



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Elections in Georgia

2020 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

- When is Election Day?..... 1
- Why are these elections important? 1
- Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? 2
- What is the electoral system?..... 2
- What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?..... 2
- Who is eligible to run as a candidate? 3
- What provisions are in place to support the equal rights of women and ensure women’s representation in government? 3
- What are the campaign timelines and expenditure and donation limits? 3
- What is the election management body? What are its powers? 4
- How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19? 4
- What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter foreign interference? 5
- Who can vote in these elections? 5
- Is out-of-country voting allowed?..... 5
- What provisions are in place that support persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups? 6
- Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation? 6
- Who is managing security on Election Day? 7
- What is the vote counting and tabulation process? 7
- When will official results be announced? 7
- How will election disputes be adjudicated? 8
- Resources 9
- About IFES in Georgia 9
- Disclosure 9

When is Election Day?

Georgia is scheduled to hold its parliamentary election on October 31, 2020. The 150-member Parliament will be elected for a four-year term through a new, mixed electoral system in which 120 members are elected proportionally through party lists, and 30 members will be elected through single-member constituencies proposed by political parties or individuals. Voting will take place from 8:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. on Election Day. The results of the first round of elections will be announced no later than November 19, 2020.

Why are these elections important?

The upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia have the potential to mark a new era for Georgian democracy. The ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), is approaching the end of its second term as a parliamentary majority, which was replete with numerous questions and challenges. To date, no ruling party in Georgia has maintained a parliamentary majority longer than two terms. The parliamentary election will determine whether the GD party remains in power, if the ruling party will need to expand its coalition, which would give other parties greater influence over decision-making in the country, or if a different political actor will take over the majority.

In spite of promises to the contrary and originally introducing legislation to transition Georgia's mixed parliamentary system to a fully proportional one, GD blocked the passage of the constitutional electoral system reform in November 2019. More recently, the public has met GD's response to the COVID-19 pandemic positively, as early lockdowns and strict quarantine laws resulted in some of the lowest numbers of COVID-19 cases in the region. In recent days, however, cases appear to be on the rise.

The upcoming elections are also taking place in the wake of a series of substantial regulatory reforms to Georgia's Electoral Code passed by Parliament in July 2020. Under these reforms, the number of proportionally elected seats in Georgia's mixed electoral system was increased from 77 to 120, leaving only 30 seats to be elected through majoritarian vote. Additionally, the electoral threshold for political parties to qualify for parliamentary representation was reduced from 5 percent to 1 percent, paving the way for a larger number and greater diversity of political parties to gain representation in Parliament. Since this regulation passed, Georgia has seen an increase in the number of political parties vying for seats (48 political parties and two party blocs are registered to compete) and greater diversity of political platforms, indicating increased plurality of Georgia's political landscape.

Another important development that emerged from the recent reforms is an increase in gender quotas for the upcoming election, which mandate that 20 percent of parliamentary seats must be awarded to women. Given that women hold only 14 percent of seats in the current Parliament, this mandate will ensure greater representation and participation of women in Parliament.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Georgian citizens will cast ballots for members of the Georgian Parliament to hold a four-year term. The last parliamentary elections took place on October 8, 2016, with the Georgian Dream party receiving 115 of the 150 seats under the previous electoral system.

The final list of candidates was published on October 19. A current list of registered majoritarian candidates and political parties can be found on the Central Election Commission's website.¹

What is the electoral system?

The Parliament of Georgia consists of 150 Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected to four-year terms under a mixed electoral system. A total of 120 MPs are elected proportionally through closed party lists, and the remaining 30 MPs are elected in single-member constituencies. To qualify for proportional seats, parties must exceed a threshold of at least 1 percent of votes cast. Majoritarian candidates are nominated by parties or run independently and must receive 50 percent of votes cast to be elected. If no majoritarian candidates receive a majority of the votes, a runoff election will be held on the third Saturday after Election Day between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes.²

While the 2020 elections will take place under a revised, mixed system, the next parliamentary elections (scheduled for 2024) are expected to take place under a fully proportional system, as determined in a previously adopted constitutional reform.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Five documents provide the legal framework for the Georgian parliamentary elections: the Constitution of Georgia, the Election Code of Georgia, the Law on Political Unions of Citizens, Central Election Commission Regulations and the Criminal Code of Georgia.

The 2020 parliamentary elections are preceded by a round of electoral reforms approved by Parliament in June 2020 and passed into law on July 2, 2020. Possibly the most notable legislation passed in this reform was an increase in the number of seats determined proportionally within Georgia's mixed electoral system, from 77 to 120. The reforms also reduced the percentage of votes needed to qualify for a proportionality seat from 5 percent to 1 percent, significantly increasing the number of parties that will likely gain representation in Parliament.

The new legislative reforms also established new regulations on campaign finance in the period during and leading up to elections. The reforms include the new model of public funding for political parties, new reporting and disclosure requirements and stricter sanctions for campaign finance violations. The electoral reforms also put forth legislation to prevent the misuse of administrative resources and vote

¹ https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20201021213205majoritarebi_parlamenti_agtiuri.pdf

² See Article 51 of the Electoral Code.

buying, shortened electoral dispute resolution deadlines and established rules for media coverage of candidates.³

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Any Georgian citizen who is at least 25 years of age and has lived in Georgia for a minimum of 10 years is eligible to be elected as a Member of Parliament. Candidates can be nominated by political parties or coalitions or run independently through nomination by a group of at least five voters. Candidates must submit registration documents to the Central Election Commission by October 3 in order to be eligible.⁴ As of the July 2020 reforms, the number of signatures required for previously unregistered political parties to register official candidate lists was reduced from 25,000 to 5,000.⁵

What provisions are in place to support the equal rights of women and ensure women's representation in government?

The electoral reforms passed in July 2020 increased gender quotas for parliamentary seats to 20 percent, or 37 seats. New regulations established a mandatory gender quota for registered party lists whereby every fourth party seat must be awarded to a person of "another gender."⁶ The new legislation also proposes additional regulations to prevent immediate dismissals and resignations of female Members of Parliament (MPs) following the election. This language is intended to protect the seats of female MPs and to avoid the immediate removal or resignation of female MPs following their installment, as occurred following the 2016 parliamentary elections. The current Parliament is heavily male dominated, with only 21 women out of 150 (less than 15 percent) holding parliamentary seats. The current regulations will encourage historically high representation of women in Parliament, ensuring greater female representation and participation in Georgian politics.⁷

What are the campaign timelines and expenditure and donation limits?

The official campaign period for the parliamentary elections begins 60 days before Election Day. As of the July regulations, campaigning is no longer allowed on Election Day itself. While COVID-19 pandemic regulations were in place in Georgia during the full campaign period, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia released a statement in early September exempting political gatherings from these regulations, thereby allowing formal campaigning to take place.⁸

Georgian campaign finance is regulated by the Law on Political Unions of Citizens, the Election Code and the Law on State Audit.⁹ The State Audit Office is responsible for reviewing, monitoring and addressing all aspects of campaign finance, including reviewing and verifying documents and addressing formal

³ See the Georgian Electoral Code.

⁴ See Central Election Commission (CEC) schedule of election events.

⁵ See the Georgian Electoral Code.

⁶ Georgian Electoral Code.

⁷ <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-takes-on-male-dominated-parliament-with-gender-quotas>

⁸ <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2786>

⁹ Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE) Needs Assessment.

complaints. The law allows for public and private contributions to campaigns but has reduced the spending thresholds in both categories. Annual party spending was limited to 0.1 percent of Georgia's GDP in the previous year. Additionally, private contributions to one or more party candidates cannot exceed GEL 60,000 (\$18,700 USD) for individuals and GEL 120,000 (\$37,400 USD) for legal entities. Loans from individuals or private entities to one or more party candidates are permitted up to GEL 1 million (\$311,760 USD). Campaign donations from foreign, public-funded, religious and anonymous sources continue to be prohibited.¹⁰

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

The Central Election Commission (CEC) is the supreme election management body of Georgia. The CEC is responsible for ensuring the preparation and conduct of presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections, as well as referendums and plebiscites. The CEC is also responsible for managing and maintaining voter lists, voter registration, campaign lists, campaign registration and verification of relevant documentation and requirements, among other duties. The CEC will manage the upcoming elections in tandem with the District Electoral Commissions (DECs) and Precinct Electoral Commissions (PECs). There are 73 DECs and over 3,700 PECs in all of Georgia.¹¹

The work of the CEC, which is headquartered in Tbilisi, is governed by the Constitution of Georgia and the Georgian Election Code. The CEC is currently composed of 12 members, under the authority of Chairwoman Tamar Zhvania. Five of the 12 members are appointed by Parliament to five-year terms based on their professional background and experience. Six members are appointed by the parties that were registered by the CEC chairperson independently or through an electoral bloc granted by the parliamentary elections.¹² The CEC chairperson is appointed through nomination by the president and other CEC members, and the deputy chairperson is appointed through voting by CEC members. A complete guide to the structure of the CEC can be found on the CEC's website.¹³

How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?

Due to a rapid lockdown at the onset of the pandemic, Georgia has maintained relatively low numbers of COVID-19 cases compared to other countries across the region. Despite ongoing restrictions, the elections are expected to take place across Georgia on October 31, 2020 as planned. To ensure the safety of both voters and poll workers on Election Day, the Central Election Committee (CEC) will put forth a strict set of regulations for Precinct Electoral Committees (PECs) to mitigate COVID-19 risk. The regulations require voters, observers and poll workers to socially distance, wear masks at all times and apply hand sanitizer upon entry to polling stations. Poll workers and observers will also have their temperatures taken before entry into the building. Information on preventative measures will be placed at the entrances of all PECs on polling day.

¹⁰ See Articles 54, 57 and 190 of the Election Code.

¹¹ <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/1990/60#none>

¹² See Article 125 of the Election Code.

¹³ <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/reglamenti.pdf>

What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter foreign interference?

Cyberthreats can be traced back to the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008, when cyberattacks were perpetrated against Georgian government and other websites. In Georgia, malign influence by external actors through cybersecurity attacks and other means continue to pose a significant security threat to electoral operations and public confidence in politics and governance. Cyberattacks have increased in recent months leading up to the election. Notably, a massive cyberattack credited to malign foreign actors in March 2020 leaked the personal details of 4.9 million Georgian citizens on registered voting lists.¹⁴ Attacks such as these highlight the threat of outside interference on key election infrastructure, such as voter lists, campaign pages and ballots.

To strengthen resilience against cyberattacks, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has upgraded its server infrastructure and installed new hardware and software to reduce the risk of cyberattacks and interference in key election management body infrastructure. Trainings on cyber-hygiene and the new equipment are being conducted for the CEC and key stakeholders ahead of the elections.

Who can vote in these elections?

All Georgian citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote in the upcoming elections. Citizens must provide a valid identification document that shows official registry in the district in which they are voting. While masks are required in polling stations due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, voters will be required to briefly remove their masks to allow poll workers to verify their identity against a photo ID. Citizens currently serving a prison sentence for serious crimes and persons who have been disenfranchised by a court decision are ineligible.¹⁵ A voter's registration status can be verified on the Central Election Commission (CEC) website.¹⁶

According to the CEC website, 3,511,338 Georgian citizens are registered to vote in the parliamentary election, 1,881,336 of whom are female and 1,630,002 of whom are male.¹⁷ During the 2018 presidential election, 3,518,877 people were registered to vote, of whom 20 percent were youth aged 18 to 29 and 53.7 percent were female.¹⁸

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

While Georgia does not currently offer alternative methods of voting, such as mail-in ballots or internet voting, Georgian citizens registered abroad will be able to vote in 40 countries at Georgian embassies. In

¹⁴ <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/976>

¹⁵ See Article 31 of the Election Code.

¹⁶ <https://voters.cec.gov.ge/>

¹⁷ See the voter map graphic on CEC's website.

¹⁸ <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/StatisticsbyAge.pdf>

order to vote abroad, citizens must register with the appropriate embassy by October 11. For this election, voting abroad will be subject to the COVID-related laws and regulations of each country.¹⁹

Out-of-country voting is important to Georgia due to the existence of a significant Georgian diaspora. A complete list of international polling locations, registration deadlines and other information for voters abroad can be found on the Central Election Commission's website.²⁰

What provisions are in place that support persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) seeks to “promote [an] equal election environment” for all, which is reflected in recent steps taken in 2020 to support marginalized groups to vote. Notably, an amendment was passed as part of the July 2020 reforms that mandates that wheelchair ramps be placed at a minimum of four polling stations in each majoritarian district.²¹

The CEC has increased its engagement of persons with disabilities by: engaging persons with disabilities and relevant stakeholders in a technical working group; purchasing materials to support voting by persons with disabilities, such as braille ballot guides and wheelchair ramps; and enforcing legislation put forth to protect the voting rights of persons with disabilities.²² According to the CEC website, Georgia has 237 precincts that are equipped to support persons with disabilities in voting, and 888 polling stations with wheelchair access.

Activities to support ethnic minority voters include: engaging minority actors and stakeholders through a technical working group; preparing video clips on the services suggested for ethnic minority voters; allowing ethnic minority populations to verify their data online in their native language; developing voter information materials in Georgian and native languages; and translating ballots and ballot guides into Georgian and local languages.²³

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

The Electoral Code of Georgia guarantees the rights and presence of domestic and international observers during the election period.²⁴ According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), observers in Georgia have the right to be present at the polling station at any time and may inspect ballot boxes before they are sealed and after they are opened.²⁵

As of October 28, 120 local, 48 international and 104 media organizations are registered to observe the 2020 parliamentary elections. A list of registered organizations can be found on the Central Election

¹⁹ <https://www.agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2818>

²⁰ <https://cesko.ge/eng/static/3428/informatsia-sazghvargaret-mkofi-amomrchevlebisvis>

²¹ <https://cesko.ge/eng/static/3253/shshm-amomrchevlebi-2020>

²² <https://cesko.ge/eng/static/3253/shshm-amomrchevlebi-2020>

²³ <https://cesko.ge/eng/static/3250/informatsia-etnikuri-umtsiresobebistvis-2020>

²⁴ <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=64>

²⁵ OSCE Needs Assessment.

Commission's website.²⁶ Additionally, 13 international experts will be based in Tbilisi during the elections, with an additional 27 long-term observers deployed across the country starting on October 1 through the OSCE. Three hundred and fifty Georgian and international short-term observers will deploy immediately before Election Day to monitor the opening of polling stations, voting, counting of ballots and the tabulation of results.²⁷

Who is managing security on Election Day?

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) will facilitate security measures for Election Day. The overall objective of the MIA is to "[protect] legal order and to ensure the elections are conducted in a free, democratic, and safe environment."²⁸ MIA staff are currently undergoing training to ensure the elections are conducted freely and fairly. The training will also contain a component on managing the elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, including requirements for Precinct Electoral Commission operation on Election Day.

What is the vote counting and tabulation process?

A strict set of processes is detailed in the Election Code to ensure ballot boxes, ballots and envelopes remain uncompromised on Election Day and during the process of counting votes.²⁹ One summary protocol will be shared by the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), District Election Commissions (DECs) and the Central Election Commission (CEC) for both the proportional and majoritarian systems in the parliamentary elections.³⁰

PEC counting officers will count and verify the validity of each ballot cast on Election Day. PECs are also required to provide copies of poll books, photocopies of identification, complaint remarks and paper ballots cast. Any ballot whose validity is questioned or compromised will be documented, separated and shared with the DEC.³¹ PECs should immediately submit summary protocols to their respective DECs, which will summarize the voting results for submission to the CEC through summary protocols with endorsed signatures of the DEC chairperson and secretary with the DEC seal no later than the 11th day after the election.³² The CEC will review the summary protocols and additional documents shared by the DECs to produce its own summary protocol with the final election results.³³

When will official results be announced?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) will share the election results no later than November 19. If a second round of elections is not announced, the decision announced on November 19 will be final. If a

²⁶ <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/3348/damkvirveblebi-da-media>

²⁷ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/461776>

²⁸ <https://police.ge/en/shinagan-saqmeta-ministri-eutos-demokratiuli-institutebisa-da-adamianis-uflebebis-ofisis-odihr-sadamkvirveblo-misiis-khelmdzghvanelshekhveda/14002>

²⁹ See Articles 67, 68 and 69 of the Election Code.

³⁰ See Article 75 of the Election Code.

³¹ See Article 70 of the Election Code.

³² See Article 75 of the Election Code.

³³ See Article 76 of the Election Code.

second round is announced (for any of the 30 single-member constituency seats), the elections will take place on November 21 between the two candidates with the highest number of votes in the first round of elections, or with all the candidates if no two candidates received a majority of votes.³⁴

The CEC will publish the results of the elections on its website and will submit the results to designated media outlets two days after it announces the elected Members of Parliament and summary of results.³⁵

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The Election Code requires all electoral violation complaints to be recorded in a polling day logbook at each Precinct Election Commission (PEC) on Election Day and delivered to the PEC chairperson, who should respond immediately to the complaint. If the PEC chairperson refuses to respond to a given complaint, the observer has the right to appeal the complaint to the respective District Election Commission (DEC).³⁶ Registered polling complaints are to be resolved immediately by the PEC, while complaints related to the vote counting process are to be forwarded to DECs within two days.³⁷ DEC-level decisions may be appealed to the relevant court or the Central Election Commission (CEC). Decisions by the Court of Appeals are final.³⁸

The CEC can request a repeat vote within two weeks of the first or second round of elections if the number of ballots declared void during counting is greater than 10 percent of the total number of voters in Georgia.³⁹

³⁴ See Articles 76 and 126 of the Election Code.

³⁵ See Articles 76, 125 and 131 of the Election Code.

³⁶ See Article 72 of the Election Code for more details, including what information is to be included in a complaint.

³⁷ See Articles 73 and 74 of the Election Code. Complaints may also be filed directly at the District Election Commission level.

³⁸ See Article 77 of the Election Code.

³⁹ See Article 125 of the Election Code.

Resources

- [Constitution of Georgia](#)
- [Election Code](#)
- [Central Election Commission \(CEC\) Schedule of Electoral Activities](#)
- [CEC Action Plan](#)
- [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Needs Assessment Report](#)
- [CEC Website](#)

About IFES in Georgia

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has operated in Georgia since 1995, conducting a range of assistance activities to support the development of democratic elections and political processes. The work of IFES has improved electoral legislation and election administration; propelled discussions on constitutional and election system reform; strengthened civil society and media; supported political finance reform and implementation of regulations; increased participation and enfranchisement of marginalized groups; introduced a civic education course now taught in over 40 universities; increased transparency and women’s political engagement; supported a diverse array of civic and voter education projects; and enhanced the accuracy of and confidence in the voter registry.

Currently, IFES is implementing a five-year United States Agency for International Development-funded project, “Georgia Elections and Political Processes Support,” which seeks to bolster the electoral legal framework and election administration practices while engaging citizens in election awareness and activism. Through this project, IFES employs innovative methodologies to target underrepresented populations, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities to promote a demand-driven approach to focused, sustainable assistance. IFES is also supporting the Central Election Commission (CEC) to strengthen its resilience to cyberattacks ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections by procuring software and hardware and conducting trainings for the CEC and key stakeholders on cyber hygiene and operation of procured equipment.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Georgian elections authorities as of October 28, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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