



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Elections in Georgia

2021 Municipal Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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October 1, 2021

Frequently Asked Questions

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When is Election Day?

The Republic of Georgia will hold municipal elections on October 2, 2021, for mayoral and *Sakrebulo* (city council) offices. Voting will take place in each municipality from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. in roughly 3,700 polling stations across the country.

Each voter will receive three ballot papers — one each for the mayor, Sakrebulo party list member and Sakrebulo majoritarian member. Ballots will be provided in Georgian, Armenian or Azerbaijani based on each voter's preference.

Because voters will cast three ballots, counting procedures will require more time than for previous elections. The Central Election Commission (CEC) will announce the election results no later than 25 days after Election Day.¹ Interim and final results will be published on the CEC's website.

If no mayoral candidate receives more than 50 percent of all votes cast, a second election will be held no later than 28 days after Election Day.

Why are these elections important?

On October 2, Georgian voters will elect local mayors and *Sakrebulo* (city council) members across Georgia. These positions are essential to local governance and represent a continuation of Georgia's shift toward the more decentralized governing structure that was launched in 2014. Georgia's political environment remains highly polarized in the wake of the 2020 parliamentary elections, when opposition parties boycotted Parliament and demanded that the elections be repeated. In April 2021, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party, together with opposition parties, signed a European Union-mediated agreement that ended the boycott. One provision of the agreement was that, should GD fail to win at least 42 percent of the vote during the October municipal elections, early parliamentary elections would be held later in 2021. In July, GD announced that it was abandoning this agreement.

The October municipal elections will also be the first following the passage of amendments to the Electoral Code on June 28, 2021. The reform package introduced new regulations for the electoral system, pre-election campaigning and election administration staffing. The amended legislation also increased proportional representation in local elections and imposed a 40 percent threshold in majoritarian districts. In Tbilisi, the capital city, representation will be 40 proportional and 10 majoritarian seats in the 2020 municipal election, compared to 25 proportional and 25 majoritarian seats in the 2017 election. For the rest of the country, representation will be 1,356 proportional and 650 majoritarian seats, compared to the 2017 elections, when representation was 945 proportional and 1,063 majoritarian seats.

¹ Election Code of Georgia: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=69>

What is the electoral system?

Across Georgia, voters will elect 2,845 municipal government representatives via majoritarian elections in 664 single-member constituencies and 773 representatives via closed proportional (party) lists. Voters will also cast ballots in mayoral elections in Tbilisi, four self-governing cities and 59 self-governing communities. All local self-government representatives will be elected to four-year terms.

*Sakrebulo*s, or city councils, are elected through a mixed-voting system that relies on a combination of single-mandate districts determined by first past the post rules (i.e., winner takes all) and a proportional system based on party lists, with a 40 percent threshold of votes in the majoritarian part. Mayors are elected by a 50 percent plus one majority. If no candidate receives 50 percent plus one of all votes in the first round, a second round will be held between the two candidates who win the most votes. In self-governed communities that have 7,000 or fewer voters, one member of each *Sakrebulo* will be elected through the majoritarian electoral system. In communities or cities with more than 7,000 but no more than 14,000 voters, two *Sakrebulo* members will be elected by the majoritarian system. In self-governed communities or cities where the number of voters exceeds 14,000, three *Sakrebulo* members will be elected by the majoritarian electoral system. Proportional distribution is set forth in the Electoral Code.²

Forty-three political parties are registered for the 2021 municipal elections,³ and 16 candidates are registered to run for the office of mayor of Tbilisi.⁴

What is the electoral legal framework for these elections?

Seven key documents regulate municipal elections in Georgia:

- The Constitution of Georgia;
- The Electoral Code of Georgia;
- The Law on Political Unions of Citizens;
- Central Election Commission Regulations;
- The Criminal Code of Georgia;
- The Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia; and
- The Local Self-Government Code of Georgia.

What changes affect the municipal elections of 2021?

² <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/1557168?publication=69>

³ <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20210916214021პარტიებიგანცხადებისრიგითობით.pdf>

⁴ <https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20210917121949ENG.თბილისიიმეროპისკანდიდატები.pdf>

On June 28, 2021, the Georgian Parliament adopted a package of amendments to the Electoral Code that will affect the administration of the October 2021 municipal elections. Key changes include:

- The proportional share in municipal elections has been increased, with a 40 percent threshold set for majoritarian candidates.
- New rules were established for the election of the Central Election Commission (CEC) chairperson.
- Restrictions were introduced regarding groups of persons eligible to participate in pre-election campaigns.⁵
- A new rule prohibits the use of administrative resources.
- Physically impeding the movement of voters within 100 meters of polling stations is forbidden.
- Legislation introduced the use of elections technology and of random selection and recounting of votes in 10 percent of precincts.⁶
- Precincts will only be allowed to exercise an amendment protocol after sealing the precinct documentation in the case of a recount.⁷
- The deadlines for adjudicating complaints were extended.
- Complaints can now be filed in person or electronically.
- The Election Administration's refusal to create a report on violations can be appealed.
- The CEC Consultation Group was established to observe electoral disputes and recounts.

Who is eligible to run for mayor or *Sakrebulo* member?

Two sets of criteria govern who can run for the positions of mayor or Sakrebulo member. Mayoral candidates must be Georgian citizens aged 25 or older on Election Day who have the right to vote in Georgia and have resided in the country for at least the last five years. Sakrebulo

⁵ Article 45 (4 j), Election Code of Georgia.

⁶ In Krtsanisi electoral district in Tbilisi, the October 2021 municipal elections will pilot electronic technologies at 31 polling stations. Polling stations throughout the district will each be equipped with two special vote counting machines that use optical mark recognition technology, and ballots will have QR codes. A single ballot paper will be used for the proportional, majoritarian and mayoral elections; registrars will tell voters how to use them. The ballots will be placed in special envelopes to secure the secrecy of vote while ensuring that ballots can be inserted into the counting machines. It will be impossible to insert a ballot paper designed for a specific precinct electoral commission into the machine programmed for another. Preliminary results will be known at the close of polling; following the preliminary results, a hand count will be conducted.

⁷ Previously, a member of a precinct electoral commission could provide a written explanation of a human or mechanical error, and the amendment protocol would be drawn up based on this notice.

candidates must be Georgian citizens aged 21 or older on Election Day who have resided in Georgia for at least the last five years and have the right to vote.

Who is eligible to vote, and how many registered voters are there?

All Georgian citizens who are 18 years old on Election Day can vote in the 2021 municipal elections. Voter eligibility is restricted for any Georgian citizen currently serving a prison sentence for a crime more severe than a misdemeanor (up to three years) and for any beneficiary of support placed at an inpatient psychiatric facility under the Law of Georgia on Psychiatric Assistance. The CEC announced that 3,492,172 voters are registered to vote in the October 2, 2021, municipal elections.⁸

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Out-of-country voting is not allowed for the October 2021 municipal elections.

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

The State Audit Office of Georgia (SAOG) oversees campaign finance. All contestants must submit three financial reports to the SAOG covering three-week periods between August 2 and October 2, as required by the Law on Political Unions of Citizens.

Georgian law restricts campaign contributions from physical and legal entities of foreign countries; international organizations and movements (except when lectures, workshops and other public activities are held); a state agency, state organization, legal entity of public law or enterprises with state shares (except when otherwise prescribed by the Law on Political Unions of Citizens); nonprofit legal entities and religious organizations (except when lectures, workshops and other public arrangements are held); stateless persons; and anonymous donors.

The total amount that each citizen may donate to a political party is limited to 60,000 Georgian Lari (GEL, \$24,300 USD) per year, and the total amount that a political entity may donate is limited to 120,000 GEL (\$48,600 USD). Membership fees for party members should not exceed 1,200 GEL (\$485 USD) per year. In-kind donations are permitted, and the legislation allows parties to receive loans for election campaigning of up to \$1 million GEL (\$405,000 USD).

To help track campaign financing, the SAOG requires each candidate to establish an elections campaign fund, to which all campaign expenses must be charged. The rules regulating election campaign funds apply to political parties and blocs, initiative groups and individuals.

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<https://cesko.ge/res/docs/eng:ამომრჩეველთა საერთო რაოდენობასა და სარჩევნო სფეროში დასაქმებულთა რაოდენობის შესახებ>

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

The Central Election Commission (CEC), headquartered in Tbilisi, is the supreme election management body of Georgia. It 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 the verification of relevant documentation and requirements, among other duties. The CEC will manage the upcoming elections in tandem with 73 district electoral commissions and around 3,700 precinct electoral commissions.⁹

The work of the CEC is governed by the Constitution of Georgia and the Georgian Election Code. The CEC is composed of 17 members, under the authority of Chairperson Giorgi Kalandarishvili. Eight members are appointed by Parliament to five-year terms based on their professional backgrounds and experience. The remaining nine members are appointed by the parties that were registered by the CEC chairperson and received a parliamentary mandate.¹⁰ The CEC chairperson is appointed through nomination by the president. The Parliament elects one deputy of the CEC chairperson and the CEC secretary from the CEC membership. Another deputy of the CEC Chairperson is elected from among the CEC members appointed by the eight parties that are not members of the parliamentary majority. A complete guide to the structure of the CEC can be found on the CEC's website.¹¹

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

The deteriorating COVID-19 situation in Georgia affects day-to-day operations and life. Despite this, the elections are expected to take place across Georgia as planned. To ensure the safety of voters and poll workers on Election Day, the Central Election Commission (CEC) will put forth a strict set of regulations for Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) to mitigate risks from COVID-19. The regulations will 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 have their temperatures taken before they enter the building. Information on preventive measures will be posted at the entrances of all PECs on polling day. The CEC will distribute masks and hand sanitizer for voters and electoral stakeholders, and face shields for

⁹ <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/1990/60#none>

¹⁰ See Article 125 of the Election Code.

¹¹ https://cesko.ge/res/images/images/CeskoStruqtura2021final_ENG.png

poll workers, enabling all voters and election workers to participate on Election Day with greater assurance.

What provisions are in place to promote the equal participation of women and people with disabilities?

Women in Georgia comprise 53 percent of eligible voters but are generally underrepresented in political positions. Challenges to women's representation in Georgia are many, including societal perceptions of gender roles and legal and political barriers.^{12, 13, 14} However, for the first time in local elections, political parties will determine party lists such that one in every three candidates on the submitted list is of the opposite sex.

In Tbilisi, the distribution of the 1,731 candidates in proportional lists is approximately 46.62 percent women (807 candidates) and 53.38 percent men (924 candidates). However, only 25 percent of candidates competing for Tbilisi's majoritarian seats are female (35) versus 104 males out of a total of 139 candidates. Similarly, only four of 16 the candidates for mayor of Tbilisi (25 percent) are female. Statistics and the breakdown of candidates by gender for the local municipality by election district can be found on the Central Election Commission's website.¹⁵

The Central Election Commission (CEC) will provide key voter tools to support voters with disabilities in casting their votes independently and privately on Election Day. The CEC will distribute tools, including accessible voting booths for wheelchair users, tactile ballot guides and handheld magnification devices to enable voters with physical disabilities and who are blind or have low vision to vote independently. The CEC will also distribute videos on electoral participation for voters who are deaf or hard-of-hearing on Election Day.

Mobile ballot boxes will be utilized between 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., allowing voters who are unable to reach polling stations to exercise their right to vote.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they be accredited?

According to Articles 39, 40, 41 and 42 of the Election Code of Georgia, registered local and international observers, media, and party proxies may observe sessions of the election

¹² During the last local election in 2017, women comprised 36.85 percent of proportional party lists, but only 16.5 percent of majoritarian candidates were women. (Data is available at <https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge/>).

¹³ The share of women elected from proportional lists was 19.59 percent and from majoritarian lists was 8.00 percent (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ In the 2014 local elections, women comprised 33.11 percent of proportional party lists and 14.97 percent of majoritarian lists. Women won 15.46 percent of votes for proportional lists and 8.11 percent for majoritarian lists (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ <https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge/>

commissions and be present at polling stations at any time on Election Day. Observers are prohibited from interfering with the functions and activities of the election commissions. They may not exert undue influence upon the free expression of the will of voters, wear symbols or signs of any candidate or party, or violate other requirements of the Election Code. They may move freely and unhindered within the precinct territory and observe all stages of the polling process from any point of the precinct as long as they do not disrupt the voting process.

Observers may take part in the inspection of ballot boxes before they are sealed and after they are opened. They may also observe the registration of voters, issuance of ballot papers and special envelopes, and certification — again, as long as they do not disrupt the voting process.

Local observer organizations must register with the Central Election Commission if they plan to observe in multiple election districts, or with the appropriate District Election Commission (DEC) if they plan to observe only one election district. The registration deadlines were September 22 for local observer organizations and September 25 for international observer organizations.

Currently, 75 national, 36 international and 52 accredited media organizations are registered to observe the elections.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The legal process for electoral disputes and complaints are dictated by the Electoral Code and other electoral legislation. Under these laws, Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), District Election Commissions (DECs) and the Central Election Commission (CEC) manage different types of complaints.¹⁶ The Election Code requires all complaints regarding violations of polling procedures to be filed at PECs on Election Day. Polling day complaints must be “resolved immediately” by PECs. Complaints related to the vote counting process are to be forwarded to DEC within two days and must be addressed within four days at the DEC level. DEC-level decisions may be appealed to the relevant court or the CEC. The decision of the court may be appealed within one day of its delivery to the Court of Appeals.¹⁷ Decisions by the Court of Appeals are final.

Administrative courts have jurisdiction to hear appeals on alleged election violations. Deadlines for this process are specified in the Election Code and the Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia. Criminal courts can also be involved in an election case that amounts to a crime. The CEC and the State Audit Office of Georgia (SAOG) refer criminal cases, such as vote buying, to the prosecutor’s office. The Constitutional Court hears complaints related to breaches of the

¹⁶ Election Code, Article 77 and Article 14 § 1 (j,u). <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/ElectionCodeEng.pdf>

¹⁷ See Article 77 of the Election Code.

Constitution with regard to elections. The SAOG, through its Financial Monitoring Service department, is mandated to adjudicate violations related to campaign finance.

Other groups also provide oversight over certain aspects of electoral dispute resolution. The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) addresses certain election-related media violations, as specified in the Electoral Code and GNCC regulations, and district or city courts rule on administrative violation protocols issued by the GNCC.¹⁸ The GNCC has the power to investigate violations on its own initiative or on the basis of complaints received. An Inter-Agency Task Force was established in May 2021 to encourage dialogue among relevant stakeholders and to issue recommendations related to alleged violations of the law during the election cycle.¹⁹ The task force does not have sanctioning power, and its decisions are not binding.

¹⁸ Election Code, Articles 51 § 15 and 77 § 5¹; Georgian National Communications Commission, Regulation No. 9, Article 9.

¹⁹ Election Code, Article 48 § 9.

Resources

- Constitution of Georgia ([English](#))
- Election Code of Georgia ([English](#))
- Law on Political Unions of Citizens ([English](#))
- Criminal Code of Georgia ([English](#))
- Central Election Commission ([English](#), [Georgian](#), [Abkhazian](#))
- Central Election Commission Regulations ([Georgian](#))
- Election Code of Georgia ([English](#))
- Schedule of Electoral Activities ([English](#))
- Central Election Commission Gender Statistics for the 2021 Municipal Elections ([English](#))
- Election Results ([Georgian](#))
- State Audit Office of Georgia ([English](#))

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.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Georgian elections authorities as of October 1, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The information herein is

provided by the author(s) and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.