within its coverage zone.¹²

The Georgian National Communications Commission determines the participation of media and associated rules as related to the electoral process. This commission also monitors broadcasters' observance of norms established by the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting and responds to violations.

The Georgian National Communications Commission also purchases the service necessary for conducting media monitoring in accordance with legislation in Georgia.¹³

Who is eligible to vote?

Georgian citizens registered on voter lists who have reached the age of 18 by Election Day are eligible to vote in the 2018 presidential election.

Voter eligibility is restricted for Georgian citizens who are currently serving a prison sentence of more than five years. Citizens who are considered beneficiaries of support by a court are also not allowed to vote.¹⁴

What is the state of political parties in Georgia?

Georgia has a multi-party system composed of numerous political parties, of which a dozen or so are large, well-organized, and have a significant base of support. These parties compete in parliamentary and municipal elections to gain representation in the respective legislatures, which are determined by a mixed system of direct and proportional voting. Additionally, many parties nominate a candidate to run for president.

The Georgian Dream coalition (GD), which currently controls the Parliament and the executive branch, dominates the political field. The next important players in the current political environment are the United National Movement (UNM), which controlled the Parliament from 2004-12 and the presidency from 2004-13, and the European Georgia – a party established by individuals who quit UNM in 2017, and established a new political representation. This European Georgia is the strongest opposition party

¹¹ See Article 77 of the Election Code

¹² Article 51 (1 and 2) of the Election Code

¹³ Article 51 (15) of the Election Code

¹⁴ Article 3 (a.c) of the Election Code

represented in the Parliament. Based on the 2016 parliamentary election results, UNM had 27 members of Parliament (MPs), 21 of whom are currently representing European Georgia. The Alliance of Patriots is the other political party with representatives in Parliament elected via proportional representation, featuring five MPs. The Industry Will Save Georgia party has one MP, elected via majoritarian vote. The Parliament also includes four independent deputies.

There are other relatively small political parties that are part of the electoral process. Their main interest falls on parliamentary and municipal elections, as based on the results they may be eligible for state funding. However, this time their active participation in presidential elections is predicated on the possibility of forming blocs and supporting another party.

What are the changes to the presidential powers taking effect in 2018?

This presidential election represents a turning point in Georgian politics. It will usher in profound constitutional changes that will enhance powers of the prime minister and Parliament, while weakening the power of the president. After the inauguration of a new president, a series of constitutional amendments passed by Parliament in 2017 and 2018 will enter into force.

The Georgian Dream Party decided to move to a parliamentary republic. The amendments will abolish the direct election of the president, transferring it to a College of Electors composed of 300 members of Parliament, and local and regional government representatives. The removal of nearly all the powers of the president was justified by the proposed shift to a parliamentary system.

The eligibility age for the president of Georgia will increase from 35 to 40. There are changes to residency requirements as well; a potential candidate will have to have lived in Georgia for at least 15 years. S/he, however, will no longer be required to have lived in Georgia for the three years before the election.

Changes to the president's powers:

- The president will remain the head of state, the commander-in-chief and the country's representative in foreign relations but will no longer "ensure the functioning of state bodies within the scope of his/her powers granted by the Constitution;"
- The president will lose the right "to request particular matters to be discussed at the government session and to participate in the discussion;"
- The National Security Council, which "organizes the military development and defense of the country" and is led by the president under the current Constitution, will no longer exist. Instead, the draft Constitution establishes the National Defense Council, which will function only during martial law to coordinate the work of the constitutional bodies; and
- The president will lose the right to nominate and recommend candidates for the post of chair of the Supreme Court.

How will persons with disabilities cast their votes?

The Election Code of Georgia stipulates that persons with disabilities must have equal access to the electoral process. To facilitate an equal electoral environment for persons with disabilities, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has implemented the following initiatives:

- **Adaptation of Poll Centers for Voters Using Wheelchairs:** The building chosen for an election precinct shall be accessible for every voter, and where such building is not available, the building allocated for the election precinct shall, where possible, be adapted by the allocating body for Election Day to ensure accessibility for every voter;
- **Election Materials for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Voters:** The CEC has translated videos and other informational voting materials into sign language. When broadcasting a political or pre-election advertisement, the sign language translation shall be arranged by the electoral subject presenting the advertisement;
- **Tactile Ballot Guides for Blind Voters:** The CEC will make tactile ballot guides available at each precinct election commission (PEC), enabling blind voters to cast their ballots without assistance;
- **Magnifying Sheets for Visually Impaired Voters:** The CEC will make magnifying sheets available at each PEC, enabling visually impaired voters to cast their ballots without assistance; and
- **CEC Call Center:** The CEC is running a call center to provide persons with disabilities information about the 2018 presidential elections over the phone or by text message. The call center currently employs 23 operators who have been trained on electoral matters, electoral legislation and have also completed social-psychological trainings.

Information is available in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. Some services offered by the call center include processing voter requests for mobile ballot boxes, temporarily adapting the polling place for access to voters using wheelchairs, and providing video clips on election procedures in sign language to deaf or hard of hearing voters.

What, if any, role does the state play in campaign finance?

Only presidential candidates deemed “qualified” are entitled to free airtime at the public broadcaster. An election subject (party, bloc) is qualified to receive state funding if it received three percent in last parliamentary election and three percent in the last local elections (the given number of votes is calculated based on the number of votes cast in the elections held under a proportional system in the entire territory of Georgia). For presidential elections, the same rules apply to be qualified for free airtime and debates, although a broadcaster may recognize an election subject’s popularity and grant qualified status for free airtime or debate participation, which has nothing to do with state funding.

A broadcaster may also recognize a qualified election subject according to public opinion poll conducted within the whole territory of Georgia in compliance with terms set forth in the Election Code of Georgia: a candidate has gained no less than four percent of votes in no less than five public opinion polls held during the election year, or in an opinion poll held no later than one month before elections.

According to the Election Code of Georgia, any candidate who receives at least ten percent of votes in the first round of the presidential elections will receive a maximum of GEL 1,000,000 (\$400,000 USD) from the country's state budget (paragraph 1 of Article 56). These funds are to cover election campaign costs and are valid for both the first and second round of the elections.

To be eligible for state funding, a presidential candidate must apply to the Central Election Commission by September 20, 2018¹⁵, and submit a report with election campaign expenditures to the State Audit Office of Georgia.¹⁶

What language will ballot papers be printed in?

The ballots will be printed in Georgian throughout the entire country. Additionally, ballots will be available in Azerbaijani, Armenian and other languages comprehensible for the local population, where necessary. These provisions are envisaged in Article 63 of Georgia's Election Code.

To ensure voters belonging to ethnic minorities have access to voting materials in their native language, the Central Election Commission, with support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, is providing materials to election administrators in minority languages.

¹⁵ Article 56 (2), Election Code of Georgia

¹⁶ Article 57, Election Code of Georgia

Resources

- Constitution of Georgia ([English](#))
 - Key Points of Newly-Adopted Constitution ([English](#))
 - Law on Political Unions of Citizens ([English](#))
 - Criminal Code of Georgia ([English](#))
- Central Election Commission (CEC) ([English](#), [Georgian](#))
 - CEC Regulations ([English](#))
 - Election Code of Georgia ([English](#))
 - Schedule of Electoral Activities ([English](#))
 - Number of Voters According to Districts ([English](#))
 - Registration Rules and Rights of International Observer Organizations ([English](#))
- For Voters with Disabilities:
 - CEC Planned Activities ([English](#))
 - CEC Action Plan ([English](#))
 - Voting Procedure ([English](#))