



ELECTION REPORT OF THE IRI TECHNICAL ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION TO GEORGIA

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International Republican Institute
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [International Republican Institute](#) (IRI) conducted an international Technical Election Assessment Mission (TEAM) to assess the October 2, 2021, municipal elections in Georgia. The mission began on September 6, 2021, and builds upon IRI's more than 25-year partnership with Georgia, including previous election observation and assessment efforts over the last decade. IRI's mission focused on key aspects affecting electoral integrity, including election administration and implementation of the 2021 electoral reforms, media freedom and transparency, political party campaigns and campaign finance, and inclusion of underrepresented groups in electoral processes. IRI stands with the people of Georgia on their journey to democratic consolidation and hopes that the findings and recommendations presented in this report contribute positively to improving electoral integrity in the short and long term.

The municipal elections followed the passage of reforms to the Election Code in June 2021 in line with the EU-mediated [April 19 agreement](#). The reforms included changes in the composition and selection of members for election commissions, pre-election campaigning, the voting process, vote tabulation, electoral dispute resolution and notably, an increased number of proportionally elected candidates and a reduced electoral threshold for sakrebulo ("municipal councils"). Nevertheless, recommendations made in the joint opinions issued by the Venice Commission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and citizen observers remain unfulfilled.¹

The pre-election period was vibrant and politically competitive with some incidents of violence. Political parties and candidates were able to organize and campaign, and citizens had access to a variety of sources for political news and information. However the period was marred by an insufficient number of substantive candidate debates, intimidation and harassment of journalists, candidates and opposition supporters, and a highly polarized media environment which centered election content on personalities and partisan rhetoric rather than local citizen concerns.

During the municipal elections, 64 mayoral races and 2,068 deputies of sakrebulo constituencies were contested. On October 2, over 1.8 million of Georgia's [3,497,345 eligible voters](#) cast ballots, of which 53.58 percent were women, representing a more than six percent increase in the total number of voters between [2017](#) and [2021](#). As a result of the highly competitive first round of the municipal elections, 20 mayoral runoff elections and 42 majoritarian runoff elections will take place on October 30.

Credible observer groups and numerous interlocutors with whom IRI met reported various irregularities, including political party workers recording voter presence at polling stations within the 100-meter polling station perimeter, violations of secrecy of the vote, failure to properly check and ink voters, and failure to comply with the procedures for vote counting and compiling summary protocols. Interference with citizen monitoring efforts, including threats against observers, was also reported by all major observation organizations. Weaknesses were also identified in the management, verification, and certification of results at the precinct level.

¹ The [first one](#) was issued on April 30, 2021. The [second one](#) was issued on May 21, 2021.

METHODOLOGY

The IRI TEAM that arrived in Tbilisi on September 6, 2021, was comprised of an international group of four long-term analysts (LTAs) from Canada, the U.S., and Poland who reviewed the pre-election campaign, Election Day, and the period immediately following the first round of elections. IRI analysts engaged government authorities, political parties, candidates, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), election commission officials and other stakeholders to assess the election administration, the campaign environment, media and information space, inclusion, and preparedness for holding elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. IRI and its analysts strictly adhered to the [Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers](#). The TEAM based its findings and recommendations on Georgia's laws, international standards for elections and the commitments made by political parties in the [Code of Conduct for Political Parties](#).

In recognition of the risks posed by COVID-19, IRI implemented rigorous safety and security procedures and required the assessment team to adhere to the Georgian government's health regulations set forth by the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) of Georgia.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

In the spirit of international cooperation and continued support for Georgia's democratic aspirations, the IRI TEAM offers 14 key assessment findings and recommendations.

Election Administration

1. To ensure equitable thresholds to political entry, the number of signatures of support required to register a candidate in majoritarian districts should be revised so that it reflects a percentage of voters proportional to the total number of voters in the district rather than a standard number.
2. To ensure more meaningful competition, the application and selection process for temporary, non-partisan District Election Commissions (DECs) members should be held in advance of the electoral period, allowing for more time to submit and process applications. This would also allow for a longer recruitment, certified officials and a training timeframe for precinct election commission (PEC) members.
3. The Central Election Commission (CEC), its Electoral System Development, Reform, and Training Centre (Training Centre), and DECs should emphasize during training sessions and other activities the obligation placed upon PECs to function independently in order to prevent citizen observers and party representatives from interfering and performing activities reserved for electoral commissions.
4. During the results tabulation process, where counting is video recorded, Precinct Election Commissioners were obliged to show only the first page of each ballot paper. To ensure that each ballot is valid, election legislation should clearly specify that both sides of each ballot paper should be shown during the results tabulation process.

Campaign Environment and Campaign Finance

5. Political parties lack meaningful connection to citizens and lack solutions to the many issues that impact their daily lives. Parties should develop and implement long-term strategies outside of election cycles to engage citizens on local issues in order to expand their base of support in advance of the next election. As the next election approaches, parties should convert these issue-based outreach efforts into campaign strategies that could help to identify candidates and recruit volunteers.
6. The Georgian Parliament should develop reasonable “whistleblower” protections to ensure public employees have avenues of recourse and safe mechanisms to report instances of intimidation and job insecurity due to their political choices.
7. Current financial disclosure requirements are flawed and incentivize the use of “dark money” to pay salaries for party staff and campaign workers.² According to the September 29 State Audit Office (SAO) report, several parties paid zero income to party staff and others who they may have hired to do party work before and on Election Day. In coordination with the CEC, the SAO should advocate for additional budgetary and human resources to investigate these issues and implement regulatory reform to encourage proper reporting.
8. Political parties that received state funding should be required to institute internal disclosure mechanisms that ensure transparent accounting measures regarding who they employ and how those employees are paid using state funds. This includes short-term “contractors” who may be hired for the election period and Election Day. Individual contracts with sole, temporary employees should be required and disclosed as part of the party’s required documentation.

Media

9. Speakers of minority languages have difficulty accessing quality election-related information. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) should provide either a specialized channel or additional programming to better address the political interests of rural residents and ethnic minorities, particularly at election time. The government of Georgia should reconsider its decision to allow public broadcasters to sell advertising in an already narrow commercial market, as this policy limits the financial feasibility for rural media to provide election-related content.
10. In an effort to reduce a hyper-partisan and polarized media environment, media organizations as well as the Georgian government should prioritize and invest in training and education to encourage adoption of objective, journalistic practices.
11. Perceived partisanship of the Information Protection Center (IPC) further eroded public confidence in the CEC as a professional, impartial institution. Should the IPC operate in future elections, it should engage in trust-building measures with the Georgian people by involving Georgian CSOs in the planning and media monitoring process including credible organizations such as the Media Development Foundation and Georgia’s Reforms Associates who offer a meaningful track record of impartially identifying and addressing misinformation.

² Dark money refers to money entering the political system through organizations that are not required to disclose their donors. In some cases, those organizations are also not required to disclose expenditures made that influence the political system.

Inclusion

12. To ensure a diversity of membership and candidates from different ethnic backgrounds and geographic localities, political parties should develop and/or enhance internal elections for candidate selection processes and adopt campaign messages that are as diverse as Georgia's population, including investing in outreach to youth, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).
13. Underrepresented groups continue to state that political candidates only address minority constituents immediately prior to elections. As IRI recommended in 2020, to avoid further marginalization of underrepresented groups, political parties should make every effort to conduct outreach to minority groups throughout the year and to offer relevant materials in the appropriate minority language.
14. As a result of the amended Election Code, women's political participation in Georgia will increase. Rather than selecting female candidates simply to meet a gender quota, political parties should make equitable investments in women members, including building their leadership, communications, and fundraising skills, and training women on the roles and responsibilities of elected leaders. Women must be given equal opportunities for participation in forming party policy and agendas.

Electoral Reforms

The [April 19 agreement](#) provided a broader political commitment to "ambitious electoral reforms." The aim was to strengthen transparency and safeguards for the results management process. Nevertheless, reforms were reactive in nature, responding to immediate needs related to the upcoming municipal elections. Time constraints related to the upcoming elections and the limits of political will resulted in partial adoption and implementation.³

While the structure of the election administration remained the same, the electoral reforms affected the rules for selection of CEC members, the composition of election commissions, complaint resolution procedures, and certain elements of the electoral system, such as revising thresholds for representation and increasing the number of proportional seats in sakrebulo. Some changes created counterbalancing measures to allow for greater power-sharing between the ruling party and opposition in the election administration. Overall, the changes were assessed positively by the TEAM interlocutors as providing a better framework for balanced election administration and a much more inclusive process.

Among the most fundamental changes implemented for the 2021 elections was the reduction of electoral thresholds for proportionally elected sakrebulo seats from four percent to 2.5 and 3 percent for Tbilisi and other municipalities, respectively. Parity in party representation in electoral processes was enhanced by the return to the principle of "one party, one member" in each electoral commission. The modified CEC composition includes 17 members: nine appointed by parliamentary political parties and eight members, including the Chairperson, elected by the Parliament. The Parliament voted to select the Chairperson, but the two-thirds majority required by legislation to approve the appointment in the

³ Almost all the changes were revisions to the Organic Law of Georgia no 703 on June 28, 2021. The amendments to decrease the threshold for the 2024 parliamentary elections and the number of members of Parliament required to establish a parliamentary faction are still [pending](#) in the Parliament and will require constitutional amendments.

first round of voting was not achieved.⁴ Only on August 2 was the fourth attempt with the simple “anti-deadlock” majority conclusive. However, this was short of broader political support, which was one of the main objectives for these reforms. As mandated when the Chairperson is elected with less than a two-thirds majority, the new CEC Chairperson will hold this position for only six months.

Further commitments included clearer criteria for recounts and a compulsory recount for 10 percent of all precincts. While the compulsory recount was adopted, criteria for conducting other recounts were not specified.⁵ Recounts remained at the discretion of the DEC, and a decision to conduct a recount requires a qualified majority of a two-thirds vote. To support the complaint resolution process, a “special task force” was envisaged, composed of a representative of the Public Defender, “credible” citizen observer organizations, and domestic and international experts. This was included in the Election Code as an “advisory group.” However, the majority of credible international and domestic civil society organizations, along with the Public Defender left the advisory group due to conflicts of interest.

Additional changes were made to the Election Code that were not in the April 19 agreement, including a ban on corrections to the summary protocols by the PEC immediately after completing the protocol. Deadlines for complaints and appeals submission and resolution were extended by 50 percent (for PECs to DEC an increase from two days to four, for DEC to the CEC an increase from one day to two). The revised legal framework added the option to submit complaints electronically and included a register of persons entitled to submit complaints on behalf of civil society organizations or a party. To limit inappropriate activities by party representatives and pressure upon voters, the reforms established a perimeter of 100 meters from polling stations, banning gatherings, campaigning, and tracking of voters within this area. Moreover, a single article was added for the 2021 elections that empowered the CEC to conduct a wide range of electoral activities “through electronic means.”

Election Administration

The CEC under new leadership made considerable effort to regain the trust of political parties, civil society, international partners, and voters. For the first time, sessions were livestreamed. Sessions were not limited to formal voting but provided an invaluable platform for discussion and exchanging opinions. The more politically diverse composition of the CEC only facilitated this process. Occasionally partisan alignments, disagreements and political opinions prevailed. However, positions were presented, specific aspects discussed, and details clarified in an overall constructive manner.

The CEC rigorously followed the [Schedule of Electoral Activities](#). Adopted decrees and ordinances were promptly available online, along with acts adopted by DEC, electoral complaints and decisions in those cases. Lists of candidates to DEC and PEC were published as well as detailed information about the selection process. The CEC introduced livestreamed interviews with candidates for DEC positions and a video recording of the vote-counting procedure.⁶ Supervision over cameras was reserved for members of the PEC appointed by the opposition parties. The same parties were asked to delegate representatives to work in the CEC data center, where the figures from the summary protocols were transferred to spreadsheets. All these measures have contributed significantly to increased transparency and trust in the process.

⁴ The process for selecting the Chairperson requires a two-thirds vote in Parliament. Failure to achieve this results in subsequent rounds of voting with an anti-deadlock mechanism, requiring a two-thirds vote in the second round, then a three-fifths vote in the third round, then a simple majority in the fourth round. The intervals between votes that are defined in the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia are a minimum of four weeks, but for the 2021 municipal elections, one-off, specific provisions stipulated that no more than one vote may be held in one calendar week. The term of office of a CEC Chairperson elected by less than a two-thirds vote is six months.

⁵ The only exception to this is when the summary protocol is corrected without issuing the amendment protocol. Then the DEC, in line with the revised Election Code, is required to conduct a recount.

⁶ Interviews and their transmission were not obligatory, putting candidates in an unequal position. The CEC implemented interviews in a very tight timeframe determined by the electoral calendar and with various practical and legislative limitations.

Candidate Registration

Individual candidates could compete for the position of mayor and in majoritarian districts. To register, an initiative group must be formed, and signatures of support must be collected. The CEC is tasked with determining the minimum number to be collected. For majoritarian candidates in districts with 5,000 or more voters, the minimum is one percent of eligible voters. For all others, 50 signatures are needed.⁷ However, some districts are very small, with one thousand or less votes. As a result, in a number of districts the required number of signatures needed for a candidate to register is more than five percent of total voters, and in 20 districts, a candidate would need signatures from more than 10 percent of voters. This contradicts a well-established standard according to which candidate registration "should not require collection of the signatures of more than one percent of voters in the constituency concerned".⁸

DECs and PECs

DECs are permanent bodies composed of five members. During the election period, party-appointed members and additional CEC-appointed members are temporarily added, adhering to the same composition as the CEC. On August 3, the CEC announced the competition for three posts within each of the 73 DECs involved in these elections. The window for DEC applicants was only two days per the Election Code.⁹ In total 370 applicants were considered for 219 DEC seats – an average of 1.6 candidates per available seat. Seats for 12 DECs (16 percent) were not contested – the number of candidates equaled the number of open seats.

DEC candidates must hold a certificate of an Election Administration officer to qualify for the role.¹⁰ The certificates are administered by the CEC Centre for Training Centre after passing a rigorous technical test. For example, of 433 individuals who took the test in June 2021, only 108 passed. In total, 18 test sessions have been carried out since 2012, which resulted in a larger pool of qualified people for DEC positions. However, this did not translate into a greater number of candidates for these elections.

Only 15 of 17 CEC members participated in the selection of DEC members. The United National Movement (UNM) and European Georgia – Movement for Liberty (EG)-appointed members left the session in protest, arguing that interviews with only some of the candidates created unequal conditions, in addition to the fact that most of the candidates are dependent on or affiliated with the ruling party. Despite this, [in a roll-call vote](#), 98 members were elected with a two-thirds qualified majority. Nevertheless, the absence of two influential opposition parties deprived the process of broader political consensus.

PECs are established with the same procedure, and their composition matches that of the CEC and DECs, including nine party appointees. DECs were tasked with electing 29,312 PEC members – eight for each of 3,644 regular precincts. In total, 30,580 valid applications were submitted – an average of 1.04 candidates per available seat.¹¹ In 58.76 percent of precincts, the number of candidates equaled the number of open seats. Furthermore, in 24.32 percent of precincts the number of candidates exceeded the number of open seats by only one person. In total, in at least 83 percent of precincts, the procedure was purely formal and absent of real competition.

⁷ See [annex](#) to the CEC Ordinance 100 where the number of required signatures of support for each majoritarian district is determined.

⁸ Guideline [1.3.ii](#) of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

⁹ Election Code article 20(12b).

¹⁰ Election Code article 20(17a).

¹¹ 903 applications were rejected, as these candidates were appointed by parties in the last general election. This requirement was put in place in 2020 to add some guarantees for the impartiality of the elected members.

DEC members appointed by various opposition parties expressed distrust towards the process, submitted dissenting opinions or did not take part in voting at all.¹² Their objections included the lack of specific criteria for assessing candidates and that the procedure resulted in staffing PECs with public employees and persons affiliated with and subordinate to the ruling party. A dissenting opinion submitted by a UNM-appointed member included reliable information on many applications submitted from the same e-mail addresses.¹³ The party first [challenged in court](#) the CEC ordinance on Rules, Conditions and Terms of the Competition for PEC members. Later, on August 17 it appealed to the CEC based on several DEC ordinances on election of PEC members. Both claims were rejected as unfounded. The CEC indicated the lack of legal grounds for establishing breach of the law and the discretionary power of DEC members when voting for PEC members.¹⁴ The TEAM received reliable information that some parties were using their quotas to appoint members to PECs delegated by and from other parties, abusing the rule of one party, one representative. The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy's (ISFED) [reported](#) in its second interim report that some PEC members were unaware which party had appointed them.

Long-standing controversies related to the composition of electoral commissions have not been resolved. There are difficulties staffing PECs, including the expectation to select impartial candidates. At the same time, a low number of candidates make most of the competitions purely formal. In most cases, DEC members elect specific candidates, but there is no competition because there are no additional applicants. Moreover, the expectation for imposing more detailed requirements for candidates' selection may conflict with the right to vote, where a DEC member exercises their discretionary right to select a specific candidate.

Election Administration Training

The CEC's Training Centre took into account the experience of the 2020 elections and developed a modified, intensive and engaging set of trainings for the members of PECs. The number of training sessions ("phases") was increased from four to six. Some were prepared specifically for the executive members (chairperson, deputy chair and secretary), while others were intended for elected or appointed members. It is noteworthy that the sixth phase for executive members only included a module on "techniques for compiling summary protocols." The CEC, in collaboration with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), developed one more phase – a pilot e-learning program focused on practical skills in drawing up summary protocols. Some citizen observers mentioned poor attendance, with less than half of the members present. This coincides with the experience of the TEAM's observations in Telavi and the Centre's official statistics. Only 47 percent of party-appointed members took part in the trainings prepared for them (phase three). Notably, attendance was high at the trainings for executive members (phase four) at 87 percent.

New Technologies

The 2021 amendments to the Election Code authorized the CEC to perform a wide range of electoral procedures "through electronic means" during the 2021 elections. The CEC decided to pursue new technologies, namely video recording the counting process and a pilot of a vote counting project with the use of electronic ballot scanners.

¹² A detailed account from 14 DECs monitored by Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG) is available in the organization's [interim report](#), page 18.

¹³ In some cases, more than 20 applications were submitted from the same email address. See the [minutes](#) of the Krtsanisi DEC4 session that took place on August 15. The UNM reported the same for applications submitted to Vake, Saburtalo and Khulo DECs.

¹⁴ Discretionary power is defined in the Administrative Code of Georgia. The decision is available [here](#).

Cameras for video recordings were used in some 3,200 polling stations to record vote counting procedures. Per the Election Code, the recordings were to be made publicly available online no later than 10:00AM the fifth day after Election Day. The ruling party provided the cameras to the CEC at no cost on a temporary basis for four months.¹⁵ While there seemed to be broad political acceptance of this action, such a donation from a contesting political party to an election management body is not standard practice.¹⁶ As a result, counting procedures throughout the country were recorded by the election administration on equipment provided by one of the contestants, undermining the principle of independence. The Election Code determines that the costs incurred for preparation and conduct of elections “shall be funded from the State Budget of Georgia” but also allows for the receipt of “grants from persons duly authorized by law.”¹⁷

The Gakharia – For Georgia (For Georgia) party took issue with implementation of this technology, as the party wanted to use the video recordings for post factum verification of the vote count. Indeed, on the videos available, the practice varies from one PEC to another, and some do not consistently show the front page of the ballots. In most cases, it is not visible how ballots were marked, but it seems that this requirement was not enforced through the CEC decree.¹⁸

On September 22, the CEC conducted a [mock election](#) for the Tbilisi district of Krtsanisi to test the ballot scanners. The results printed from the devices coincided with the manual count. The ballot scanners were used on Election Day in almost all polling stations in the Krtsanisi district. The results provided by the devices were not considered official, and PEC members were still required to establish results through the standard hand counting procedure. A single ballot was used for all three votes, and voters were obliged to mark a dedicated space. Since the Election Code requires that voters make a choice on the sakrebulo proportional ballot by circling the sequence number, to avoid confusion by voters, a test marking was done with each voter to illustrate how the space had to be marked to make it readable for the device.¹⁹

Elections and COVID-19

Based on the experience in 2020, the CEC modified its COVID-19 regulations; in particular, rapid tests were required for all training participants and on Election Day for anyone entering the CEC and DEC premises (except representatives of the election administration). Standard procedures were imposed such as obligatory masks, thermal screening and frequent disinfection. The CEC encouraged its employees and DEC and PEC commissioners to get vaccinated. Mayoral and proportional ballots were provided for infected, quarantined, and self-quarantined voters. For this purpose, the CEC established 70 polling stations that operated as special groups with mobile ballot boxes. Self-quarantined voters needed to register through the CEC hotline to vote and provide confirmation of their status from the relevant state agency.²⁰

¹⁵ See [minutes](#) of the CEC session from August 23, page 59.

¹⁶ ISFED in its [First Interim](#) report noted that the “already blurred line between the state and the ruling party is further eroded by such actions”, page 8.

¹⁷ Election Code article 52(1) and (5).

¹⁸ The decree 55 articles 1a and 4 stipulate the requirements for use of video recordings. The TEAM witnessed in one of the Tbilisi PECs how its members disagreed how the cameras should be used. The CEC responded to For Georgia through a letter on October 7. All the video records are available [here](#).

¹⁹ The practical implementation on Election Day was more problematic. Special ballots used in three precincts were printed incorrectly and were too large to be inserted into the scanners. This was observed by the IRI TEAM. The voting in the affected precincts continued in traditional form.

²⁰ In total, 6,045 voters registered for this form of voting.

CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

Following unrest after the October 2020 parliamentary elections and an extended opposition boycott of parliamentary proceedings that lasted nearly six months, the ruling party and several opposition parties signed the April 19 agreement detailing a political compromise. While the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (GD) party initially signed the agreement, which included a commitment to call snap elections should the ruling party fail to receive at least 43 percent of proportional votes in the October 2021 municipal elections, several opposition parties such as UNM [did not](#) initially sign the April 19 agreement. One hundred days after signing the agreement, GD withdrew, pointing to the failure of opposition parties to sign the agreement. UNM eventually signed the agreement on September 2, 2021.

The official campaign period began on August 3. The deadline for political parties to apply to the CEC for registration depended on their participation in the last parliamentary elections or having parliamentary representation by the day of calling the elections. For parties that fulfilled at least one of these conditions the deadline was August 6; for all others the deadline was July 14. Fifty-two parties applied to participate in the election process, with 48 eventually becoming registered, five of which de-registered after being unable to submit candidates. The CEC and DEC across the country registered 68 initiative groups with candidates for mayoral and majoritarian sakrebulo elections. [Nine parties](#) and three initiative groups were either rejected or cancelled by the CEC for a range of administrative issues. The deadline for lists of party candidates for sakrebulo was September 2. The number of candidates on a municipal party list were to be no less than the number of proportionally elected seats in a sakrebulo and to not exceed three times the number of seats.

Mayoral Candidates

59 Self- Governing Communities	Tbilisi	4 Self-Governing cities	Women Candidates (in total)
199	16	24	25

Sakrebulo Candidates

	Proportional	Majoritarian	Total
Tbilisi Sakrebulo	1,728	138	1,866
63 Local Sakrebulo	18,896	2,632	21,527

Much of the opposition's strategy ahead of the municipal elections came at the expense of any substantive discussion of issues that impact citizens at the municipal level. IRI analysts found national-level politics were driving campaign narratives more than any local issue that one would expect to see featured in municipal election campaigns. After withdrawing from the April 19 agreement in July, GD candidates distanced themselves from the promise to hold snap elections and publicly stated there would be no early elections. Talk of a "referendum" on the ruling party's performance allowed a usually fragmented and poorly funded opposition to coalesce around what they thought would offer their parties an opportunity to bring an end to the GD government.

IRI analysts received reports of alleged abuse of administrative resources, such as civil servants actively campaigning during working hours and the politicization of social services. The abuse of state resources is an offense under Article 88 of the Election Code.²¹ Additional reports of alleged intimidation of opposition parties and their supporters, including, inter alia, intimidation of public officials (teachers and school administrators in particular) and threats against civil servants and their families, though not substantiated, should still be taken seriously. Parties indicated that the victims would not speak to the authorities on record for fear of recrimination. However, on September 1, the Georgian Public Defender [released a report](#) that found that 62 public employees had been subjected to various forms of pressure, including losing their jobs due to support for opposition parties. Additionally, on August 31, the Public Defender sent the cases of 34 persons to the Prosecutor General's Office of Georgia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia for investigation and response. In both reports, the majority of individuals that were willing to speak publicly were aligned with For Georgia.

Faced with limited financial resources for the elections, opposition parties had to adapt their campaign efforts to deal with this reality. Observers and parties that IRI analysts spoke with indicated that they directed their resources toward social media, public gatherings in parks, and limited door-to-door canvassing. As it related to door-to-door canvassing, none of the parties told IRI that they were targeting voters or collecting data. They would only say that they were knocking on all doors or the doors of family and friends.

Several smaller opposition parties had difficulty finding candidates for their party lists. In several cases, citizen election observers discovered that opposition parties had forged their signatures on candidate filing papers and that their names had been listed on party lists in rural municipalities. This action is a [violation of Georgian law](#). Individuals are considering taking legal action.

As the campaign entered its final days, there was a noticeable rise in opposition activity and advertising. Unfortunately, there was also an increase in [campaign violence](#) during the week of September 19, with four reported incidents of violence against opposition candidates.

On September 6, former President Mikheil Saakashvili released a [video](#) in which he told Georgian citizens that he would return to Georgia for the October 2 elections. The video presented an unexpected dynamic in the campaign that impacted opposition turnout. Having been convicted twice in-absentia, and with multiple ongoing charges related to abuse of power and his handling of 2007 anti-government protests, the government publicly stated that Saakashvili would be arrested if he were to return to the country. In a [second video](#) released on September 13, Saakashvili called on the military to “actively participate” in the October elections. On October 1, the former President [released a video](#) on Facebook claiming that he had entered Georgian territory. Throughout the day, the government tried to downplay the situation, first denying that Saakashvili had returned to the country then announcing [his arrest](#) just hours before the polls opened. The return of the former President seemingly had limited effect on UNM's attempt to nationalize the election. Rather, it appeared to have marginalized smaller opposition parties while increasing polarization between GD and UNM.

²¹ Article 88 - Prohibition on the use of administrative resources and the abuse of power or office during canvassing and election campaigns. Any violation of the requirements of this Law in the course of using administrative resources or exercising official duties or an official capacity during canvassing and election campaign shall be subject to a penalty in the amount of GEL 2000.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

On September 1, the SAO released an [“Interim Report on the Financial Monitoring of the October 2, 2021 Municipal Elections.”](#) This report served as an audit of political parties released prior to the election. The document included a review of donations, public funding provided to eligible parties, other sources of income such as loans, and expenditures. A review of the SAO report indicated that parties may continue to rely on illegal “dark money” contributions that go unaccounted for in public disclosures. This is most visible when reviewing [salary expenditures](#).

In the case of GD, the party disclosed that during the reporting period from August 23 to September 12 only four individuals were salaried employees of the party, receiving a total of 7,500 GEL. There was no indication that regional or local staff were paid salaries, nor was there any disclosure of national party staff salaries. When reviewing disclosure reports for For Georgia and Girchi (Iago Khvichia) political parties, analysts discovered that both parties disclosed that they were paying no salaried employees. IRI discussed this matter with Transparency International - Georgia and was told that parties often fund these expenses using dark money contributions. For a number of parties, such as UNM, the disclosure reports indicated that there were lump-sum expenditures allocated to party workers or contractors who may be hired during the election period or on Election Day that may account for these costs. It is also worth mentioning that at the time of writing this report, the SAO is conducting an [investigation](#) into whether Girchi sold its seats on both DEC and PEC to help fund its campaign activities.

The SAO report showed that GD spent more than two-times (7,600,097 GEL) the total amount of all other parties (3,484,464 GEL) combined in the period between August 2 and September 12. The bulk of GD’s expenses were for advertising. GD’s declarations were significantly higher than those of all the opposition parties combined. Both EG and UNM reported figures that were a distant second and third in spending. IRI analysts concluded that GD’s disproportionate fundraising ability, supplemented by public funds, proved a disproportionate advantage to the incumbent party. Likewise, the seeming reliance of opposition parties on public funds over strategic fundraising as a primary source of income will ensure that parties may never have the ability to field a significant campaign. For many opposition parties, public funds amount to the majority of their income. Ultimately, this diminishes the voice of opposition parties and poses a significant barrier to challenges to parties with a larger electoral footprint.

Electoral Subject Expenditures in GEL August 2-September 12

	Election Subject	Ad	Salaries	Other spending	Gross spending
1	GD	5,299,065	7,500	2,293,532	7,600,097
2	Lelo	539,321	23,783	233,265	796,369
3	For Georgia	336,566	-	367,038	703,604
4	UNM	65,950	81,748	373,606	521,304
5	Girchi	124,741	-	329,589	454,330
6	EG	72,497	13,534	244,931	330,962
7	Citizens	190,879	14,343	8,182	213,404
8	Alliance of Patriots	34,262	64,797	26,888	125,947
9	Third Force	37,626	5,102	60,703	103,431
10	Others	73,362	82,550	79,201	253,113
	Gross	6,774,269	293,357	4,016,935	11,084,561

Electoral Subject Income in GEL – August 2-September 12

	Election Subject	State funding	Donations	Other income	Gross income
1	GD	428,335	7,837,030	22,505	8,287,870
2	UNM	183,303	543,182	48,219	774,704
3	For Georgia	-	755,711	890	756,601
4	European Georgia	93,701	74,262	500,000	667,963
5	Girchi	577,218	-	-	577,218
6	Citizens	369,043	-	-	369,043
7	Lelo	66,963	824,997	4,000	895,960
8	Alliance of Patriots	86,927	34,360	-	121,287
9	Third Force	78,327	22,500	-	100,827
10	Others	89,179	227,948	3,115	320,242
	Gross	1,972,996	10,319,989	578,729	12,871,714

MEDIA

Georgia's media environment is hyper partisan, polarized and often acrimonious. Election media was dominated by political developments including the April 19 agreement, the State Security Service of Georgia's (SSSG) private information leaks, and the arrival and arrest of former president Mikheil Saakashvili just prior to Election Day. The main TV channels and largest media companies' editorial narratives of these events varied widely, closely reflecting their stakeholders' interests.

Incidents of threats and violence against journalists were prevalent in the pre-election period. Transparency International's September 30 [report](#), Media - Target of Violence and Illegal Surveillance: Assessment of the pre-election media environment summarizes trends and changes in Georgia's media environment since the 2020 parliamentary elections, including 93 cases of violence against 23 media representatives, and 53 injuries stemming from the July 5-6 protests alone. GD candidate Kakha Kaladze received widespread media attention and criticism after making negative comments [directed at](#) Mtavari Arkhi reporter Dea Mamiseishvili. The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics [described the exchange](#) as "characteristic of authoritarianism." On Election Day, violence and intimidation against journalists continued, with at least 16 [incidents](#) taking place across the country. Most cases involved party coordinators and activists, primarily of the ruling party, verbally attacking critical broadcasters. Of note, at polling station 84 in Zugdidi, a man wielding an electric shocker [threatened a Formula TV journalist](#) and verbally abused her. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has [launched a criminal investigation](#) into the matter.

In July 2020, an amendment to the Electronic Communications Act allowed the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) – the government authority that oversees broadcast media and electronic communications – to establish a "special manager" at telecommunications companies to enforce decisions made by the GNCC. The GNCC, while beneficial in theory, is not perceived as independent, and the 2020 amendment was perceived critically by civil society organizations as potentially overreaching. In the pre-election period, the GNCC received and reviewed election complaints, assessing whether the content of political ads adhered to legal standards. In one complaint brought to the GNCC, the opposition party EG [stated](#) that Imedi TV "grossly violated the legislation" by refusing to air their political advertisement due to alleged "hate speech content." The GNCC upheld the

complaint and fined Imedi TV. Although Imedi TV challenged the ruling in court, the GNCC's ruling was upheld. Opposition party UNM has filed similar complaints with the GNCC that are currently undergoing review. The publicly-funded Georgian Public Broadcaster has also struggled to win the trust and attention of broad audiences — both due to perceptions of bias and less sensational content.

While Facebook is the most popular social media site that allows candidates to connect with interested voters, it is also the primary means of spreading invective and misinformation online. Fake online pages, via online news sites or social media networks, are numerous and contributed to voter confusion. Positively, several Georgian CSOs worked to track and expose online misinformation in the election space including the Media Development Foundation's (MDF) [Myth Detector Lab](#), which exposes campaign disinformation and offers recommendations to strengthen media literacy. ISFED has also conducted ongoing, extensive social media monitoring during the election campaign, revealing misleading and discrediting Facebook pages. On September 14, it released the [first interim report](#) on social media monitoring in the context of the 2021 local elections, which includes an analysis of key trends in the social media space in Georgia ahead of Election Day.

The CEC's newly introduced Information Protection Center (IPC) was designed to identify and report about misinformation disseminated by the media regarding the election process. In practice, the IPC's misinformation reports received criticism for allegedly targeting media outlets selectively, primarily media critical of the government. Furthermore, the IPC admitted technical errors after wrongly including several CSOs and media organizations in their misinformation reports due to technical and monitoring flaws. Shame Movement also quickly challenged their inclusion in a misinformation report, demonstrating that a Facebook page attributed to them was in fact not of their creation, but was itself a fake page. USAID announced on September 24 that its funding of the IPC had ceased.

ELECTION DAY

Based on reports from citizen and international observer groups and the limited observations of IRI's TEAM, Election Day was largely peaceful and conducted in line with Georgian laws. Exceptions were noted with regards to journalists who experienced cases of intimidation and in some instances violence.

Official voter turnout figures provided by the CEC indicate that both GD and UNM were able to increase their vote turnout respectively on October 2, which had the likely impact of marginalizing smaller parties vote share. CEC data shows that [turnout for the 2017 municipal elections was 45.65%](#), while the number of voters participating in the [2021 municipal elections increased to 51.92%](#). While Saakashvili's return may not have offered UNM decisive victories in the first round, it did ensure that UNM was able to secure a significant position in the runoff elections on October 30.

Preliminary National Party Percentages (Major Parties)

Party	National Vote Total	National Percentage
Georgia Dream	822,669	46.74%
United National Movement	541,069	30.7%
For Georgia	137,414	7.8%
Lelo	47,836	2.71%
European Georgia	29,279	1.66%
Alliance of Patriots	25,678	1.46%
Girchi - More Freedom	25,447	1.44%
Labor Party	24,301	1.38%
Third Power	23,629	1.34%
Girchi	16,695	0.95%

As a result of the highly competitive municipal elections, there will be 20 mayoral runoff elections and 42 majoritarian runoff elections held on October 30. Several of the key races (starred in the list below) saw GD and UNM finish the first round only a few percentage points apart. While Saakashvili's return appears to have increased UNM votes on Election Day, it was not enough to prevent GD from exceeding the 43 percent threshold agreed to in the April 19 agreement, which included a commitment to call snap elections should the ruling party fail to receive at least 43 percent of proportional votes on October 2. This rendered unsuccessful the opposition's attempts to turn the elections into a national referendum on GD's performance.

Mayoral Runoff Elections - October 30, 2021

Municipality/City	Georgia Dream %	Opponent %
Tbilisi	45	34 - UNM
Rustavi*	45	44 - UNM
Kutaisi*	41	43 - UNM
Poti	47	38 - UNM
Batumi*	41	42 - UNM
Telavi*	46	45 - UNM
Tianeti	43	30 - Tamaz Metchiaur for United Georgia
Kareli	35	46 - UNM
Khashuri	44	35 - UNM
Tsageri	49	35 - For Georgia
Baghdati	49 (49.5)	36 - UNM
Tskaltubo	49	43 - UNM
Ozurgeti	44	29 - Independent
Senaki*	40	42 - UNM
Martvili	44	36 - UNM
Khobi	47	34 - UNM
Zugdidi	41	47 - UNM
Tsalenjikha*	38	40 - UNM

While the government claimed victory related to proportional and majoritarian seats, opposition parties have tempered their response to the election results, framing their concerns with the process as irregularities or procedural deficiencies rather than claiming election fraud. Though protests were anticipated in the immediate days following the announcement of the results, positively, the environment has remained calm. The following races will remain competitive in the next round, with supporters of For Georgia, the third-highest winning party, possibly playing a deciding factor in the outcome of some races.

Preliminary Majoritarian Results

Region	District Name	Majoritarian District	Number of polling stations	Opposition Party Name	Opposition% in 1st round	Georgia Dream % in 1st Round
Tbilisi	Saburtalo	3	98	Girchi-More Freedom	14.39%	38.64%
Kakheti	Kvareli	9	2	For Georgia	33.22%	39.58%
Kakheti	Akhmeta	3	2	UNM	30.89%	37.50%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Tianeti	1	3	Tamaz Metchiaur for United Georgia	31.46%	39.82%
Kvemo Kartli	Rustavi	6	7	For Georgia	14.78%	37.60%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Dusheti	1	4	UNM	20.06%	37.23%
Shida Kartli	Kaspi	5	3	UNM	30.62%	39.60%
Shida Kartli	Kareli	1	5	UNM	35.32%	38.34%
Shida Kartli	Kareli	3	5	UNM	32.41%	25.94%
Shida Kartli	Khashuri	7	5	UNM	18.95%	36.06%
Racha-Lechkhumi-Svaneti	Oni	4	3	For Georgia	35.66%	35.90%
Racha-Lechkhumi-Svaneti	Oni	7	2	Lelo	29.41%	33.99%
Racha-Lechkhumi-Svaneti	Lentekhi	5	3	Free Georgia	29.86%	35.89%
Imereti	Samtredia	8	3	UNM	31.53%	39.52%
Imereti	Chiatura	12	3	United Georgia - Democratic Movement	29.49%	36.81%
Imereti	Tskaltubo	11	2	UNM	31.03%	39.51%
Guria	Ozurgeti	1	4	For Georgia	37.76%	39.73%
Guria	Ozurgeti	6	4	UNM	38.34%	33.91%
Guria	Ozurgeti	11	4	Independent	27.97%	35.28%
Guria	Ozurgeti	12	4	UNM	25.47%	38.69%
Guria	Chokhatauri	10	4	For Georgia	36.77%	37.76%
Samegrelo	Senaki	3	7	UNM	38.79%	35.84%

Region	District Name	Majoritarian District	Number of polling stations	Opposition Party Name	Opposition% in 1st round	Georgia Dream % in 1st Round
Samegrelo	Senaki	8	4	UNM	37.52%	36.78%
Samegrelo	Martvili	3	2	UNM	34.02%	34.51%
Samegrelo	Martvili	8	3	For Georgia	36.09%	35.41%
Samegrelo	Martvili	9	2	European Socialists	22.05%	35.51%
Samegrelo	Zugdidi	4	7	UNM	39.84%	38.95%
Samegrelo	Tsalenjikha	1	6	For Georgia	26.53%	36.18%
Samegrelo	Tsalenjikha	4	3	UNM	29.62%	34.89%
Samegrelo	Tsalenjikha	5	3	UNM	31.28%	36.11%
Samegrelo	Tsalenjikha	6	2	UNM	33.51%	35.42%
Samegrelo	Tsalenjikha	9	1	UNM	37.50%	38.60%
Samegrelo	Chkhorotsku	1	4	UNM	28.41%	34.98%
Samegrelo	Chkhorotsku	2	4	UNM	25.30%	37.95%
Samegrelo	Chkhorotsku	5	3	For Georgia	37.52%	34.59%
Samegrelo	Chkhorotsku	6	3	For Georgia	36.96%	32.24%
Samegrelo	Chkhorotsku	7	3	For Georgia	39.80%	37.08%
Adjara	Keda	2	5	UNM	38.66%	36.03%
Adjara	Khelvachauri	5	5	UNM	39.29%	36.08%
Adjara	Khelvachauri	6	6	UNM	39.31%	37.57%
Adjara	Khulo	1	1	For Georgia UNM	38.116% (For Georgia) 32.029% (UNM)	Both candidates participating in the run-off will be opposition candidates
Adjara	Khulo	2	9	UNM	27.59%	33.10%

Citizen observer groups reported instances of procedural deficiencies and irregularities such as violations of secrecy of the vote, failure to comply with vote counting procedures and filing summary protocols, and failure to properly check and ink voters. Interference with citizen monitoring efforts, including cases of threats against citizen observers, were also reported. More detailed analysis can be found in the following preliminary statements: [International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy](#), [Transparency International Georgia](#), [Georgian Young Lawyers' Association](#), [Public Movement Multinational Georgia](#) and the [joint International Election Observation Mission \(IEOM\) statement](#) made by the OSCE/ODIHR, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe.

The quality of the work of PECs was uneven across the country and within municipalities. While several commissions observed by IRI can be assessed as good in their performance during the voting process, others lacked the competence and knowledge of election-day procedures.²² The shortcomings of PECs were more often concerning the basic principles and obligations of PEC members rather than complex procedures. However, as far as the TEAM is aware, the shortcomings observed on Election Day were not systemic.

Notably, the joint OSCE/ODIHR, European Parliament, and Council of Europe mission reported that observers who were associated with political parties occasionally interfered with the process, which could have influenced voters due to their presence in and around polling stations. Further, the joint IEOM preliminary statement noted, “party and candidate representatives and citizen observers were present in 83.1 percent of polling stations observed, however, in 7 percent they were seen as interfering with the election process.” IRI and ISFED witnessed similar interference on Election Day, including the presence of politically aligned observers ostensibly tracking voters in Rustavi.

ISFED’s observers posted outside of 120 precincts observed that in 20 percent of the precincts, gatherings of persons within the perimeter of 100 meters were taking place. Voters’ arrival was tracked in 11 percent of the observations within the same perimeter. Nearly identical statistics were published in the Preliminary Statement of the IEOM. The IEOM reported that the presence of groups of individuals in the immediate proximity was recorded for 21 percent of observed stations, while voter tracking occurred in 8 percent.²³ Further, [ISFED reported](#) on organized mobilization or transportation of voters in 22 percent of the above dedicated observations of precinct perimeters. At eight percent of these precincts, verbal confrontations or harassment were recorded outside of polling stations.

Preliminary Results Integrity and Electoral Dispute Resolution

Through legislative changes and CEC decrees, measures were adopted to strengthen the integrity of the results management process. Among them are video recording of counting procedures and obligatory random recounts of five precincts in each DEC. Moreover, PECs are no longer allowed to correct the protocols a day after the vote. Despite this, some defective protocols, for example with calculation errors, were received by DEC and will require a decision with a two-thirds majority to initiate a recount.²⁴

Local NGO iFact, as in 2020, [conducted detailed analysis](#) of all the proportional protocols.²⁵ The organization found that 27 percent of the protocols were mathematically disbalanced, a similar figure to 2020 (26 percent).²⁶ In principle, the same figure was calculated [by the CEC](#). According to iFact, in some districts of Tbilisi a disbalance was calculated in more than 40 percent of proportional protocols.²⁷ In the vast majority of cases, this was limited to ballot shortages smaller than five. Yet in some precincts, the shortage was larger than 10, while surpluses were more than five ballots.²⁸

22 Human Rights Center (HRC) reported in its election-day [statement](#) that violations were caused by the “low qualification of the PEC members that was a very common tendency during the recent elections”.

23 According to the IEOM, this is “raising concerns about the ability of voters to cast their vote free from pressure. This was reported especially in Rustavi, Bolnisi, Gori and Kutaisi.” An HRC observer reported from Gardabani municipality on a person standing at the entrance to the yard of the polling station who recorded in a notebook all who arrived.

24 Election Code article 8(4).

25 Each PEC was obliged to prepare a separate protocol for mayoral, sakrebulo proportional, and sakrebulo majoritarian races.

26 iFact compared the number of voter signatures with the combined number of invalid ballots and valid ballots.

27 Mtatsminda, Vake, Saburtalo, Didube and Nadzaladevi districts.

28 According to the CEC’s published [data](#) as of October 4, a shortage was noted in 73 proportional protocols, and in 21 protocols a surplus of five and more ballots was established.

In line with the electoral reforms and legislative requirements, the mandatory 10 percent recount provided an integrity check of the counts performed by five PECs in each of the 73 district level commissions. A total of 360 precincts were recounted.²⁹ As a result, mistakes were found in 121 precincts (33 percent of the sample). In almost all cases, mismatches were minimal, limited to one or two ballots, but there were also a few protocols with more serious discrepancies.³⁰ Results in 194 precincts were partially or completely recounted due to submitted complaints and at the DEC's own initiative. Similarly, in these recounts, changes were made to 66 protocols (34 percent of precincts).³¹ In a highly contested Zugdidi constituency, after GD demanded to annul the majoritarian summary protocols issued by four PECs, the GD candidate was declared the winner in one race instead of the UNM candidate.³² This approach was challenged by TI because the DEC's recalculated only invalid ballots, rather than all ballots.³³ Citizen observer groups specialized in electoral matters submitted appeals with demands for recounts. GYLA requested recounts in more than 230 precincts, including all those under the Isani DEC5.³⁴ TI appealed summary protocols issued by 12 precincts.

On October 9, the CEC Chairperson recommended DEC's conduct additional further recounts of the precincts where the results were appealed by what it termed "leading citizen observer organizations," with a high number of invalid ballots or a ballot surplus of five or larger. The CEC's structural unit prepared information on the list of precincts that might be recounted based on the above-mentioned criteria. Of the total 812 precincts recounted, 360 were in compliance with the 2021 amendments to the voting regulations and [257 were additional](#) precincts that met the criteria set out on October 9. This unexpected move was met with controversy by opposition parties and observer organizations who questioned the number of precincts that submitted protocols that appeared to be inaccurate. Due to the timing of the CEC's announcement, ISFED and other observers were not always able to be present for these recommended recounts, in practice contradicting the CEC regulatory requirement.³⁵ In total, partial or full recounts took place in 812 PECs. The results for the majoritarian and proportional recounts can be found on the [CEC website](#).

As of October 1, 247 complaints and appeals were submitted by political parties during the pre-election period: 224 by UNM, six by Free Georgia, and four each by EG and Zurab Girchi Japaridze: Girchi - More Freedom. On September 28, the CEC also reported a total of 41 submissions to the CEC and 315 to DEC's, mostly related to parties and candidates' registration, infringements on PEC functioning, members selection, and campaign activities. Of positive note, and in contrast to the 2020 parliamentary elections, there were only a few submissions rejected on procedural grounds. The TEAM followed a limited number of proceedings at the CEC level. All of them were conducted in a transparent manner, giving the claimants an opportunity to present their submissions, occasionally with substantial discussion among the CEC members and well-reasoned decisions.

29 Five precincts per DEC. PECs under the Krtsanisi DEC4, where ballot scanners were used, were not included in this sample, which is why it is 72 and not 73 districts.

30 Detailed data for all three types of protocols are available [here](#).

31 More data on this is available in the CEC's [Information on Summary Protocols](#) issued on October 9.

32 The GD complaint is available [here](#). UNM also [appealed](#) all summary protocols in this municipality due to the allegedly high number of invalid ballots. The DEC did not consider UNM's appeal because UNM failed to appeal before the signature of the summary protocols.

33 This appeal was not satisfied by the Zugdidi District Court. See the TI [Brief Information](#) on election disputes.

34 Results in four of five sampled PECs were modified as a result of the obligatory recounts. See GYLA's [statement](#).

35 ISFED issued a [statement](#) that it was informed of some of the recounts with only two hours' notice and that the recounts started at 10 PM. The CEC regulatory requirements can be found in the [Guidelines For the Members of District Election Commissions](#) on page 41.

On Election Day and shortly afterward, 1,702 submissions were made to DEC's, 561 of which were prepared by citizen observer organizations. The majority were demands for recounts and annulment of PEC summary protocols. The remainder requested imposing disciplinary sanctions and focused on various procedural infringements. Almost all of the submitted complaints and appeals were rejected on merits. As of October 7, the CECs database included 37 cases that were partially or fully satisfied. These were related mostly to violations committed by PEC members during voting and counting procedures, two cases of abuse of administrative resources and one case related to candidates' registration and PEC member participation in agitation.

INCLUSION

Although awareness of inclusion issues is growing, the acceptance of women and minority communities including youth, PWDs, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) and ethnic minority groups remains a work in progress.

LGBTQI Community

On May 16, 2021, [15 political parties agreed](#) to eliminate discrimination and violence against queer people, protect the right to peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression of all human beings, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and not allow the use of hate speech and incitement of social strife in the political process on the basis of homophobia. However, the [July 5 attacks](#) on Tbilisi Pride and journalists by far-right groups have resulted in continued discrimination and violence against the LGBTQI community, as well as the media reporting on their activities. On September 6, Public Defender Nino Lomjaria noted "the acts of violence of this day aren't fully investigated yet" despite plenty of photo and video evidence. The Prosecutor's Office has not initiated criminal proceedings against any person on charges of organizing group violence. The lack of criminal proceedings has opened the space for aggression towards other groups, including women and opposition candidates. Furthermore, the ability of the LGBTQI community to exercise an active voice during these elections has been suppressed.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) [issued](#) a written declaration on October 1 calling on Georgian authorities to take action for protecting LGBTI people from violence and discrimination. The signatories stressed the authorities' response to the July 5 events "demonstrates a resounding State failure to ensure the protection of human rights and constitutes a violation of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights," reminded the Georgian authorities of their "duty and responsibility to protect the Constitutional rights and freedoms, and human rights of all citizens" and called on Georgian authorities to "bring to justice those who commit violence against others peacefully exercising their rights."

Ethnic Minorities

Georgia's ethnic minority groups make up approximately 13 percent of the population, of which 6.3 percent are Azerbaijani and 4.55 percent are Armenian. The majority of ethnic Azerbaijanis reside in Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Sagarejo municipalities, while ethnic Armenians are concentrated in Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda and Akhaltsikhe municipalities. These communities face numerous challenges to active political engagement including, but not limited to, language barriers, lack of education and economic marginalization. Rather than continual engagement, political parties tend to engage ethnic minorities mainly during election cycles, and few political parties make their party programs available online in minority languages when they have the funding to do so.

To its credit, the CEC continues to support the inclusion of minority groups and took significant steps to ensure minority voters had access to information, such as multilingual ballots in Azerbaijani, Georgian and Armenian languages. To facilitate an inclusive electoral environment, the CEC established 348 polling stations for the 2021 municipal elections with multilingual materials, namely 211 offering Georgian-Azerbaijani, 133 offering Georgian-Armenian and four offering Georgian-Armenian-Azerbaijani materials. Materials available for voters of the regions densely populated with ethnic minorities included: ballot papers in Georgian-Armenian, Georgian-Azerbaijani, and at mixed polling stations (four polling stations) Georgian-Armenian-Azerbaijani languages; a unified voters' list in Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani languages; rules describing the procedure for filling in the ballot papers in Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani languages; and posters describing the polling procedures in Georgian-Armenian and Georgian-Azerbaijani languages.

Ethnic minority inclusion within the electoral process is most prevalent with respect to PEC composition. PEC members, particularly in minority-dominated areas, remain poorly trained ahead of Election Day. On September 15 at a session of the CEC's [Working Group on Ethnic Minorities' Issues](#), PMMG's Chairman [commented on](#) the lower degree of attendance of DEC and PEC training by minorities, who are best positioned to serve as election workers in minority-dominated areas, as well as the need for more Armenian and Azerbaijani-speaking trainers.

Electoral materials and manuals were translated into Azerbaijani and Armenian languages, and a concerted effort was made to facilitate trainings in these languages. Trainers of the CEC Training Centre conducted courses for PEC members speaking in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. The following manuals were translated for them: instructions for the PEC Chairperson; authorities of the PEC Secretary on Election Day; duties of the PEC member regulating the voters' flow; duties of the registrar PEC member; duties of the PEC member supervising the ballot box and special envelopes; duties of the PEC member conveying the mobile ballot box; training module for PEC members on electoral security; rules to seal electoral documentation/equipment; and guidelines for members of precinct election commissions on supporting independent participation of voters with disabilities in elections. In its [second interim report](#), PMMG noted that "In those districts with settlements of ethnic minorities where language barrier is not a hindrance for the ethnic minorities, trainings for precinct elections members were delivered in Georgia whereas in those districts where language barrier remains a problem, trainings were delivered in Georgian as well as in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages."

The highest representation of minorities in PECs is in Ninotsminda and Marneuli, according to PMMG's first [interim monitoring report](#). Of 296 elected PEC members in Ninotsminda and 720 elected PEC members in Marneuli, there are 283 and 579 ethnic minority PEC members, respectively. Of all electoral districts monitored by PMMG (21 in total), the lowest representation of ethnic minorities is in Samgori, where out of 582 elected PEC members only 13 belong to ethnic minority groups. This may be attributed to an overall smaller ethnic minority population within Tbilisi. These figures may have been revised slightly in advance of October 2 due to last minute membership changes at the PEC.

Persons with Disabilities

To support the active participation of persons with disabilities, the CEC went to great efforts to make voting and information more accessible, including translating informational videos into sign language; conducting an online course for PEC and DEC members on how to use frames for the visually impaired; and implementing temporary procedures for the participation of voters using wheelchairs including accessible polling stations. The online training course was [updated](#) to raise awareness among election administration staff about the etiquette of talking to voters with disabilities, norms of behavior

and services introduced to promote their independent participation in elections. The CEC offered an opportunity for wheelchair users to vote in accessible PECs. Of the 3,746 polling stations, 255 are adapted precincts for [accessible polling](#), and 873 have provided ramps.

Participation of Women

For the 2021 municipal elections, candidate lists for proportional seats were legally required to have at least one in every three candidates of the opposite gender, which resulted in women's overall share on proportional lists reaching 42.5 percent. An [amendment](#) to the Election Code from July 2, 2020, stipulates that one in every two candidates on the party proportional lists must be of the opposite sex for the 2028 municipal elections. While mandated quotas for women are a step in the right direction, the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions by the IEOM [reported](#) that "women are underrepresented in public office holding only 19.3 per cent of seats in the parliament, 15.5 per cent of the seats in outgoing local councils, and 4 out of 13 ministerial posts. Out of 64 outgoing mayors, one is female. Only one in 10 mayoral candidates and one in seven majoritarian candidates were women."

Comparison of Women's Representation in 2017 and 2021 Municipal Elections

	2017	2021
Total Female Mayoral Candidates	47 (13%)	25 (10%)
Total Female Majoritarian Candidates	756 (16%)	488 (17%)
Total Female Proportional Candidates	218 (37%)	8,767 (42.5%)
Tbilisi Female Mayoral Candidates	2 (15%)	4 (25%)

Women [did not feature prominently](#) in the 2021 municipal election campaigns, with a few notable exceptions mainly in the capital. The proportional list quota was effective in getting women on the ballot; however, without a broader mandated quota, women still have a long way to go to reach parity in nominations, particularly in majoritarian races. Although more women participated as candidates in this election, the quota did little to eliminate the hostile environment many women face when pursuing political office. Every opposition party interviewed by IRI analysts provided numerous examples of women being threatened and harassed, including that they were the subjects of vilification in the media and had experienced gender-specific harassment, cyberbullying, insults and threats to expose their private lives.

Of note, EG submitted [a case to the Constitutional Court](#) against the gender quota in August 2021 and in particular against the rule that if a person resigns from a seat, the replacement must be the next person on the list of the same gender, not the next person on the list. In some cases, this leads to a party losing the seat; however, it ensures that the gender quota is maintained. On October 21, the [Constitutional Court dismissed](#) the case alleging the unconstitutionality of the gender quota and upheld the rule requiring female sakrebulo members to be replaced by the next female on the proportional list. However, it ruled that the similar rule for replacing male sakrebulo members with the next male on the proportional list to be unconstitutional without any further consideration of the merits.

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