

# UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

**Georgia's upcoming elections to decide whether it's the end  
of democratic transformation or a new start**

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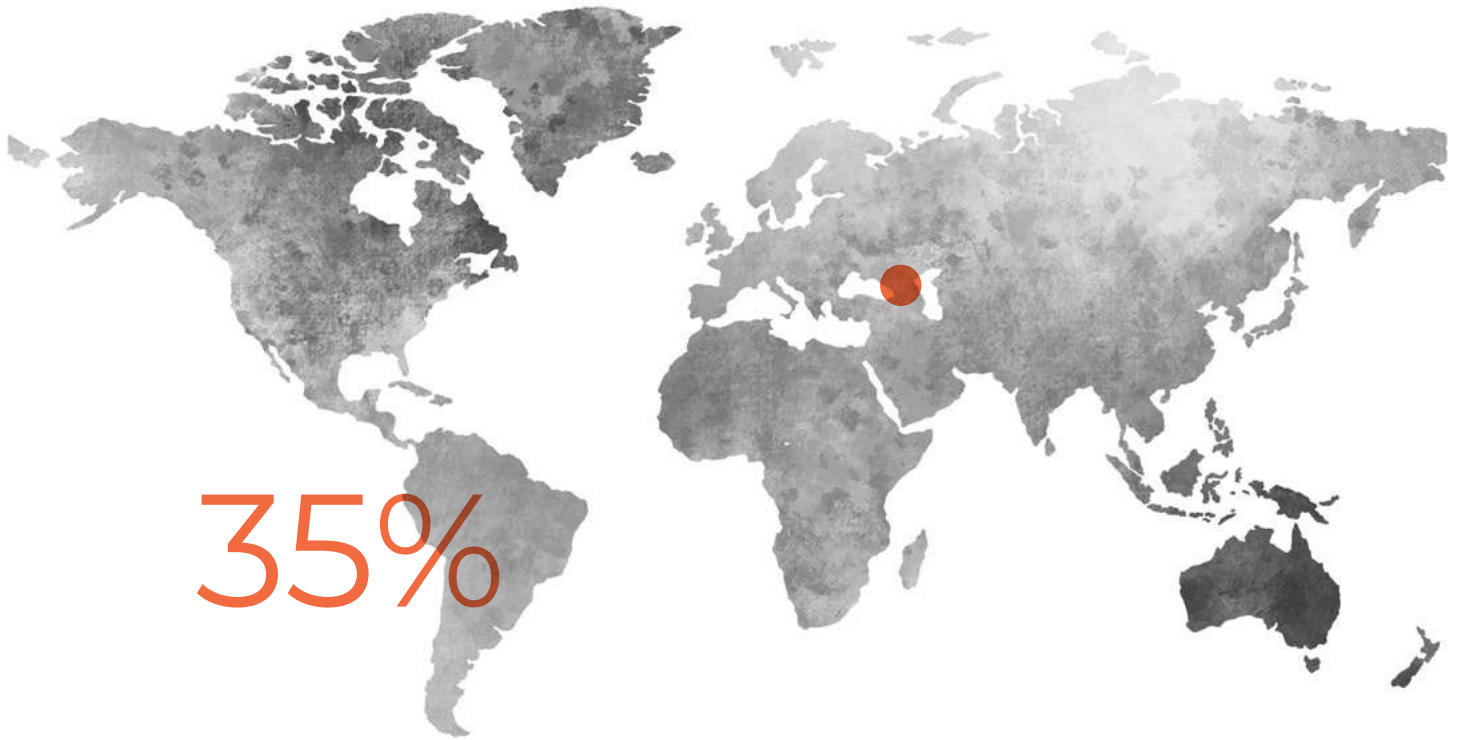
# INTRODUCTION

On October 26, 2024, Georgia will hold parliamentary elections. The pro-Russian Georgia Dream (GD) party will be vying for its fourth majority following several years of unrest, widespread protests, and the closing of democratic space. This election will be a watershed moment that marks whether Georgia will continue its fall backward into authoritarianism or reverse course and move towards a more accountable and inclusive democracy.

This report presents an analysis of electoral perceptions and scenarios based on academic research, focus group discussions, and the input of field experts.



## GLOBAL CONTEXT



**W**e are living through a global wave of autocratization. According to the Varieties of Democracy Institute, as of 2023, autocratization has affected 35% of the world's population in 42 countries. This contrasts with democratization taking place in 18 countries, home to only 5% of the world's population. Electoral autocracies, where regimes hold elections but impose restrictions on civilians in order to prevent meaningful, free, and fair elections, are experienced by a plurality of the world's population (44%). Most of the world's population lives in countries where electoral competition is "real but unfair" than any other regime type.<sup>1</sup>

Clean elections are the second most deteriorated component of democracy (after freedom of expression), declining in 23 countries while improving in 12. Electoral fraud, which includes attacks on Electoral Management Bodies, the use of disinformation and attacking media, and the threat of online and offline violence, has become an ever more common tool of autocrats and autocratic aspirants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2020). The new competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), 51-65. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>

<sup>2</sup> Nord, Marina, Martin Lundstedt, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Cecilia Borella, Tiago Fernandes, Lisa Gastaldi, Ana Good God, Natalia Natsika, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*. University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute

Yet, authoritarians and autocratic aspirants continue to engage in elections because they do not have the power to fully overcome expectations for electoral exercises, especially in light of local and international pressure for formalized legitimacy. Indeed, for much of the West, a regime being recognized as legitimate depends largely on whether elections have been held, not often considering whether the said election has been free, fair, or could result in meaningful changes in political power. This has especially been true since the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> In this view, elections, perhaps counterintuitively, can be harmful when they reaffirm perceptions of authoritarians' legitimacy at home or abroad. For example, although elections in contemporary Russia, Belarus, and Venezuela are widely perceived to be fraudulent – a perception backed by strong evidence – these exercises continue to occur and provide their respective regimes with a coat of formalized legitimacy. Opponents may openly question the fraudulent electoral results but are likely to fail if they do not have the adequate planning, numbers, and institutional support (domestic and international) to dislodge the autocratic regime. Fraudulent elections can also undermine satisfaction with democracy as countries seek to develop and consolidate their institutions, thus derailing the overall perceived legitimacy of democracy as a regime type.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, elections can also provide a focal point for anti-authoritarian mobilization, serving as a vehicle to delegitimize the authoritarian regime and demonstrate the legitimacy of opposition forces. In addition to providing a clear objective and

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timeline for mobilizing, elections are also a time of heightened scrutiny by various actors, including the international community. This heightened scrutiny is an opportunity for opposition forces to get their presence and message out as well as call attention to misdeeds and abuses committed by the regime. Electoral wins by the opposition, accompanied by parallel vote counts that uncovered attempts at fraud, widespread mobilization, and international recognition, have been the mechanism by which many authoritarian regimes have been defeated, including the Philippines (1986), Chile (1990), and Serbia (2000).

Despite a wave of democratization that coincided with the end of the Cold War (and often achieved through opposition electoral wins and popular mobilization to secure those wins), the contemporary world is witnessing a democratic decline. Russia and China are actively challenging concepts of liberal democracy and supporting autocratic regimes. Ongoing lower-intensity fraud in nominal democracies combined with the failure of many democracies to deliver meaningful economic and social well-being and inclusion to their citizens have been weaponized by demagogues to undermine the perceived legitimacy of democracy as a system.

Moreover, Western countries that have stylized themselves as global bastions of and ambassadors for democracy have come under scrutiny for their own interventionist and neocolonial policies. Nevertheless, a new generation of youth-led movements is emerging in the global South and East that seeks to redefine democracy according to local demands for dignity and accountability.

As we are writing this report, Georgia's Central Election Commission (CEC) refused to open additional polling stations in Europe and the US, denying thousands of citizens living abroad access to elections. The opposition parties challenged the decision in court, demanding nullification; however, the court rejected the demand. Meanwhile, Transparency International-Georgia (TI) was pressured to withdraw from election monitoring. It is the first time that TI will not have its own observers present at polling stations. As the race tightens and election day approaches, we may observe more similar decisions from the Georgian government. As such, we decided to compile this study and analysis to initiate debate on risks and responses to authoritarianism so vividly emerging from the ruins of the Soviet Union.

3 Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2020). The new competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), 51-65. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>

4 Fortin-Rittberger, J., Harfst, P., & Dingler, S. C. (2017). The costs of electoral fraud: establishing the link between electoral integrity, winning an election, and satisfaction with democracy. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 27(3), 350-368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2017.1310111>

# THE METHODOLOGY



## 53 RESPONDENTS CONTRIBUTED TO THE WORK OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

This report is based on an analysis of previous CANVAS reports, academic field research, and input from Georgian activists and politically engaged citizens based in Georgia, EU countries, and the US. In total, 53 respondents contributed to the work of the research team: 36 based in Georgia (17 male, 19 female), 10 based in North America (6 female, 4 male), and 7 based in EU countries (4 male, 3 female).

The authors of the report engaged with the Georgian activists based in Georgia as well as those in the US and EU countries to understand their opinions and expectations of the upcoming elections.

This part of the report summarizes major points organized around three themes: general outlook towards upcoming elections on October 26, strengths and weaknesses of the democratic civil society, and possible scenarios for resisting authoritarian takeover by the GD government. It also provides an analytical framework that members of the media and local activists can use to understand, conceptualize, and plan to prepare for upcoming challenges.

# THE 2024 GEORGIAN ELECTIONS

The upcoming elections are accompanied by a historical transformation of the electoral system. Georgia will have its first parliament elected through a fully proportional system where seats will be allocated to those who pass the 5% threshold. 3.5 million people are eligible to vote and, presuming a high turnout rate of 70%, approximately 2.5 million voters will cast their ballots.

There will be 84 electoral districts and 2,200 polling stations, with up to 40,000 members of the election commission involved in election administration. 17 local commission members are expected to be present at each polling station, including the chair, deputy,

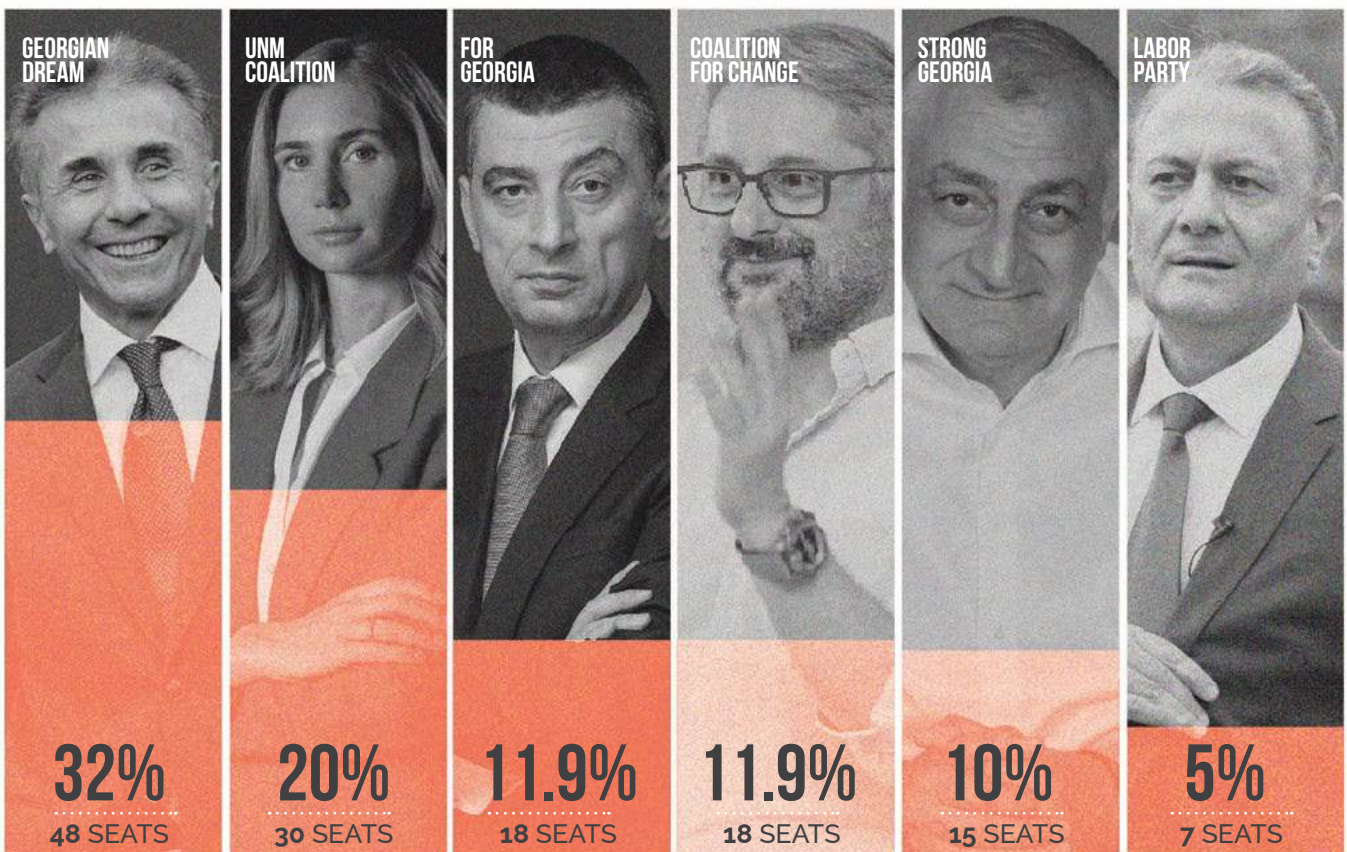
and secretary. Of the 17 members, six will be appointed by political parties and the rest will be selected by the upper-level commission (District Level Commission).

Election monitoring will be conducted by international and local organizations. Currently, 49 local monitoring organizations and 21 international organizations, including OSCE, NDI, IRI, US Election Support Mission, representatives of EU states, etc., are registered as observers. The exact number of observers is currently unknown.

According to the September 27th survey conducted by Edison Research, the votes may be divided in the following manner: GD - 32% (48 seats), UNM Coalition - 20%

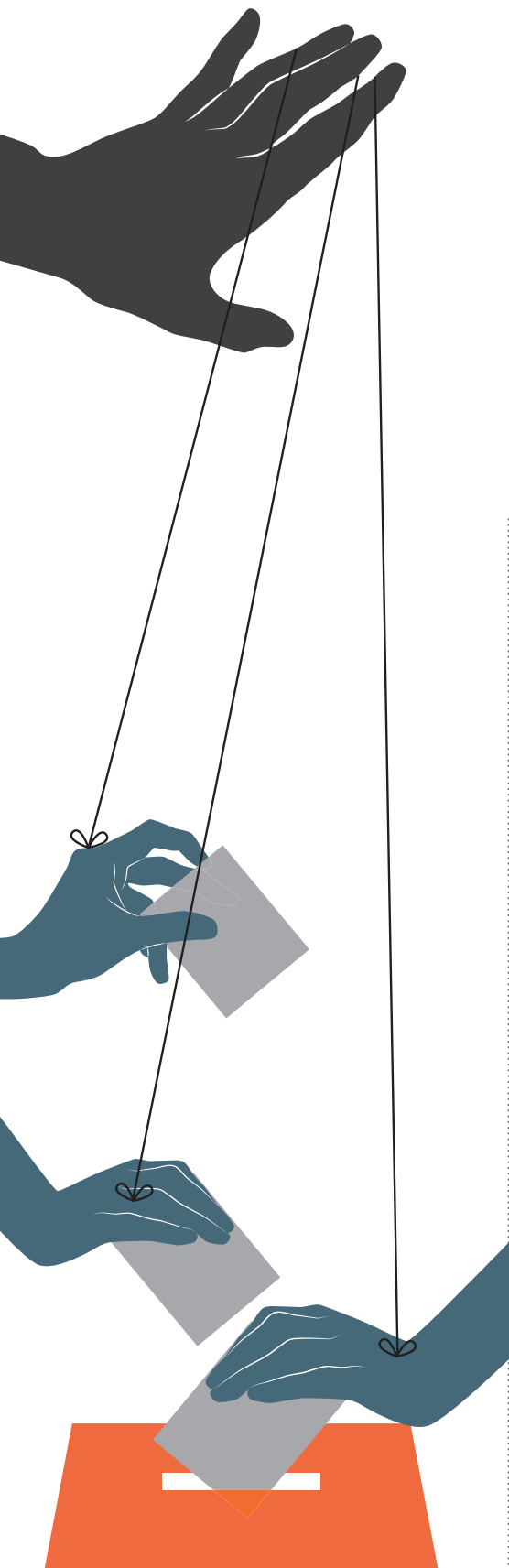
(30 seats), Coalition for Change - 11.9% (18 seats), Gakharia for Georgia - 11.9% (18 seats), Strong Georgia, Lelo - 10% (15 seats) and Labor Party - 5% (7 seats).

Members of the GD party and high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) are sanctioned by the US government. However, the exact list of sanctioned individuals has not been disclosed. There are media reports about sanctions prepared against GD chairman, Bidzina Ivanishvili, and Georgia's EU Ambassador has spoken about suspending the visa liberalization regime in the event that the GD tries to rig the elections.



Photos: official Facebook pages

# MAJOR EXPECTATIONS



**A SIGNIFICANT MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS (70%) STATED THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ELECTRONIC VOTING SYSTEM AND DO NOT TRUST IT.**

The majority of field research respondents expect that the GD government will use all possible means to falsify elections. These include, but are not limited to, using administrative resources, intimidating voters and forcing "unreliable" voters to not go to polling stations, conspiring with criminal gangs to exert physical and moral pressure on opponents, corrupting members of the electoral commissions, isolating election monitors from polling stations, manipulating counting machines, engaging radical religious groups, inciting massive terror on election day, and even smuggling some "Boeviks" from Russia into the country.

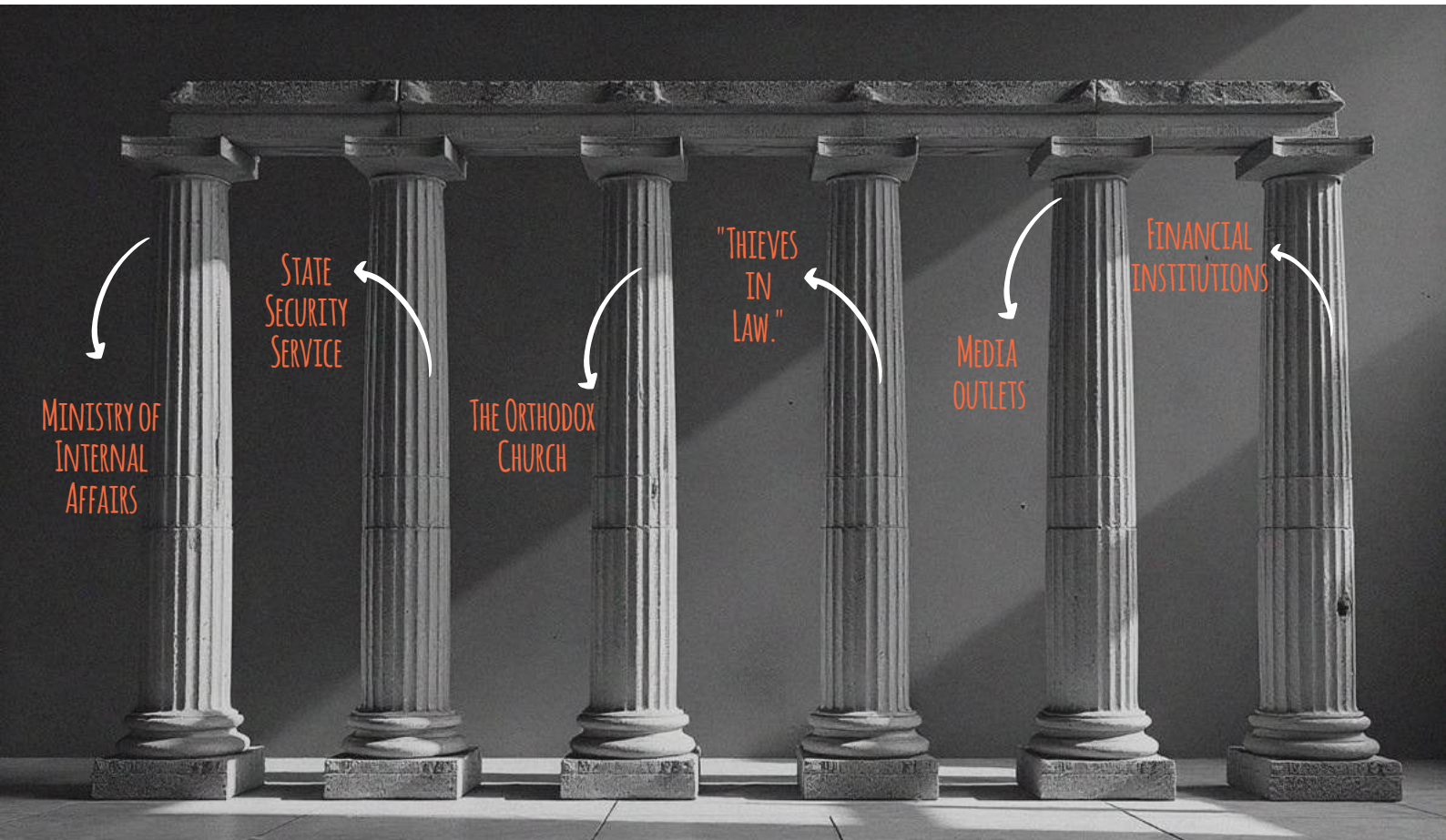
Most of the practices that activists point to as "expectations" have already been employed by the government during previous elections – they are not new. However, the vote counting machines to be used this year are new, and many believe that they can be used to manipulate the results. The current vote-counting procedure consists of two parts. First, results will be counted by the machine and polling stations

will be able to produce initial results immediately after the doors are closed. Secondly, the votes will be counted by hand. The system must be trusted by the voters, and it seems the current opinions are divided among the activists we spoke to and surveyed. A significant majority of respondents (70%) stated that they do not have adequate information about the electronic voting system and do not trust it.

Misinformation and disinformation are major concerns among activists. The Doppelganger operation revealed a network of fake accounts influencing public discussions in Georgia. It is not the first time that Georgian authorities have been suspected of funding misinformation/disinformation campaigns. Facebook has been used as a major platform for many years, and during this election, Tik-Tok is expected to play a significant role as well.

The majority of participants pointed out that the government is already engaged in criminal actions such as illegally processing personal information, funding criminal networks and intimidating activists, organizing "local groups" to increase pressure on voters, and running gigantic propaganda campaigns through their affiliate media and social network platforms.

Some examples of mechanisms that the government can employ are intimidating opposition voters and discouraging them from going to polling stations, preventing the presence of observers, so that any damage of ballot papers can go unnoticed and that way produce inaccurate results, corrupting opposition representatives in polling stations, and falsifying results



## PILLARS OF SUPPORT

Activists also point to major pillars that will provide support to the government during the elections. The MIA and Georgia's State Security Service are the most important pro-GD pillars, followed by the Orthodox Church and a criminal network known as "Thieves in Law". Special emphasis is placed on financial institutions like the State Investment Fund, which distributes funds among big businesses, small and medium enterprises, and the National Bank that helps government members avoid international sanctions. The major propaganda work is led by Imedi TV, POSTV, Asval - Dasavali, and their many affiliates among social networks and dysfunctional state companies whose main job is to vote for the government and spread state propaganda through personal networks. The government is closely working with the families of prisoners and makes offers of amnesty for those whose families will be actively involved in mobilizing voters to support the government.

Participants of the research also point towards Russian-funded groups and actors in the public arena and businesses that currently control large networks of food supply, energy, and other service industries. Furthermore, local governments are major organizers of employing local civilians to identify "Targets" for criminal groups and security services.

There are arguments concerning the skill and knowledge of the many "government employees" who will be engaged as election commission members in various actions. Doubts have arisen about whether the government "employees" will be able to execute orders to masterfully cover the falsification process or processes of intimidation and corruption. Evidence related to this concern has already been documented by opposition media.



# RESPONDING TO ELECTION FALSIFICATION

## MAJOR STRATEGY



Considering the diverse political landscape and competition among political actors, it is less likely that there will be a unified political opponent to the government. However, opposition parties still have a chance to organize a coordinating council in times of crises, as has been the case during several previous crises. As activists rightly pointed out, it is important to have a unified response in times of adversity and to have confident leaders who will send a powerful message to the wider society, including disengaged and marginalized groups.

Many activists expect large demonstrations to take place in case of electoral fraud. However, mobilization is not an automatic recipe

for success, and more planning is needed to understand how to organize effective nonviolent resistance to secure results. Some suggest that there is already significant experience with activism in the country and it will be possible to organize spontaneously without initial planning. As such, there would be less chance for the government to effectively confront civic groups.

Experience of the past few years has made it clear that mass gatherings in central locations in Tbilisi as well as Kutaisi, Batumi, Zugdidi and other locations are the preferred mode of protest campaigning. Tactics must vary, however, through creativity, encouraging participation, and hav-

ing sufficient preparation in case violent groups decide to attack participants.

The importance of decentralized planning but coordinated action was stressed a few times, emphasizing that there are still problems when it comes to coordination, trust, and cooperation. All intra-personal problems cannot be overcome, so it will be important to elaborate the rules of cooperation in a way that is openly accessible and agreed upon among diverse groups.

One-time gatherings will not be effective, and every protest campaign needs to be planned to last for at least several months. Although prolonged campaigns are difficult, that should not deter various parties involved from planning and preparing for that possibility.

In the event of a prolonged campaign, it will be important to diversify actions, spreading them to many different parts of the country and engaging as many participants as possible. There were positive experiences when the main actors of the protests effectively organized themselves to divide functions, spread to various locations, and organize independent actions. These experiences should serve as a basis for future planning.



FOTO: Zurab Tseretsovadze / AP

## WEAKNESSES OF THE GD GOVERNMENT/ NETWORK

The GD government/network was always very diverse and, if not for Russian-originated oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, the network would have significant if not existential problems. The formal and informal role of Bidzina Ivanishvili has propelled public discussion on "State Capture" and informal influence in Georgia. Ivanishvili and informal actors within his close circle exerted disproportionate influence on formal decision-makers, largely making them look like Ivanishvili's puppets. The strength of the oligarch is ruling from the shadows, therefore it is regarded as a sign of deep crisis that Ivanishvili has come out to light and is placed in the first slot on the party list, as it was during the 2012 elections

when the GD-led coalition won elections against the National Movement. During the past few years, Ivanishvili has said repeatedly that he was not going to return to politics and instead lead his party through a crucial election campaign.

There could be many reasons for the systemic failure of the GD network, with one of them being the recent failed campaign to push for the "Russian Law". The move was not supported by a significant number of GD allies and was understood as a disproportionate measure delegitimizing GD governance. Many skilled and knowledgeable people have left the country and continue to express their discontent with the actions of the government.

There is very vocal disregard expressed by Western Allies in the form of sanctions against judges, current government officials, former government officials, and leaders of government-affiliated radical groups. Open statements have been made by US government representatives as well as EU leadership pointing towards authoritarian tendencies and possible repercussions if the government decides to violently overtake power.

Activists mention that GD has nothing to offer anymore. Everything said before appeared to be a lie and even though they are employing thousands of voters in fake jobs within dysfunctional state companies, it remains a problem to convince people that this system will last. Sanctions and open statements about limiting free movement with the EU in case elections are a falsified signal of the government's inability to further Georgia's advance towards EU institutions and NATO. Georgia has no experience of the military participating in political matters, which leaves the government with MIA forces and criminal gangs at hand in case they decide to retaliate against peaceful demonstrators. It is also possible that they privately recruit personnel from Russia, but that might further delegitimize the government and, instead of projecting force, could fundamentally undermine any support.

The GD network is not popular among young people and mobilization events in the last year made it obvious that most first-time voters will not vote for the GD. The spring protests mobilized



FOTO: Shakh Alavazov / AP

youth from various neighborhoods, schools, and institutions and included young family members of the GD network.

Widespread corruption cannot be obfuscated. Corrupt officials compete with each other and the fear of sanctions makes the competition even more brutal. It is widely agreed that the GD network is using blackmailing (sex tapes) and corruption as the main tools for exerting loyalty from the GD network members. The system is therefore not very large and cannot compete with numbers which is a significant benefit for pro-democracy groups.

The GD network members also understand that their criminal actions are publicly known, and they can become targets of international sanctions which limits their ability to enjoy "Western benefits", such as sending their children to Western universities, traveling, doing business in EU countries and the US, etc.

## THE GD NETWORK

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FOTO: Giorgi Arjevanidze / AFP

## STRENGTHS OF THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

The pro-democracy movement has significantly changed over the past six years. The number of experienced activists is increasing and a wider understanding of the importance of civic protest is growing. If civic protest was previously regarded as something exceptional, nowadays it is understood as an absolute necessity. Civil society showed very good results in spontaneous planning as well. Facebook groups were established spontaneously to support activists and volunteers organized themselves to provide various services to demonstrators. The ability to spontaneously organize and independently conduct tactical-level planning is a strength to be effectively utilized. Various public education campaigns disseminate information on effective campaigning and civic activism, which then goes on to help build consensus among the wider society, reach agreements, and plan jointly in a rapidly changing environment.

Activists point out that successful campaigns in traditional and social media helped bring down fake propaganda channels and exposed government corruption and false promises. These communication channels are important and help to deter very well-funded government propaganda.

Many point out that more work needs to be done to build cooperation and trust among youth groups such as promoting the creation of small groups in various locations for effective coordination and the decentralization of civil society and civic campaigns.



## RECIPE FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

Tackling election fraud in competitive autocracies is a multi-faceted task. Though types and tactics to make election fraud success differ (ranging from manipulating the electoral landscape pre-election like in the 2023 Turkish presidential race or Poland's 2024 parliamentary elections, to "election day fraud" - e.g. altering results in physical documents and committing a variety of fraudulent activities during election day and the counting process (Serbia 2000, Venezuela 2024), dealing with it requires meticulous planning for various scenarios.

Historically, the presence or absence of four major factors has decided contested elections in competitive authoritarianism throughout the last two decades. The factors that we should be looking at in Georgia are:



**Opposition Unity** (or at least its pre-electoral strategy to turn every vote into representation)



**Mass turnout** (especially in urban opposition strongholds and among younger and highly educated voters)



**Capability to monitor elections** which diminishes the chances for election fraud and documents it when and where it occurs; and



**Presence and activity of non-partisan politically influential movements** that coordinate with the opposition but are not on the ballot (like OTPOR in Serbia, PORA in Ukraine, or KMARA in the 2003 Georgian elections).

In addition to these four elements, it is important to note whether there is a strategy in place to combat election fraud systemically and proactively, as opposed to just calling for protests as a response to it. Such a strategy was present in the 2000 Serbian elections.

## OPPOSITION UNITY



A united opposition that serves to nurture a future democratic government lays a foundation of hope for a transition to democracy and ideally serves as a mass mobilizer of various constituencies throughout the campaign. This has been an important element in a series of democratic transitions in the last decade. Though single-list opposition unity is not likely in Georgia, there is still a chance to achieve the "Polish Formula": Poland's electoral system is very much like the Georgian system with proportional parliamentary elections and a 5% threshold. In 2023, the Polish opposition ran and won as three different parties, enabling voters who didn't want to vote for the ruling PiS party multiple choices. Whether this scenario will work in Georgia, however, depends on whether all the opposition coalitions are likely and capable of passing the 5% threshold. Those who don't are "spilling the votes down the sink", as most of the votes under the threshold will by nature of the voting system go to the strongest polling party, in this case, the GD.

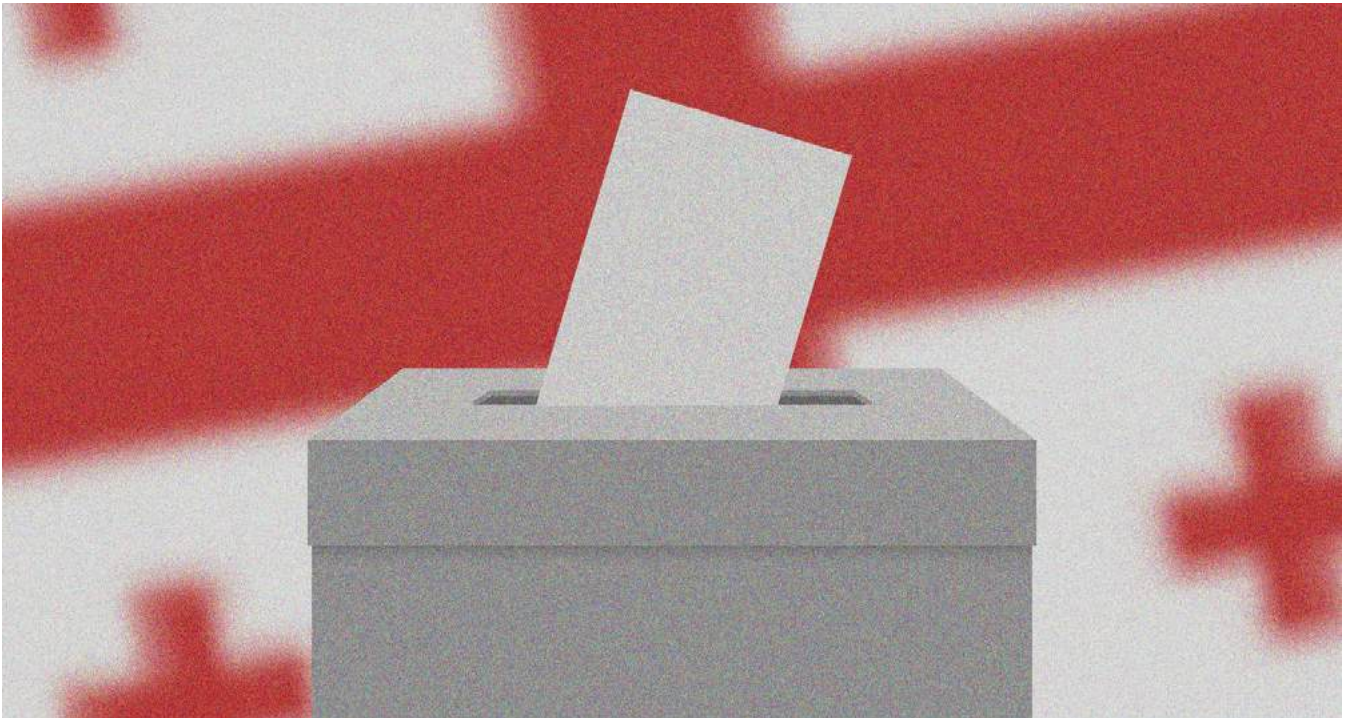
Multiple opposition coalitions are also coordinating and planning for a joint reaction to the threat of a more complex fraud. Coordination and previous agreements about what will happen for which outcomes are very important as opposition unity will be tested on election night, especially in the case of perceived election fraud.

Note that the easiest form of fraud for the ruling party would be to alter election results to keep the weakest opposition coalition under the 5% threshold. This would allow the GD maximal impact (in the form of a possible parliamentary triumph) with the least resources (in the form of concentrating fraudulent efforts on a limited number of polling places which is more difficult to document).

## MASS TURNOUT



The element of mass turnout, especially in opposition strongholds, is the common denominator underlying democratic opposition victories in every election under competitive authoritarian regimes. Mass turnout has a double-edged impact on results: 1) strong performance from opposition strongholds tends to diminish the effect of perceived electoral fraud, and 2) the more people are personally invested in elections through their own participation, the more they are likely to respond to the call to defend election results. Historically, get-out-the-vote campaigns, especially those including music, art, and social media in a way that galvanized youth and the educated electorate, were instrumental to making this element possible.



## ELECTION MONITORING



As the important part of election legitimacy (though not all of it) happens at polling stations, democratic transitions and the prevention of election fraud have found well-organized and massively trained election monitors, both coming from opposition parties and the civil rights sector, quintessential to diminish efforts of committing fraud. The possibility of uncovering and exposing fraud is a potential trigger for mass mobilizations, thus making attempts at fraud more costly for the regime. Trained and instructed election monitors can

- Monitor and document any violation of the election process throughout election day
- Make sure that no fraud occurs during the day at polling places, or in case it is attempted, signal, document, and respond to it by all legal means
- Count and potentially manually recount results of elections in their polling place
- Publish or inform results from each polling place depending on the legal framework and election strategy of the opposition
- Maintain documents and deliver them to their headquarters and media
- Know the legal framework and, in case of perceived or spotted fraudulent activities, act on the spot, thus building the case for further legal actions



### COUNT AND POTENTIALLY MANUALLY RECOUNT RESULTS OF ELECTIONS IN THEIR POLLING PLACE

Additionally, in the world of AI and blockchain technology, photographing and storing photographic proof of final and signed authentic election documents once counting is over may serve as an important legal basis for challenging fraud in cases where those documents become altered after election materials leave polling stations (such as in the Venezuela 2024 elections).

Training monitors to perform these tasks in a legal, non-confrontational, and cooperative manner with their opposition and civic sector counterparts has proven to be foundational to preventing and documenting election fraud.

Additionally, domestic election monitors may cooperate and coordinate with international poll watchers, whose reports are very often quintessential to the international perception of the fairness of the elections.

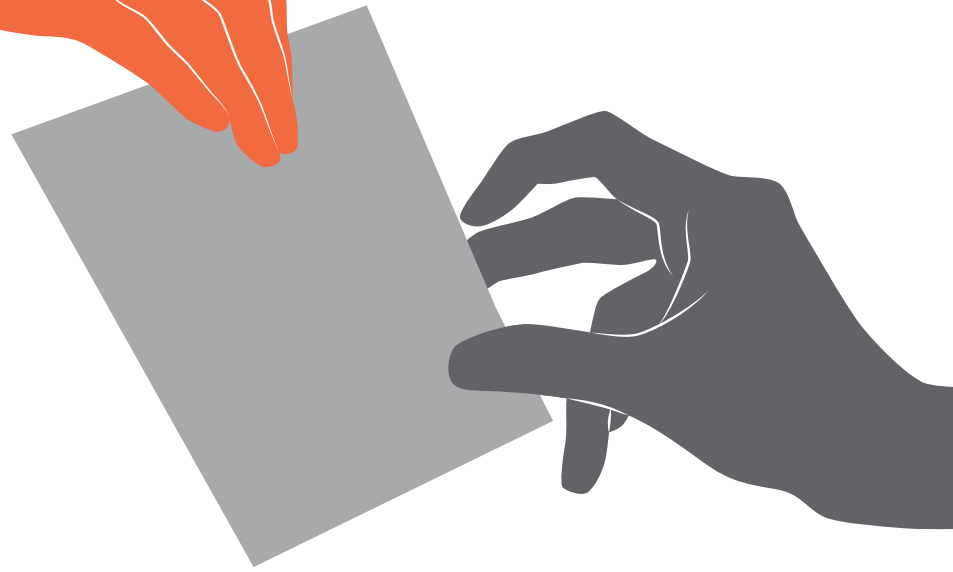
### NON-PARTISAN GROUPS



Non-partisan movements throughout the last few decades of challenging competitive authoritarianism have played various important roles. Whether being a mass mobilizer and keeping the government on the defense for years before elections, thus creating an atmosphere and organizational network to challenge autocratic tendencies (OTPOR, Serbia, 2000) or mobilizing people around elections and during election fraud drama (Pora in Ukraine, Rios de Pie in Bolivia), nonpartisan movements were at the spotlight. Similarly, the movement of civic society that was on the tip of mass mobilization in Georgia in 2023 and 2024 has a major role to play both in light of election preparations (there are few parallel initiatives for training observers run by NGO coalition, grassroots groups like GEUT/ჯეუტო, etc.) and in the case of potential election fraud. Non-partisan movements historically were central to recognizing momentum, claiming proof of election fraud, and strategizing for post-election responses to the fraud.



# RESPONDING TO THE FRAUD



It is not the intent of the authors to make specific recommendations about elections in Georgia. However, we can build on the experiences of other relevant instances and provide a brief roadmap of how successful campaigns were designed and what are the elements that could be in place to increase the probability of a successful outcome.





Opposition efforts to prevent fraud or make it costly should include:

- Collecting all materials from all election places
- Regularly updating voters through press conferences and social media throughout the night about election results
- Proclaiming electoral victory in the EXACT moment when election results show that victory
- Moving to activities of planning transitional government, negotiations with partners, etc.
- Potentially plan for victory celebrations
- Being ready to respond to government altercation or annulment of the results (or lack of publishing the results like Venezuela 2024).
- Appearing calm and non-confrontational

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In the event that there is election fraud (e.g. situation in which whatever result the government proclaims differs from electoral material regularly and legally collected by the opposition):

- Having platforms, both offline and online, that can offer authentic results to the public. These may be in the form of a searchable database, website, or physical space where electoral acts are held
- Having a team in place that will go through all authentic and altered results and catch regime actors in efforts to alter results, thus documenting concrete acts of fraud
- Having a legal strategy to challenge results through legal procedures
- Having a clear list of pillars/institutions that can become planes of battle for defending accurate election results
- Having a strategy to mobilize voters in defense of election results (protests, strikes, boycotts, methods of nonviolent resistance, etc.)
- Having a clear plan and division of labor between various stakeholders of a campaign to defend election votes (ranging from rallies and marches to mass civic non-cooperation. Note that historically, tactics of non-cooperation like strikes worked better than protests and rallies to challenging election fraud)
- Having a strategy to get the international community mobilized about defending the electoral will of the Georgian people

Defending votes and challenging electoral fraud is a complex process involving multiple actors and, most importantly, many voters. Preparations take time, and we have observed numerous efforts by local actors to develop various initiatives. These efforts, such as building local capacities by establishing strong networks and communication channels, can contribute to overall preparedness. We have found that research participants often anticipate spontaneous situations that interfere with their movements, thus incentivizing them to prepare for effective response and participation in these cases. With movements being affected by rampant political and social instability, efforts should be made to keep strong social bonds, maintain networks to effectively share information, build trust and coordinate decentralized actions. We also observed that various initiatives are carried out separately from each other. However, this does not imply that organizers are unaware of each other's activities. It has also been the case that multiple initiatives came together at critical times, emphasizing that various actors can overcome their differences and join in unified action to strengthen a larger movement.



## CONCLUSION

The upcoming Georgian parliamentary elections have the potential to be a critical juncture on Georgia's path towards further autocratization or democratization. Escalating moves by the incumbent Georgian Dream party to close democratic space and intimidate the opposition, combined with intensified Russian aggression in the region, indicate that there is a high likelihood that the GD will attempt to manipulate electoral procedures and results in its favor.

Opposition forces, meanwhile, have had success mobilizing. However, we strongly recommend, based on an analysis of the current context as well as historical patterns of electoral fraud and successful and unsuccessful regime change, that the opposi-

**THE UPCOMING GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE A CRITICAL JUNCTURE ON GEORGIA'S PATH TOWARDS FURTHER AUTOCRATIZATION OR DEMOCRATIZATION.**

tion prepare and plan for likely electoral scenarios. This requires, at a minimum: forging opposition unity, which may include ensuring that as many opposition parties as possible pass the minimal 5% threshold for garnering seats; driving massive voter turnout; coordinated election monitoring, especially in the opposition stronghold districts that are most vulnerable to manipulation; and having legal communication and mobilization strategies in place to either claim victory or defend the vote in the case of fraud. Communication with the international community is also important. Op-

position forces should have open and regular communication with the international community. This includes speaking with a single voice in terms of signaling what kinds of electoral manipulation is likely to happen before elections, what to look out for on the day of elections, and what action the international community should take, including actions that directly target Bidzina Ivanishvili.

It is our hope that this report provides a meaningful and effective framework for Georgian democratic forces' successful next steps.