

GEORGIA'S 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS FINAL MONITORING REPORT



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1. Main Findings

October 26, 2024, Parliamentary Elections in Georgia were historic in many ways. After the restoration of Georgia's independence, for the first time, the elections to the highest representative body were held under a fully proportional electoral system. Electronic technologies were introduced into the voting process on a large scale for the first time as well. Additional significance of the elections resulted from the fact that they were the first held after Georgia received the status of a candidate country for membership in the European Union. Thus, the elections played a crucial role in achieving progress on the path of European integration. The 2024 parliamentary elections represented an opportunity for Georgia to take important steps towards democratic development, the establishment of a multi-party system, and European integration. However, the violation of the basic principles of democratic elections set the country significantly back, called into question the legitimacy of the election results, further deepened the polarization between the government and its critics, and posed an existential threat to the possibility of strengthening democratic order in the country.

Ahead of the 2024 parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream party reached the maximum level of its years-long consolidation of power as manifested through the complete capture of state institutions. All types of administrative resources – coercive, regulatory, institutional, financial, and media – were used for the elections to ensure the ruling party's victory.¹ During the parliamentary elections, four of the five fundamental principles of democratic elections – universal suffrage, free voting, equality, and secrecy of vote – were essentially violated. The combination of fundamental violations identified during the pre-election period and on Election Day, the use of systematic and organized schemes of voter intimidation, pressure, threats, and vote buying, affected the expression of the free will of the voters and, consequently, the election results cannot be considered as a true expression of the will of the Georgian voters.

Legislative Framework

- With the parliamentary elections approaching, the ruling party hastily adopted several legislative amendments through one-party support without proper consultations and discussions, ignoring OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and limiting the participation of relevant civil society organizations. Georgian Dream adapted the amendments to its own interests, thereby worsening the electoral legislative framework.
- The amendment to the Electoral Code adopted by the parliamentary majority in May 2024, introducing the concept of a delegate in parliamentary elections, violated the principles of the proportional electoral system and the single nationwide multi-member district defined by the Constitution. At the same time, only Georgian Dream took advantage of this opportunity, creating a false expectation that delegates, like majoritarian members of parliament, would have additional ties to voters in specific districts. In this way, the ruling party gained an advantage compared to others in the process of conducting the election campaign and affecting the electoral behavior of local voters.
- In the absence of electoral blocs and the existing 5% threshold, the restriction on the choice of name by electoral subjects and the prohibition on nominating a member of another party on the party list created an additional obstacle for opposition political parties.

¹ For more information on the classification of administrative resources used for elections, see the policy document: “Misuse of Administrative Resources for Elections: International Standards, Georgia’s Regulatory Framework and Practice”, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, accessed February 21, 2025, <http://bit.ly/3QR9mOw>

- Despite numerous recommendations from the Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR, and local observer organizations, ahead of the parliamentary elections, the rules defining the composition of the election administration and decision-making by the CEC deteriorated further, allowing the composition of the CEC to be determined by a single-party vote and reducing the likelihood of consensus-based decisions within the commission.
- In May 2024, the mandatory gender quota and the financial incentive established by law to protect gender equality were abolished, which was a significant step backward in ensuring women's representation and, at the same time, did not comply with international standards.

Election Administration

- Like previous years, the influence of the ruling party on election administration continued to be a significant challenge, as demonstrated by the complete subordination of all levels of commissions in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Staffing the election administration based on the interests of the ruling party and biased decisions reduced the degree of independence of the election administration and further damaged its credibility.
- Despite the formally minimized representation of the ruling party, the ruling political force maintained real control over the election commissions, as members elected on professional grounds effectively followed the ruling party's agenda.
- The process of selecting professional members for both district and precinct election commissions was conducted in a low-competitive environment. Commission members were mainly elected with the support of a simple majority. In addition, a significant part of the members elected to the election commissions were employed in budget-funded agencies, and some of them were affiliated with the ruling party. In several cases, when selecting professional members for the precinct election commissions, members of the district commissions appointed by opposition parties were prevented from fully participating in the process - a right granted to them by law.
- The ordinance adopted by the CEC in August 2024 – on changing the terms of casting lots for the distribution of functions of members of precinct election commissions – contradicted the electoral legislation of Georgia. This change made it easier for the ruling party to plan and implement electoral manipulations, as it was known in advance which commission members would perform which functions on election day.
- The information campaigns conducted during the pre-election period to enhance the credibility of the election administration, including presenting the introduction of electronic technologies as a mechanism for improving elections, participation in critical media outlets, and impartial positioning with international organizations and other stakeholders, failed to answer questions regarding the independence of the election administration and, ultimately, failed to ensure public trust in the administration.

Electronic Technologies

- In the context of the large-scale introduction of electronic technologies for the 2024 parliamentary elections, the non-transparent implementation of this process significantly damaged the trust of the

stakeholders towards electronic technologies, as political parties and monitoring organizations were not given the opportunity to participate in both the software development and the audit process.

- Due to the visible traces of the marker on the ballot paper, voting with electronic technologies violated the principle of the secrecy of the vote - one of the basic principles of democratic elections enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international acts.
- During the pre-election period, the stakeholders conducted information campaigns regarding the protection of the secrecy of the vote in the context of electronic technologies. However, in parallel, electronic technologies were used to intimidate voters by distributing unofficial messages about the possibility of identifying voters and subsequently punishing them. These messages - in the context of inadequate protection of secrecy of the vote and following the installation of video cameras by the ruling party at polling stations, significantly limited the fundamental principle of free suffrage.

Out-of-country Voting

- Despite the demands of voters living abroad, the CEC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not demonstrate due will to ensure universal suffrage for citizens of Georgia. Although the CEC opened 17 more polling stations abroad compared to the 2020 parliamentary elections, the location of the polling stations did not meet the increased demand of voters living outside the country.
- Due to improper arrangement of the polling station facilities and lack of commission members in some polling stations opened abroad, many voters could not vote on election day, thus once again violating the principle of universal suffrage.

Pre-election Campaign

- The election campaign took place under conditions of strong political polarization, which was particularly aggravated by the ruling party's anti-democratic rhetoric against opposition parties, including the promise to declare the main opposition unions unconstitutional if the ruling party gained a constitutional majority. The Georgian Dream's campaign rhetoric was based on conspiracy theories, the traumas and fears of a war-torn society, nationalist and religious sentiments, as well as messages inciting hatred on gender and sexual grounds. At the same time, the central line of the ruling party's election campaign was to create an image of the West as an enemy, which allegedly demanded the opening of a second front in Georgia. These messages were supplemented using the tragedy of the Ukrainian people and the war for electoral purposes.
- The fundamental violations identified during the pre-election period and the ruling party's use of systematic, organized schemes had a negative impact on the conduct of elections in a free and competitive electoral environment. The election campaign was characterized by intimidation, pressure, and control of the will of the voters, which limited the free participation of Georgian voters in the elections.
- During the pre-election period, numerous stories confirmed the existence and use of a scheme to mobilize votes through illegal means, as well as cases of confiscation of voters' ID cards. The failure of relevant investigative agencies to respond to such facts once again demonstrated the politicization of state bodies in favor of the ruling party.

- Incidents of physical violence, obstruction of the election campaign, threats and/or intimidation, intrusion/attempted intrusion into party offices, and the detention of individuals affiliated with political parties affected the ability of the electoral subjects to campaign freely.
- During the election campaign, the ruling party's anti-Western, including Eurosceptic messages and an unprecedented large-scale discrediting campaign against civil society, also created risks of inciting violence. The ruling party's campaign materials used images of representatives of non-governmental organizations in an offensive and derogatory context.
- During the pre-election campaign, the line between the ruling party and the state was completely erased due to the Georgian Dream's use of all types of administrative resources. Among others, this included the use of large-scale social projects and state initiatives for electoral purposes, the active involvement of employees of budgetary organizations in the campaign activities of the ruling party, the politicization of the education system, and the subordination of public institutions to the ruling party's interests.

Campaign Finance

- Unlike other electoral subjects, Georgian Dream raised a significant portion of its campaign funds before the official start of the campaign. In addition, the ruling party spent more money on its campaign than all other political parties participating in the elections combined, indicating significant financial disparities.
- The decision of the Anti-Corruption Bureau to recognize two non-governmental organizations, their employees, and founders as persons with a declared electoral goal was particularly problematic during the pre-election period. By this decision, the Bureau illegally and unjustifiably broadly interpreted the standard established by law. Later, following the call of the Prime Minister of Georgia, the Bureau revoked its decision. This process once again confirmed the existing doubts regarding the institutional independence and impartiality of the agency.

Media Environment

- The media environment for the 2024 elections was sharply polarized, caused by the ruling party's decision not to allow the Georgian Dream candidates to participate in political and news programs of media outlets critical of the government, while pro-government media outlets did not invite representatives of the main opposition parties to their programs.
- The adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and the events surrounding it further deteriorated the media environment. Threats, physical attacks, and pressure on journalists became more frequent. The cases of suspension of parliamentary accreditation for journalists representing media outlets critical of the government hindered journalistic activities.
- The political instrumentalization of the Georgian National Communications Commission and its decision-making in favor of the ruling party's interests were evident.
- A large-scale advertising campaign spreading positive messages in favor of the ruling party and negative messages against opposition political unions was revealed on the Facebook pages of the TV companies Imedi and Pos TV. During the two-month official pre-election campaign, they spent more than 77,000 US dollars on advertisements. This advertising campaign effectively erased the line between the electoral subject and the given media outlets and significantly damaged the existing media environment in the

country. In addition, considering that the money spent on these advertisements has not been declared to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, it can be regarded as an illegal donation made in favor of the Georgian Dream.

Social Media

- Various social media platforms were actively used to conduct political campaigns for the 2024 parliamentary elections. Unlike previous elections, a large-scale campaign was conducted not only on Facebook but on TikTok as well. Along with the opportunity to easily and inexpensively reach a broad group of voters, social media also created a significant challenge in terms of spreading disinformation and propaganda during the pre-election period.
- Increased polarized rhetoric was observed on political parties' and their representatives' pages, accounts, and channels. Along with official pages, unofficial campaign pages and accounts operating on Facebook and TikTok, supporting or opposing electoral subjects, were also used, most of which disseminated pro-government and anti-opposition messages. Given the sharply changed rhetoric of the ruling party, pages and accounts supporting the Georgian Dream engaged in anti-Western, Eurosceptic, anti-liberal, conspiracy theory-spreading campaigns - which was a significant novelty compared to the previous elections.
- Some advertising campaigns on Facebook and Instagram were conducted in violation of Meta's mandatory transparency standards, according to which the identity of the owner of ads related to elections, politics, and/or social issues should have been known to the public.
- In the final stages of the election campaign, threatening and intimidating messages addressed to voters of opposition parties appeared more frequently on social media. Among them was a call to record and subsequently prosecute supporters of opposition parties.
- During the official pre-election period, cases of Russian interference in the Georgian parliamentary elections through a social media advertising campaign were revealed. The advertising was carried out through Facebook pages managed from outside of Georgia and was directed against opposition parties and in support of the Georgian Dream.

Election Day

- Numerous fundamental, systematic, and organized violations took place on election day. The following violations were recorded at the polling stations: ballot stuffing; attempts or acts of proxy and multiple voting; voting with improper documents; restrictions of observers' rights; violations of the inking procedure and secrecy of voting; handing over more than one ballot to a voter; the presence of unauthorized persons in polling stations; facts of illegal campaigning and control of voters' will, as well as problems with the mobile ballot box, electronic devices, and other procedural incidents.
- Violating the principle of secrecy of the vote - due to visible traces of a marker on the back of the ballot - in all polling stations where voting was conducted using electronic technologies was a large-scale problem. The constant photo and video recording by representatives of the ruling party increased the risk of seeing the choice made by the voter and violated the principles of both secrecy of the vote and free suffrage. Photo and video recordings served as a mechanism for controlling both the will of the voters and, presumably, the loyalty of the commission members.

- On election day, observers were subjected to verbal abuse, physical violence, expulsion from polling stations, threats, and pressure both by commission members and by Georgian Dream party representatives/coordinators and fake observers. Notably, observers were often not allowed to observe the voter verification process.
- During the voting process, suspicious gatherings of people and voter tracking, including collecting their personal data, campaigning, and mobilization/transportation of voters, were observed on the outer perimeter of polling stations. Cases of verbal and physical confrontations and alleged vote-buying were also observed. Most of the above-mentioned illegal actions served as a mechanism for controlling the will of voters. Accordingly, the use of such methods violated the principle of free suffrage.
- Compared to the previous elections, there was a significant increase in the number of cases of violation of the inking procedure (9%) and alleged vote-buying (13%). In the last general elections, these figures were 2% and 4%, respectively.
- Anomalies were identified in voter turnout on election day. In many polling stations, there was a significant difference between the turnout of male and female voters, which deviated from the normal distribution and displayed practically impossible or unnatural characteristics. Among them, in 275 polling stations, the difference between the turnout of male and female voters was higher than 20 percentage points. In some polling stations, the turnout of male voters was higher than 100% - which is theoretically impossible. The CEC failed to adequately explain these differences, thus further strengthening suspicions of alleged manipulations at these polling stations.

Election Disputes

- The election dispute resolution process was one of the significant challenges of the 2024 parliamentary elections. The election administration and courts largely failed to ensure an impartial and fair review of complaints/appeals filed during the pre-election period and on election day, further reducing public trust in the elections.
- The narrow and inconsistent interpretation of electoral legislation by election commissions and courts was problematic. A significant proportion of complaints were dismissed on technical grounds without consideration of merits, and election commission chairs often made the decisions unilaterally. This raised doubts about the transparency and fairness of the process.
- The lack of independent judicial oversight was a significant challenge. Courts typically upheld decisions of the election commissions without further review.

Election Observation

- The adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence in May 2024 and the ruling party's continued use of hostile rhetoric against civil society negatively impacted the work of key domestic observer organizations. There have been attempts to intimidate ISFED observers and their families.
- Both during the pre-election period and on election day, representatives of state agencies, the ruling party, and individuals associated with them were uncooperative and, in many cases, hostile towards observers from local organizations. They also obstructed the activities of the observers and verbally and physically insulted them.

- As in previous elections, several fake election observation organizations also registered for these elections. The ruling party and some opposition parties used these fake observers to pursue their interests. Particularly problematic was the large number of fake observers affiliated with Georgian Dream, who engaged in voter control and mobilization inside and outside of polling stations. They also acted aggressively toward opposition-appointed commission members, party representatives, and other observers.

In recent years, the amendments to the electoral legislation were adopted in a rush, without any consultations and participation of stakeholders and without considering the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR, the Venice Commission, other international organizations, and domestic observer groups. These amendments were not based on the real needs to improve the electoral framework but served the party interests of the Georgian Dream. ISFED believes that small and fragmentary changes are no longer enough: a complete, comprehensive, and inclusive electoral reform process is needed, with the participation of all stakeholders, which will be based on research and analysis of the problems existing in the legislation and practice and whose goal will be the long-term improvement of the electoral environment. Such a process requires legitimacy from the society, which is only possible once the country's current political and legal crisis is resolved. Should such a process occur, ISFED stands ready to present a complete package of recommendations to meet the standards necessary to ensure a free and fair electoral environment.

2. Political Context

The October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections were of decisive importance for Georgia's democratic development and integration into the European Union. For the first time, the elections were held under the status of a candidate country for EU membership, based on a fully proportional electoral system and using new electronic technologies. Given their significance, main political unions called these elections a referendum: the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (Georgian Dream) compared the elections as a choice between war and peace, while the main opposition parties equated them with a choice between the country's democratic, European future and international isolation and/or falling under the Russian influence.

A historic window of opportunity preceded the parliamentary elections. After submitting its application for membership in the European Union on March 3, 2022², Georgia received recognition of its European perspective from the European Council and then, in December 2023, the status of a candidate country for EU membership. In order to move to the next stage and start accession negotiations, Georgia was requested to implement nine steps, including holding free, fair, and competitive elections.³

As Georgia was getting closer to the European Union, anti-Western messages, including Eurosceptic ones, gained momentum in the country. For the first time in the country's recent history, the ruling party questioned the lack of an alternative to the pro-Western foreign policy course and European integration enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia, thereby attempting to revise the existing pro-European consensus in the society.⁴ Despite the formal statement that the country's vector was unchanged, on April 29, the founder and honorary chairman of the

² Georgia's PM Signs Application to Join the EU, *Civic Georgia*, March 3, 2022 <https://civil.ge/archives/477258>

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions: 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy," European Commission, pp. 25-26, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3zg1NLO>

⁴ According to a public opinion survey conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in September-October 2023, 73% of the surveyed population fully and 13% somewhat support Georgia's accession to the European Union. Also, 65% of those surveyed fully and 14% somewhat support NATO membership. Georgian Survey of Public Opinion, IRI, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4idlxAV>

Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, declared the change in foreign policy. Ivanishvili accused the West of operating a network of agents in Georgia and trying to bring them to power and, in effect, stated that the recommendations presented by the European Union regarding Georgia would not be taken into account.⁵

In the run-up to the elections, the Georgian Dream took a number of anti-democratic steps. A turning point in this direction was the declaration of non-governmental organizations and the media as organizations pursuing the interest of a foreign power, thus creating an existential threat to the civil society that has been formed in the country for 30 years. Despite the continuous protests of the Georgian society, numerous rallies, as well as harsh criticism from the President of Georgia, strategic allies, and various international organizations, the Parliament adopted the draft law and then overcame the veto imposed by the President on May 28. The government did not take into account the direct and unambiguous message of the representatives of the European Union,⁶ according to which the given law did not correspond to Georgia's European aspirations and distanced the country from Euro-Atlantic integration.⁷ Most Georgian civil society organizations did not comply with the aforementioned law, which contradicts the Constitution of Georgia and fundamentally violates basic human rights and freedoms. The organizations started a legal battle using existing domestic and international legal mechanisms.⁸ Although the law was not directly enforced during the election period, it had a negative impact on domestic observer organizations. Among the steps that were also detrimental to the European integration process was the adoption of the Law On Family Values and Protection of Minors, which, along with restricting the rights of the LGBTQI community, also served the government's homophobic rhetoric in the pre-election campaign.

These and other anti-democratic, anti-Western steps of the Georgian Dream were followed by a sharply negative reaction from the international community and a review of the policy towards Georgia by the European Union and Western states. A number of important assistance and programs were suspended. Also, the process of European integration was de facto halted.⁹

Main political parties met the 2024 parliamentary elections with significant changes. The changes were dictated by the transition to a fully proportional electoral system and a 5% electoral threshold. In the context of the ban on electoral blocs, the relatively high electoral threshold pushed opposition political parties to unite and adopt new strategies. Among them, one of the large-scale changes affected the United National Movement (UNM). After losing to Levan Khabeishvili in internal party elections, Nika Melia left the party, taking a significant part of the party's active members with him. The UNM formed an alliance with Giorgi Vashadze - Strategy Agmashenebeli and participated in the parliamentary elections in a coalition under the name of Unity - National Movement. In turn, Nika Melia and former Director General of the Mtavari Arkhi, Nika Gvaramia, founded the New Unity Gvaramia Melia, which was later renamed as Coalition for Change Gvaramia, Melia, Girchi, Droa, after political alliance Elene Khoshtaria-Droa and Girchi – More Freedom joined the coalition. Another coalition, called Strong Georgia – Lelo, for the People, for Freedom!, was established around the party Lelo for Georgia, which was joined by the political parties Ana Dolidze-For the People, Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens and the movement Freedom Square. The party of former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia - Gakharia for Georgia, the Labor Party of Georgia, Girchi, and others ran in the elections independently. It is noteworthy that the changes in political parties have also affected the electoral behavior of voters, as a result of which the fragmented opposition electorate consolidated around the four electoral subjects, thus significantly changing party patterns dominating the country since 2012.

⁵ Bidzina Ivanishvili Backs Anti-Western Policies, Threatens Repressions, *Civil Georgia*, April 29, 2024 <https://civil.ge/archives/602348>

⁶ Charles Michel: Foreign Agents Law „Not Consistent with Georgia's EU Aspirations“, *Civil Georgia*, April 16, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/592459>

⁷ International Reactions to Final Adoption of Foreign Agents Law, *Civil Georgia*, May 15, 2024 <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/606551>

⁸ We Continue Our Legal Fight Against the Russian Law, ISFED, accessed on February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Y83CDV>

⁹ EUCO 15/24,“ European Council, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3D3zm5W>

The election campaign took place under the conditions of strong political polarization, which was especially deepened by the ruling party's anti-democratic rhetoric against the opposition parties. Immediately after the start of the pre-election activities, the leaders of the Georgian Dream promised their voters that, if they received a constitutional majority, they would declare the main opposition unions unconstitutional.¹⁰ A sharp confrontation between the President of Georgia and the ruling party also preceded the pre-election period. Along with the threats against political actors, there was an unprecedented discrediting campaign against civil society, as well as attempts to intimidate critics of the government, threatening phone calls and physical attacks.

The right of voters to make an informed choice based on the analysis of the offers received during the pre-election period was significantly undermined by the rhetoric of the Georgian Dream campaign, which, like those of authoritarian regimes, was based on: conspiracy theories; traumas and fears of a war-torn society; nationalist and religious sentiments; messages inciting hatred on gender and sexual grounds. Instead of offering a program responsive to the voters' needs, the central line of the ruling party's election campaign was to create an image of the West as an enemy, which allegedly demanded the opening of a second front in Georgia, as well as portray the elections as a choice between war and peace. These messages were supplemented by the use of the tragedy of the Ukrainian people at war for electoral purposes.

In the run-up to the elections, in parallel with disinformation and information manipulations taking place within the country, Russian information operations aimed at political processes significantly intensified. High-ranking officials of the Russian Federation made a number of official statements against the opposition political spectrum and in support of the Georgian Dream.¹¹ Along with disseminating official statements, a social media network linked to Russia that had been spreading mainly anti-Western messages in previous years, particularly narratives against Georgia's integration into the European Union, intensified its pro-government campaign during the pre-election period.

Election day was marked by widespread, systemic, and organized violations aimed at securing a victory for the ruling party. According to the assessment of ISFED and other observation missions, the elections were not free and fair and, therefore, failed to express the will of the Georgian people. Despite calls by domestic observation missions to hold a rerun instead of summarizing the results, the Central Election Commission (CEC) issued a summary protocol of the election results on November 16. The election results were appealed to the Tbilisi City and Appeal Courts, but none of them were upheld. On November 19, the President of Georgia and 30 members of Parliament filed lawsuits with the Constitutional Court of Georgia to declare the results of the parliamentary elections unconstitutional, but the Constitutional Court dismissed the complaint. Against this background, the assessment of the elections by international observation missions was also highly critical.¹²

In parallel with the issue of the legitimacy of the elections, on November 28, 2024, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, made a statement regarding the suspension of Georgia's EU accession process until 2028. This decision of the Georgian Dream, which contradicts Article 78 of the Constitution of Georgia, was followed by a large-scale public protest. The police forces used torture and inhuman and degrading treatment against the peaceful protest of Georgian citizens. Not only was disproportionate force used, but it was also completely incompatible with and unjustified under the standards established by the Constitution and international human rights law. The repressions were followed by illegal detentions of citizens, disproportionately high financial fines for administrative detentions, and a fully controlled judiciary making

¹⁰ Kobakhidze specifies which parties Georgian Dream plans to ban, *Netgazeti*, August 23, 2024, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/738901/>

¹¹ US, OSCE ODIHR conspiring to discredit Georgian elections — SVR, "Russian News Agency TASS, September 11, 2024, <https://tass.com/world/1841593>

¹² *Parliamentary Elections of Georgia, 26 October 2024: Final Report*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Accessed February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4i0ZCnc>; *Observation of the parliamentary elections in Georgia (26 October 2024), election observation report*, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Accessed February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4iasDpS>

politicized decisions. These practices still continue. Among the detained, beaten, and injured citizens are representatives of various fields, including media, political parties, arts and culture, and activists.

The Georgian Dream's undemocratic actions violating human rights have been met with harsh criticism from international partners, financial sanctions, and visa restrictions. The Minister of Internal Affairs and the Deputy Director of the Department for Special Assignments were included in the Global Magnitsky List. The United States also sanctioned the founder and honorary chairman of the Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili. In order to overcome the current political and legal crisis, the Georgian public demands include the immediate release of illegally detained persons and the holding of new parliamentary elections under free and fair conditions. It is noteworthy that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution with an identical request, expressing concern about the accuracy of the election results and calling on Georgia to release all political prisoners to ensure accountability for all law enforcement officers involved in violent crackdowns, beatings, ill-treatment, torture and arbitrary detentions against peaceful demonstrators, and to organize new, genuinely democratic elections, which will be held under strict international monitoring and the condition of political independence of state institutions and election administration.¹³

3. Legislative Framework

Significant legal changes were made in the run-up to the October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections. Since the previous parliamentary elections, a number of amendments have been made or enacted in the electoral legislation. However, no complete and comprehensive electoral reform has occurred in recent years. Each subsequent change was initiated and adopted piecemeal, without proper consultations and discussions, often hastily and ignoring the recommendations of the Venice Commission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). A significant problem was the restriction of the participation of relevant civil society organizations in this process.¹⁴ In addition, the legislative amendments adopted as the elections approached served the narrow interests of the ruling party and worsened the existing electoral environment.

On October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections in Georgia were held under a fully proportional electoral system for the first time since the country regained its independence. However, compared to the 2020 elections, the 2024 elections were held under an increased threshold of 5%, which contradicted the political agreement reached between political parties in 2021, mediated by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, based on which the electoral threshold was to be reduced to 2%.¹⁵ Along with maintaining the high electoral threshold, the norm prohibiting electoral blocs also remained in force, which, overall, created a significant obstacle to the independent development of some political parties.¹⁶

Despite the switch to the fully proportional electoral system and a single nationwide multi-member district, in May 2024, the parliamentary majority amended the Election Code, introducing the possibility of designating a candidate for parliamentary membership on a party list for parliamentary elections as a delegate for a specific electoral district. In particular, when compiling a party list, parties were given the right to designate a candidate for parliamentary membership as a delegate of voters registered in the territory of the electoral district. For this

¹³ Resolution 2585 (2025), Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Georgia, Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, Accessed February 22, 2025, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/34147/html>

¹⁴ The ruling party blocked ISFED's participation in the working group on electoral issues, ISFED, accessed on February 22, 2025 <http://bit.ly/41UTktl>

¹⁵ President of the European Council Charles Michel publishes new proposal made today to Georgian political parties, "Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Accessed February, 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/439CY12>

¹⁶ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 125. Summarizing Elections Results at the CEC, part 4

purpose, an appendix to the Election Code defined 30 districts, the boundaries of which almost exactly coincided with the 30 single-member electoral districts that existed for the 2020 parliamentary elections before the fully proportional system was introduced. In addition, it was determined that a member of the Parliament of Georgia nominated as a delegate shall be considered a delegate of the relevant constituency after the elections if the party that nominated him or her as a candidate for a delegate received the most votes in the territory of the said constituency. These amendments run contrary to the essence of the proportional electoral system defined by the Constitution of Georgia and contradict the existence of a single nationwide multi-member district. ISFED believes that the amendment, which was dictated by the interests of the ruling party, misguided the voters and, under the current, fully proportional electoral system, there is no institutional basis to ensure the connection between the voter and the candidate, both in the process of voting and during the distribution of mandates.¹⁷

An important change was made to the rules for registering parties. In particular, the provisions related to the name of an electoral subject and the inclusion of another party member in the party list changed.¹⁸ According to the amendments, in the application submitted to the CEC chairperson for registration to participate in the elections, the party had to indicate the name that corresponded to the name and/or its abbreviated version given in the statute of the political union. In addition, the name under which the party would be registered had to be indicated in the ballot paper without change. According to the old version of the law, along with the name specified in the statute, parties could indicate the name and last name or only the last name of up to three leaders. The same package of amendments prohibited the inclusion of a person in the party list who was simultaneously a member of another party.¹⁹ According to ISFED's assessment, the restriction on the selection of party names for the election and the prohibition on nominating a member of another party on the party list, in the absence of electoral blocs and the 5% threshold, created an additional obstacle for opposition political parties.

In the spring of 2024, the provision on gender quotas in the Election Code and the Law of Georgia on Citizens Political Unions was abolished, which was a significant step backward in ensuring women's representation and, at the same time, does not comply with international standards. Prior to the change, at least one person in every four candidates on a party list for the October 26, 2024 elections had to be a woman. The 30% financial incentive established for women's representation on a party list was also abolished. International organizations also negatively assessed the above-mentioned changes.²⁰

The procedure for composing the election administration was particularly problematic, having deteriorated a number of times in recent years. Despite the recommendations of the Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR, and local monitoring organizations, with the latest amendments, the candidates for the CEC chairpersonship and professional membership are selected by the Speaker of the Parliament instead of the President of Georgia and presented to the Parliament, which, in turn, can elect candidates for a full term of five years by a simple majority. Accordingly, the role of the President in this process has been reduced and has effectively become a formality. In addition, reducing the number of required MP votes further simplified the possibility of composing the CEC by a single-party decision only.

The amendments also abolished the position of the CEC deputy chairperson, who was elected from among the opposition-appointed CEC members. In addition, the amendments to the Election Code simplified the process of

¹⁷ Statement by ISFED regarding the initiated amendments to the Election Code, ISFED, accessed on February 22, 2025 <https://bit.ly/41rcqH1>

¹⁸ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 113, Party registration/degistration, part 3.a

¹⁹ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 117. Electoral registration of party list, part 4.b

²⁰ OSCE/ODIHR: Abolition of Women's Quotas on Party Election Lists "Not Consistent" with Georgia's Obligations, *Civil Georgia*, July 1, 2024 <https://civil.ge/archives/615025>

making CEC decisions by simple majority, thereby reducing the possibility of consensus-based decision-making within the commission.

4. Election Administration

Trust in the election administration, a necessary condition for sound electoral processes, has been a challenge in Georgia for years, and the ruling party's influence and control over the election administration has increased with each election. One of the main goals of the April 19, 2021, political agreement was to develop an institutional arrangement for election administration that would increase trust in the elections. However, the complete capture of all levels of election administration by the Georgian Dream for the 2024 parliamentary elections made this goal impossible to achieve.

The adjustment of provisions regulating the composition of election administration to the interests of the ruling party, biased decisions made by the election administration, lack of transparency in the implementation of electronic technologies, and insufficient steps taken to increase the opportunities for Georgian citizens living abroad to participate in the elections were especially problematic for 2024 parliamentary elections.

The information campaigns conducted during the pre-election period to enhance the credibility of the election administration, including presenting the introduction of electronic technologies as a mechanism for improving elections, participation in critical media outlets, and impartial positioning with international organizations and other stakeholders, failed to answer the questions regarding the impartiality and independence of the election administration and, ultimately, failed to ensure sufficient public trust in the administration.

4.1. Composition and work of the election administration

Three-tier election commissions administer elections in Georgia. For the 2024 parliamentary elections, the election administration consisted of the Central Election Commission (CEC), 73 District Election Commissions (DECs) and 3,111 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs).²¹ Each election commission at all three levels consisted of no more than 17 members, of which 9 members were appointed by political parties, and 8 members were elected on professional grounds through a competition.

In recent years, the procedure for composing the election administration has become more aligned with the interests of the ruling party, and members elected on professional grounds are, in effect, advancing the agenda of the ruling party. Following the latest deterioration in the procedure for electing the CEC chairperson and professional members, on April 30, 2024, the Parliament elected the CEC chairperson, deputy chairperson, and two commission members on a second attempt by a simple majority.²²

After the official announcement of the elections, the election administration began to implement the measures envisaged by the election legislation. A competition was announced first for the district and later for precinct election commissions, and trainings for PEC members were also held. In order to inform voters, the election administration held demonstrations of new electronic technologies. During the pre-election period, the issue of

²¹ Report on the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, *Central Election Commission*, accessed on January 30, 2025 <https://bit.ly/3XcJro0>

²² Parliament Elects Chair and Members of the Central Election Commission, *Parliament of Georgia*, accessed on February 20, 2025 <https://bit.ly/43z9Jow>

ensuring the electoral participation of Georgian citizens living abroad and establishing additional polling stations for them was particularly challenging.

On August 16, 2024, the CEC adopted a problematic resolution, which changed the dates of the casting of lots for the distribution of the functions of the PEC members, and the said procedure was carried out in advance for all election precincts - no later than the 7th day before election day.²³ According to the CEC, the said change was due to the need to ensure a smooth election process so that the implementation of the casting of lots procedures at different deadlines would not cause inconsistency. ISFED believes that the resolution contradicts Georgia's election legislation. Moreover, its adoption made it easier for the ruling party to plan and implement election manipulations at the PEC level since it was known in advance which functions each commission member would perform on election day. Overall, this process increased the risks of pressure on commission members and significantly damaged trust in the election administration.

Legislative changes related to election administration negatively reflected on the process of composition of district and precinct election commissions. The temporary DEC members were selected in a low-competition environment. In addition, out of 219 vacant positions, only 10 members were selected by a high quorum - 2/3 of the CEC members; the remaining 209 members were elected by a simple majority of the full CEC composition and not based on a consensus decision.²⁴

The selection process for professional PEC members was also conducted in conditions of low competition and against the backdrop of negative trends. In several cases, when selecting professional PEC members, DEC members appointed by opposition parties were prevented from fully participating in the process - a right granted to them by law: they were not allowed to fully receive and/or fully familiarize themselves with the application documents submitted by the candidates for the precinct election commission.²⁵ Opposition-appointed DEC members were not given enough time to study the applications submitted by PEC membership candidates.²⁶ DEC members did not interview any candidate for PEC membership despite some of the commission members expressing a desire to conduct interviews, and the deadlines established by law allowed for this.²⁷

DECs and PECs were not composed in such a way as to exclude political influence on them. In most cases, PEC officials and members were elected by a simple majority of the full composition of the DEC members since they failed to obtain the support of 2/3 of the full composition of the commissions during the first vote. In addition, some candidates elected as PEC members and officials had disciplinary sanctions imposed on them during the general elections held in 2020 and/or 2021.²⁸ According to ISFED's observations, DEC members elected by the CEC, as well as a significant part of the PEC members elected by the DEC members, were persons employed in public service and budgetary organizations. Some were also affiliated with the ruling party due to their own and/or family members' current or recent past activities.

Over the years, the differentiation in the activities of party-appointed and professional PEC members, whether through electoral legislation or by-laws, in terms of the division of duties or functions, undermined the balance of power in the election administration, contradicting the main essence of its staffing - the principle of equality of

²³ Resolution No. 32/2024 of the Central Election Commission of Georgia of August 16, 2024 "On Determining Some Election Procedures and Deadlines for the Elections to be Held on October 26, 2024", accessed on October 25, 2024 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6247488?publication=0>

²⁴ See the annexes to the minutes of the meeting of the Central Election Commission of Georgia of August 31, 2024 No. 20/2024, accessed on February 17, 2025, <https://bit.ly/419HMAO>

²⁵ Kaspi, Zugdidi, Poti, Khobi, Dmanisi, Kobuleti, Batumi, Telavi

²⁶ Adigeni, Aspindza, Kaspi, Zugdidi, Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Khulo, Batumi, Ozurgeti, Chughureti, Shuakhevi, Vani, Chiatura, Terjola, Zestaponi

²⁷ Kaspi, Batumi, Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Chughureti

²⁸ For example: Mtskheta - 1, Kaspi - 3, Kvareli - 1, Sagarejo - 3, Gurjaani - 1, Lagodekhi - 6, Kobuleti - 12, Sachkhere - 2, Senaki - 13.

the collegial body and its members. This trend continued even before the 2024 parliamentary elections. The CEC decree of August 27, 2024, set different remuneration for professional and party-appointed PEC members.²⁹ Such a discriminatory approach towards a collegial body, where each member should enjoy equal rights, is detrimental to the full functioning of the PECs and is incompatible with the principle of equality guaranteed by fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The trends identified in the activities of the election administration have not only damaged trust in the election administration and the election process in general but have also largely contributed to the unprecedented number and scale of election day violations.

4.2. Introduction of electronic technologies in elections

The introduction of electronic technologies in the voting process began following the amendments made to the electoral legislation in December 2022. In order to automate the process of voter registration, digitalization of ballots, and vote counting, the CEC introduced special voter verification and vote counting devices into the voting process. In particular, out of 3,044 polling stations opened by the election administration across the country, 2,263 (74%) of the precincts used these electronic devices, which was an unprecedented innovation for Georgia.³⁰ Ultimately, approximately 89% of voters (3,113,747 voters) had the opportunity to participate in the elections using electronic technologies.³¹

There was a consensus among the majority of political parties on the use of electronic technologies in the voting process. However, some challenges remained problematic even considering the technologies. One of the issues of concern was the risks associated with voter identification/registration and voter lists on election day. In its 2023 assessment, ISFED noted that the voter verification machine only verified the validity of electronic ID cards and did not identify or verify a voter's identity.³² Therefore, voter identification, as during the traditional voting process, was still the registrar's responsibility. Accordingly, in the event of dishonest use of the machines, the high risks of manipulating voter lists and voting on behalf of others did not decrease.³³ This assessment of the organization was followed by attacks and criticism from the CEC and the Georgian Dream.³⁴

ISFED monitored the use of technology in the electoral process during the 2022 and 2023 Georgian parliamentary by-elections and the 2023 local self-government by-elections. In its assessment of these elections, the organization clearly spoke about the shortcomings identified during the use of voter verification and vote counting machines, cases of violation of the secrecy of the vote, and possible attempts to influence voters, including visible traces of a marker on the back of the ballot, and called on the CEC to eliminate these violations in the future.³⁵

Despite numerous public promises made by the election administration, these types of violations were again observed during the 2024 parliamentary elections. At all polling stations where voting was conducted using

²⁹ On determining the amount of remuneration for members and managers of precinct election commissions for the elections of October 26, 2024, Central Election Commission of Georgia, accessed on January 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3EPs2LH>

³⁰ Report on the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia”, Central Election Commission of Georgia, p. 7, accessed on January 30, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3XcJro0>

³¹ Ibid, p. 11

³² Use of Electronic Technologies in the Voting Process: Assessment of Electronic Machines Introduced in Georgia, ISFED, accessed on February 22, 2025 <https://bit.ly/43ztcoZ>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ The CEC issues a statement regarding the assessment of electronic voting machines by ISFED. Channel One, November 25, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3QBifvf>

³⁵ Evaluation of the 2022 by-elections of the Parliament of Georgia and the City Council of Batumi Municipality, ISFED, accessed on February 22, 2025 <https://bit.ly/43vQpZi>

electronic technologies, the right to secrecy of the vote, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was violated due to visible traces of the marker on the ballot.

One of the serious problems during the implementation and evaluation of electronic technologies was the lack of transparency. Political parties and monitoring organizations were not involved in the process of either the software provision or the audit. Moreover, ISFED requested the CEC to ensure the involvement of local and international accredited monitoring organizations in the audit process, including defining the audit's scope.³⁶ However, the CEC left this request unanswered.

According to the CEC, each verification machine was loaded with a single list of voters, after which the list of voters registered at the polling station was activated in the machines designated for that specific polling station.³⁷ Accordingly, the audit of the compliance of electronic devices used in the election process should have confirmed the following: that on election day, it was impossible to activate the same voter in the verification machines located in different polling stations; that the verification machine printed the voters list that was activated during the election process; that on election day voter verification machines did not allow verification of voters with the corresponding status (“transferred to a special list of another polling station” and “mobile box”). Verifying these issues within the audit of the election technologies became even more relevant due to the incidents recorded during the October 26 voting process.³⁸

Although the CEC conducted an audit of electronic technologies, as noted, this process was closed and did not provide answers to existing questions. On October 27, 2024, the CEC published the results of two phases of the compliance audit conducted by the American auditing company, Pro V&V. However, it is clear from the documents that the conclusions of the configuration audit and the source code review were issued before the election day and, therefore, could not answer the questions about the configurations and functionalities of the mentioned devices on the election day. The third phase of the audit, conducted after the parliamentary elections and published on November 7, could not answer the questions either.³⁹ ISFED believes that the non-transparent conduct of the audit of the process of introducing electronic devices significantly damaged the public’s trust in electronic technologies.

³⁶ Letter N24/1-217 of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, October 23, 2024, accessed on February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3D7R88b>

³⁷ CEC letter N01-01/1605 of September 28, 2024, accessed on February 22, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4395fEX>

³⁸ 1. In the 79th polling station of the 09 Nadzaladevi district of Tbilisi, a person was found to have a finger marked. Nevertheless, the flow regulator allowed the voter to go to the registrar, where the voter was successfully verified when an identity document was passed through the verification machine and a corresponding receipt was printed. This fact is confirmed by the explanatory note of the registrar commission member and a copy of the corresponding receipt; 2. In the 14th polling station of the 02 Vake district of Tbilisi, before the start of the voting process, ISFED observer asked a commission member to apply the ink to his arm in order to check the marking fluid. In the process of removing it, the mark moved to the index finger of his right hand. In order not to restrict his right to vote, the flow regulator commission member advised him to try to remove the mark with Coca-Cola. The observer managed to erase the marking traces quite easily using the mentioned method, at approximately 15:00, successfully passed the inking check in the N07 polling station of the same district and voted. The mentioned case is confirmed by the N1 act drawn up and signed by the chair and secretary of the PEC N14. 3. In the N2 polling station of the 06 Samgori district, a case was recorded when, during the verification procedure with the voter verification device of a voter who had been in emigration in the past (6 years) discovered, that an unidentified voter had already passed the verification instead of him. As a result, the voter was denied his right to vote.

³⁹ Pro V&V Reports Successful Completion of Parliamentary Election Observations with No Issues Detected, *Central Election Commission*, accessed on February 20, 2025 <https://bit.ly/4ldwg00>

4.3. Out-of-country voting

One of the pressing issues for the elections was ensuring the right to vote for Georgian citizens living abroad. In order to ensure out-of-country voting for Georgian citizens, Georgian legislation provides for the opening of polling stations in foreign countries by the CEC for no less than 50 and no more than 3,000 voters.⁴⁰

In line with the established practice over the years, the CEC established polling stations in Georgian diplomatic missions and/or consular representations. The same practice continued for the 2024 parliamentary elections. The CEC established 67 polling stations in 53 cities in 42 countries where Georgian diplomatic missions and consular representations were located - 17 more polling stations than the number of polling stations opened abroad for the 2020 parliamentary elections.⁴¹ The total number of voters registered at polling stations opened abroad for the 2024 parliamentary elections was 95,910.

It is noteworthy that before the CEC opened polling stations abroad, Georgian citizens filed numerous requests to open additional polling stations outside the country in cities where there are no diplomatic missions or consular representations but where many Georgian citizens live.⁴² The CEC chairperson responded on September 5, 2024, refusing to satisfy the request. In order to protect the rights of out-of-country voters, ISFED appealed the aforementioned response of the CEC chairperson to the Tbilisi City and Appeal Courts. However, none of the courts upheld the organization's demands.

On September 26, the CEC adopted a decree that established polling stations in other countries for the October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections.⁴³ No polling stations were established in the cities, as requested by the citizens and ISFED's appeals to the court. Accordingly, ISFED appealed the September 26 CEC decision⁴⁴ to the Tbilisi City Court on September 28.⁴⁵ By the decision of the Tbilisi City Court of September 30, 2024, the organization's claim was denied.⁴⁶ ISFED appealed the decision to the Court of Appeals. However, the Court decided not to uphold the appeal on October 4, 2024.

The decision taken by the CEC failed to sufficiently ensure the election participation of citizens living outside of Georgia and protect the principle of universal suffrage. Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CEC did not show due will and did not take all measures to open more polling stations abroad, including in cities where Georgia does not have diplomatic missions but many Georgian citizens live. Many voters could not exercise their right to vote on election day due to the arrangement of precincts violating the requirements of the election legislation, detailed information about which is provided in the Election Day chapter of the report.

⁴⁰ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 23, Polling Stations, part 7

⁴¹ Out-of-country Polling for the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, *Central Election Commission*, accessed on January 20, 2025 <https://bit.ly/4dTCGNq>

⁴² On September 3, 2024, Georgian citizens registered at consular offices and residing in the United States of America (Chicago), Italy (Ostuni), and Spain (Arnedo and Valencia) applied to the CEC Chairman with a request to establish polling stations abroad and requested the creation of polling stations in Chicago, Ostuni, Arnedo, and Valencia.

⁴³ Resolution of the Central Election Commission of Georgia of September 26, 2024 N191/2024 On Establishment of Polling Stations in Another State for the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, *Central Election Commission of Georgia*, accessed on January 20, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4eSGZcO>

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ ISFED's September 28, 2024 complaint accessed on January 20, 2025, <https://sachivrebiapi.cec.gov.ge/api/file/DownloadFile?id=35007fe7-c460-4bc0-80d7-9b5872b006a3>

⁴⁶ Tbilisi City Court decision of September 30, 2024 in case No. 3/7244-24, accessed on February 4, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3XcKHYg>

5. Election Registration of Political Parties and Gender Balance in Party Lists

5.1. Election registration of political parties

According to the Constitution of Georgia, for the parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024, unlike the previous parliamentary elections, parties needed to clear a 5% electoral threshold to obtain parliamentary mandates, and the establishment of electoral blocs was no longer allowed. In addition, under the amendments made to the electoral legislation, an electoral subject registered in the elections was prohibited from including members of other parties in the party list. Considering the above, parties wishing to unite forces had to make unconventional decisions. A significant part of political parties refused to register for the elections. Individual politicians left their own parties in order to be included in the list of other political union. Before the official registration of party lists, a number of politicians applied to the National Agency of Public Registry for this purpose. Among them, chairpersons of the Christian-Democratic Movement, Conservative Party of Georgia, People's Power, Republican Party of Georgia, Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens, Yes to Europe - Strategy Aghmashenebeli, Elene Khoshtaria – Droa, Ana Dolidze - For the People and Girchi - More Freedom parties formally left the positions of leaders and members of political parties.

For election registration purposes, the Election Code of Georgia divides political parties into two groups, considering their status and the results obtained in previous elections. According to the law, a political party with a member elected to the Parliament of Georgia on its ticket at the time of the election was entitled to apply to the CEC and register no later than the 57th day before the election day, after the parliamentary elections were called. If the party did not meet this condition, it had to apply to the election administration from January 1 to July 15 of the election year. In addition, it was obliged to submit to the CEC a list of at least 25,000 voters supporting the party's participation in the parliamentary elections within 60 days of receiving the sample list of party supporters but no later than August 1.⁴⁷ Unlike non-parliamentary parties, under election legislation, the registration of political parties with representatives in the 10th convocation of the Parliament of Georgia continued until August 30.

At the session held on August 16, the CEC determined the serial numbers of electoral subjects for the October 26 parliamentary elections. The CEC assigned serial numbers to the 30 electoral subjects registered at that time both by drawing lots and based on applications submitted by the relevant authorized parties within the deadlines established by the legislation.⁴⁸

A total of 40 political unions applied to the CEC to participate in the October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections. However, only 18 of them ultimately participated in the elections. Of the 22 political parties that withdrew from the parliamentary elections, two political unions had their registration procedures terminated based on the decision of the National Agency of Public Registry, CEC refused to register 11 political parties, and nine had their

⁴⁷ Organic Law of Georgia Election Code of Georgia, Article 113. Party registration/deregistration

⁴⁸ According to the Election Code of Georgia, political parties that received budgetary funding as a result of the previous parliamentary elections had the right to apply to the CEC no later than July 17 and to retain the number assigned during the previous parliamentary elections or corresponding to the funding sequence. Similarly, electoral subjects that received at least 0.75 percent of the votes in the last general proportional elections had the opportunity to request to participate in the elections with the ordinal number used during the last general elections, if this number had not already been assigned to a (better) party receiving budgetary funding. In the case when the ordinal number was assigned to an electoral bloc in the last general elections, the right to use this number was granted to the party named first in the list of members of the said bloc.

previously completed electoral registration canceled.⁴⁹ The reasons for refusing registration in the elections were the failure to submit an extract from the public registry and/or the expiration of the term of office of the chairperson,⁵⁰ as well as the failure to submit to the CEC the list of supporters required by law (European Socialists, People's Party, National Democratic Party, Union of Georgian Traditionalists) or the failure to correct a flaw identified on the list of supporters (United Communist Party of Georgia, Victory – for United Georgia, Homeland, Language, Faith, Whites, Generations for Georgia).

The CEC Chairperson annulled the registration of the following political unions based on their own request: Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens, Ana Dolidze - For the People and Green Party of Georgia, while the election registration was terminated for the following political parties due to failure to submit a party list or failure to register the submitted party list: Third Way, For Justice, Alliance of Democrats, European Georgia - Movement for Freedom, Yes to Europe - Strategy Aghmashenebeli and Social Democratic Party of Georgia.

5.2. Representation of women in the lists of electoral subjects

The May 15, 2024, legislative amendments abolished the mandatory gender quota and the financial incentive established to protect gender equality. Subsequently, the representation of women in the registered party lists significantly decreased. In addition, in some cases, a large share of women included in the lists were represented in non-winning positions. It is noteworthy that despite the abolition of mandatory gender quotas, some opposition unions ensured the minimum 25% representation of women in the full list.

Among the 18 registered party lists, electoral lists of only two political parties (Development Party of Georgia and Change Georgia) had a majority of female candidates, while the share of women in the lists of three parties (European Democrats, Gakharia for Georgia, Georgia) was between 40 and 50%. Notably, in the case of the European Democrats, all but one of the female candidates were outside the top ten.

The share of women in the registered party lists of five electoral subjects ranged from 25 to 40 percent (Coalition for Change - Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa; Strong Georgia-Lelo, for the People, for Freedom!; We; Labor Party of Georgia and Free Georgia). However, no female candidate was represented in the top ten of the electoral list of the Labor Party of Georgia, while the majority of the last 20 on the same list were women.

The proportion of women on the electoral lists of three political unions (Leftist Alliance, Unity-National Movement, and Georgian Unity) ranged from 20 to 25 percent.

The parties with the lowest share of women in the registered party lists were Tribuna (15%), the Georgian Dream (16%), Our United Georgia (16.1%), Girchi (19.4%) and the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (19.5%). It is noteworthy that among them, the ruling Georgian Dream party did not have any women on the list from numbers 21 to 53. The party placed the highest number of women - five- between 130th and 139th places.

⁴⁹ The Public Registry canceled the registration of the Conservative Movement/Alt Info party, and the authority of the leader of the Georgian Idea party was terminated.

⁵⁰ Tavisupleba – Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Way, Development Party of Georgia

Table 1. Number of female candidates on registered party lists in the 2024 parliamentary elections, by order

Source: Central Election Commission of Georgia, October, 2024

Electoral subject	Number of candidates	Including women		# of women in each 10th																
		#	share	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91-100	101-110	111-120	121-130	131-140	141-150	151-160	161-170
European Democrats	32	15	46.9%	1	8	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Georgian Dream	169	27	16.0%	2	3	0	0	0	3	2	1	1	2	2	1	5	2	2	0	1
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	77	15	19.5%	1	0	2	3	1	3	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Girchi	36	7	19.4%	2	0	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gakharia for Georgia	115	52	45.2%	2	4	3	5	4	5	5	6	6	5	5	2	-	-	-	-	-
Leftist Alliance	34	7	20.6%	2	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unity- National Movement	98	23	23.5%	3	3	1	0	3	1	2	5	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Change Georgia	82	42	51.2%	5	5	6	7	6	5	3	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coalition for change – Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa	85	23	27.1%	2	6	0	4	2	2	1	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Strong Georgia – Lelo, For People, For Freedom!	104	31	29.8%	4	5	2	5	2	5	4	0	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Georgia	49	22	44.9%	4	3	6	5	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Our United Georgia	31	5	16.1%	1	0	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Georgian Unity	44	9	20.5%	1	2	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tribuna	60	9	15.0%	3	0	0	4	2	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
We	50	15	30.0%	2	3	2	0	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Labor Party of Georgia	70	20	28.6%	0	1	3	1	3	5	7	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Free Georgia	30	10	33.3%	3	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Georgian Unity and Development Party	31	16	51.6%	4	5	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

6. Pre-election Campaign

The official campaign for the 2024 parliamentary elections began on August 27, but the events that preceded it had a significant impact on the pre-election environment and led to strong political polarization. Although the official campaign commenced 60 days before election day, political parties began opening regional offices earlier, in June, and pre-election activities gained speed in July. Political parties campaigned across the country, including holding face-to-face meetings with voters.

The pre-election period was characterized by a set of trends and violations that posed irreversible threats to the development of healthy and competitive electoral processes and called into question the legitimacy of the elections.

The main challenges were intimidation, pressure, and control of voters' will, which limited their free participation in the elections. During the pre-election period, numerous stories confirmed the existence and use of a scheme to mobilize votes through illegal means. In addition to the scheme, there were numerous reports and facts about the seizure of voters' identity cards. The failure of the relevant investigative agencies to respond to such cases once again demonstrated the politicization of state bodies in favor of the ruling party.

Facts of physical violence, disruption of the election campaign, threats and/or intimidation, breaking into a party office, and detention of persons affiliated with political parties affected the free conduct of the campaign by representatives of electoral subjects.⁵¹

During the pre-election campaign, the line between the ruling party and the state was completely erased due to the Georgian Dream's use of all types of administrative resources. These included large-scale social projects and state initiatives for electoral purposes, active involvement of employees of budgetary organizations in the campaign activities of the ruling party, politicization of the education system, and subordination of public institutions to the ruling party's interests.

During the election campaign, the ruling party's anti-Western, including Eurosceptic messages and an unprecedented discrediting campaign against civil society, created risks of inciting violence. The ruling party's campaign materials used images of representatives of non-governmental organizations in an offensive and derogatory context.

6.1. Control of the will of the voters

One of the biggest problems of the 2024 parliamentary elections was the control of the will of the voters, which began long before the elections and continued inclusive of election day. The unprecedented scale of voter intimidation and control undermined the main principle of democratic elections - the free expression of the will of the voters. Consequently, it raised questions about the legitimacy of the election results.

To control the will of Georgian voters, the Georgian Dream used a scheme developed over many years and adjusted for each election, which involved illegally obtaining and processing personal data about citizens from various state agencies, using this information to intimidate and pressure citizens, and thus forcibly obtain votes. Such a scheme was confirmed in 2022 when a former senior official of the State Security Service handed over documentation confirming the scheme to ISFED and Transparency International Georgia. Based on the analysis of

⁵¹ During the pre-election campaign, 10 cases of verbal abuse, 4 cases of physical violence, 5 cases of office attacks/attempted attacks, 2 cases of problems related to office rent, 3 cases of detention of persons affiliated with parties, and 3 cases of problems related to campaign materials, stands, and billboards were identified.

the documents, a large-scale scheme of mobilizing votes in favor of the ruling party through illegal means was identified, which most likely confirms the use of state institutions, including law enforcement agencies, for election/party purposes. These agencies allegedly collected personal data about employees of budgetary organizations and other citizens, most likely with the aim of putting pressure on them in the future. In addition, in exchange for support in elections, citizens were provided with pre-requested assistance and other types of benefits through various state agencies.⁵²

During the pre-election period, numerous stories confirmed the existence and use of a scheme to mobilize voters, including the material obtained by the online media outlet *Batumelebi*.⁵³ In addition, multiple reports and facts about the confiscation of voters' ID cards were published, including those spread in the media.⁵⁴ For example, ISFED revealed two facts in Zugdidi when an employee of the Department of Special Assignments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was ordered by his superior to bring the ID cards of family members; otherwise, he was threatened with dismissal. Also, a case was revealed when a law enforcement agency representative offered 1,000 GEL to an opposition-minded family in exchange for handing over the ID cards.⁵⁵ There have also been cases of threats to withdraw social assistance and dismiss persons from their jobs.⁵⁶ According to ISFED, along with the production of so-called "voter dossiers," employees of budgetary organizations and some private institutions were instructed by their heads to compile lists of alleged ruling party supporters and submit them to the leadership.⁵⁷

6.2. Alleged vote buying

According to the Criminal Code of Georgia, vote buying is considered to be the offer, promise, transfer, or provision of money, securities (including financial instruments), other property, property rights, services, or any other advantage, directly or indirectly, for electoral purposes, or the receipt of such with prior knowledge, and/or the conclusion of a fictitious, hypocritical or other transaction with the aim of evading the restrictions established by law. Given that bribery is a criminal offense committed not only by the person buying the vote but also by the person being bribed, citizens often do not disclose and/or confirm the facts of vote buying.⁵⁸ Accordingly, it was impossible to determine the exact number of vote-buying cases and have a complete picture.

During the pre-election period, ISFED identified 16 cases of alleged vote buying, two related to opposition parties and 14 to the ruling party. The organization identified cases of representatives of the ruling party hosting the voters, distributing food vouchers, product and fuel coupons, and representatives of the opposition party providing free medical services and distributing free medicines during the pre-election period.

⁵² State resources at the service of the ruling party: Proven methods of vote buying and illegal mobilization of voters in Georgia, ISFED, accessed on January 29, 2025 <https://bit.ly/42cvuYG>

⁵³ Secretly obtained files from the "Dream" office, *Batumelebi*, October 15, 2024 <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/548144/>

⁵⁴ Who and why is taking away voters' ID cards", *Netgazeti*, October 19, 2024, <https://netgazeti.ge/life/747280/>

⁵⁵ Pre-election Environmental Assessment for Georgia's 2024 Parliamentary Elections, page 7, accessed on January 6, 2025, <https://bit.ly/42cvfx4>

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Identified – Tbilisi, Bolnisi, Lagodekhi, Chockatauri, Gurjaani, Kareli, Sagarejo, Kvareli, Telavi and Dedoplistskaro. ISFED's Statement Regarding Instances of Voter Pressure, ISFED, accessed on January 16, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Eb76Pd>

⁵⁸ According to Part 3 of Article 164 Prima of the Criminal Code of Georgia, a person who voluntarily reports a crime under this article to the body conducting the criminal proceedings shall be exempted from criminal liability. The body conducting the criminal proceedings shall make a decision on exemption from liability.

6.3. Interference in the election campaign and violence against members of political parties

During the pre-election campaign, a number of different incidents and/or violations were identified, as well as facts that affected the free conduct of the campaign by representatives of electoral subjects. The increase in political polarization was primarily due to cases of verbal abuse and physical violence against members of political unions, which were reported both during the official and unofficial pre-election period. Public statements made by the leaders of the ruling party - which encouraged violent actions - allegedly exacerbated the confrontation.⁵⁹ Relevant state institutions, including law enforcement agencies, did not respond effectively to the violations. Along with the facts of verbal and physical confrontation, there were cases of alleged intimidation of individuals on political grounds and detention of individuals affiliated with political parties.

During the pre-election campaign, attempts to disrupt the activities of political parties also posed a problem, mainly as attacks/attempted attacks on political party offices, damage of campaign materials, and difficulties related to renting an office.

6.4. Use of administrative resources for electoral purposes

During the 2024 parliamentary elections, like the previous elections, the Georgian Dream used administrative resources on a large scale. The line between the state and the ruling party was erased. The Georgian Dream mobilized all available resources, including state resources, and began its election campaign much before the commencement of the official pre-election period. In this regard, electorally-motivated state programs/initiatives that became active from the beginning of 2024 are particularly noteworthy. Namely: increasing pensions for former law enforcement officers, practice of writing off fines incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of writing off tax arrears, reducing loan interest for pensioners, paid internship programs for students, increasing teacher salaries, etc.⁶⁰

With the approach of the pre-election period, the initiation of large-scale state projects by the ruling party became more frequent. By the decree of the Government of Georgia of July 23, 2024, to promote citizen engagement in the implementation of local self-government, an additional 20,000,000 GEL was allocated from the Fund for Regional Projects, and each municipality⁶¹ received 100,000 GEL.⁶² The remaining amount was distributed to each municipality based on data from the 2014 General Census.

Along with budget programs, several state initiatives launched and implemented before the elections provided various types of material or non-material benefits for voters. Among them noteworthy is the adoption of the Law of Georgia on Amnesty, based on which persons accused and convicted of certain crimes under the Criminal Code of Georgia were released from criminal liability and punishment, and the sentences of certain convicts were reduced.⁶³

⁵⁹ Beating Berdzenishvili is Papuashvili's personal responsibility – Droa/Girchi-more Freedom, *Publika*, June 11, 2024 <https://bit.ly/4ia6dES>

⁶⁰ 2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of Pre-election Environment, ISFED, pp 39-43, accessed on December 25, 2024 <https://bit.ly/43yToAf>

⁶¹ Except Tbilisi city, Akhalkalaki, Erevis, Kurti, Tighva, Azhara municipalities and municipalities of Autonomous Republic of Adjara

⁶² Government of Georgia Decree N1025 on Measures to be Taken for the Implementation of the Initiative "Promoting Citizen Engagement", Government of Georgia, accessed December 25, 2024 https://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=-&sec_id=602&info_id=89113

⁶³ Law of Georgia "On Amnesty", Parliament of Georgia, 4435-XVIMS-XMP, accessed December 25, 2024, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6267987?publication=0>

During the pre-election period, candidates nominated by the ruling party often participated in events financed/organized with budget funds. The candidates not only attended the events but also made speeches and sometimes participated in award ceremonies. Such cases put the candidates mentioned in an advantageous position compared to those from opposition political parties.⁶⁴

During the pre-election period, the mobilization of citizens and the use of administrative resources at events organized by the ruling party were particularly noticeable.⁶⁵ The gathering of people employed at budgetary organizations for election events organized by the ruling party was particularly large-scale, including during working hours. Party events were attended by employees of legal entities of public law and state-owned non-entrepreneurial, non-commercial legal entities, teachers of public schools and kindergartens, and employees of city halls and city councils, including often from neighboring municipalities. In addition to the mobilization of people working in budgetary institutions, the use of other types of state or local resources for party purposes was recorded during the organization of these events.⁶⁶

During the pre-election campaign period, there was a tendency for public servants to campaign on social media during working hours. There were also cases of information/posts containing the campaign content of the ruling party being disseminated on social media pages operated on behalf of administrative units. Despite numerous attempts by ISFED, the response of the election administration to such election violations was unfounded, and no comprehensive investigation of the cases was carried out.

6.5. Election campaign on social media

Various social media platforms were actively used to conduct political campaigns for the 2024 parliamentary elections. In this regard, Facebook was the leading social network, and together with another platform owned by the Meta company, Instagram, hosted most political advertisements. In addition, unlike previous elections, a large-scale election campaign was conducted on TikTok, expressed through active campaigning, both officially and anonymously. Along with the opportunity to easily and inexpensively reach a broad group of voters, social media also created a significant challenge in terms of spreading disinformation and propaganda during the pre-election period.

Increased polarized rhetoric was observed on the pages, accounts, and channels of political parties and their representatives. In this regard, video ads distributed by the ruling party with an audience of millions of viewers stood out, in which voting for the party was presented as a vote for peace in contrast to war. Footage of infrastructure destroyed as a result of the war waged by Russia in Ukraine was used. In the case of messages distributed by opposition political unions, voting for the Georgian Dream was described as the country's isolation from the Western space and its subordination to Russia.

Along with official pages, unofficial campaign pages and accounts operating on Facebook and TikTok also engaged in the campaign in support of or against electoral subjects - mostly spreading pro-government and anti-opposition

⁶⁴ 2020 Parliamentary Elections: Pre-election period – Interim monitoring report, ISFED, pp 21-22 accessed on December 25, 2024 2024 <https://bit.ly/4hU2F9e>

⁶⁵ 2020 Parliamentary Elections: Pre-election period – Interim monitoring report, ISFED, pp 22-25 accessed on December 25, 2024 2024 <https://bit.ly/4hU2F9e>

⁶⁶ On September 14, the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia held a meeting with voters in Gori. Administrative resources were used to organize the party event: the landscaping and cleaning services spent three days cleaning up and preparing the stage for the event. In particular, branches of trees that prevented the placement of the stage were uprooted, lighting poles were cut down, and residents' cars that were out of order were towed away at municipal expense and by tow truck. Also, a suspected case of using a company car for personal/political purposes was identified in Adigeni and Akhaltsikhe.

messages. Unlike previous elections, a significant novelty was the polarizing values of actors involved in the unofficial campaign. In this regard, it is especially noteworthy to mention the engagement of pages and accounts supporting the ruling party in the anti-Western, Eurosceptic, anti-liberal, conspiracy theory-spreading campaigns. Some of such pages and accounts were associated with the pro-government and anti-Western public movements founded by Vato Shakarishvili - Georgia First and United Neutral Georgia, while some operated anonymously. Active advertising campaigns took place on Facebook and Instagram – mostly without complying with Meta's mandatory transparency requirements.

In the final stage of the pre-election campaign, messages containing threats and intimidation addressed to voters of opposition parties intensified on social networks. Among them was a demand to record supporters of opposition parties and subsequently prosecute them. Similar messages on Facebook and/or TikTok were mainly spread by the pro-government movement United Neutral Georgia or anonymously. These ads were also sponsored to increase the audience. Another message spread on social media aimed at intimidating voters was that it would be possible to identify voters through electronic technologies, which, according to the widespread narrative, would become a prerequisite for prosecuting supporters of the “radical opposition”.

During the official pre-election period, instances of Russian interference in the Georgian parliamentary elections were revealed through a campaign of advertising on social media. The advertising was carried out through Facebook pages managed from outside Georgia's borders and was directed against opposition parties and in support of the ruling party. At the same time, pages belonging to the Russian network were conducting an active propaganda campaign against the West and the European Union, aiming to undermine support for European integration among Georgian citizens.

7. Campaign Finance and the Work of the Anti-corruption Bureau

With regard to campaign finance, the main issues are financial equality among political parties, transparency of finances, and the existence of an effective state oversight system.

According to financial declarations submitted by 18 political parties participating in the elections, the ruling party - Georgian Dream - spent more money on its election campaign than all other political parties combined, indicating a large financial disparity.

With regard to the transparency of campaign finances and effective supervision, the Anti-Corruption Bureau has published the financial declarations submitted by electoral subjects on its website in a timely manner, although only in the form of scanned documents. In addition, the Bureau published an interim report on its activities only on the eve of election day and did not publish the final report at all.⁶⁷ During the pre-election period, particularly problematic was the decision of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, by which it illegally and unjustifiably broadly interpreted the standard established by the legislation and recognized two non-governmental organizations, their employees and founders, as persons with a declared electoral goal. Later, upon the call of the Prime Minister of Georgia, the Bureau revoked its decision. This process once again confirmed the existing questions regarding the institutional independence and impartiality of the agency.

⁶⁷ 2024 Annual report of Political Finance Monitoring, Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Qqvq2d>

7.1. Income and expenditure of political parties

Political parties in Georgia are funded from two main sources: the state budget and private donations.⁶⁸ Budgetary funding is provided to parties that receive at least 1% of the valid votes in parliamentary elections. By 2024, 12 political parties were receiving state funding. As for donations, legislative amendments adopted in 2023 prohibited receiving donations from legal entities. Therefore, political parties can only accept donations from Georgian citizens – up to 60,000 GEL per citizen per year.⁶⁹

From September 2023, the mandate to supervise political finance has been transferred from the State Audit Office to the newly established Anti-Corruption Bureau. Therefore, political parties are obliged to submit financial declarations to this agency periodically. According to the Election Code, an electoral subject candidate/electoral subject shall submit relevant interim financial reports to the Anti-Corruption Bureau in the form established by the Anti-Corruption Bureau every three weeks from the date elections are called. In addition, no later than one month after the publication of the election results, electoral subjects are obliged to submit a final declaration, together with an audit report, which includes information on the funds used from the date of the election announcement to the date of the publication of the final election results.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau is obliged to provide information related to the financial reports of the election campaign fund to all interested parties and ensure their publication on the relevant website within five working days of receipt.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau published the financial declarations submitted by electoral subjects on its website.⁷⁰ However, all declarations were uploaded as scanned documents in a non-machine-readable format, which was a deterioration of the standard existing in previous elections.⁷¹

All 18 political parties participating in the elections submitted final financial reports to the Anti-Corruption Bureau.⁷² According to the financial declarations, from the beginning of the official pre-election period until the results were summarized, only 13 electoral subjects from 18 participating parties had a financial turnover.⁷³ They received a total of 31,321,189 GEL in income, which was mainly distributed among four political parties. Political Union Coalition for Change Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa received 32% of the total income, the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia - 28%, Union Strong Georgia - Lelo, for the People, for Freedom! - 27%, UNM - 10%, while the total income received by other political parties during the election period amounted to only 3%. In addition, it is worth noting that the Georgian Dream, unlike other electoral subjects, raised a significant portion of the finances for the election campaign fund before the official start of the pre-election campaign. In particular, the ruling party received GEL 7,970,206 in donations from January 1 to August 27, 2024, while all other parties participating in the elections received a total of only GEL 2,819,242 in donations during the same period. Given the above circumstances, expenditure data provides a more accurate picture of campaign finance.

⁶⁸ Challenges for Election Campaign Finance in Georgia, Shora Narsia and Mariam Chubabria, accessed on August 20, <https://bit.ly/3RvQ6pW>

⁶⁹ Organic Law of Georgia on Citizens Political Unions, Article 26

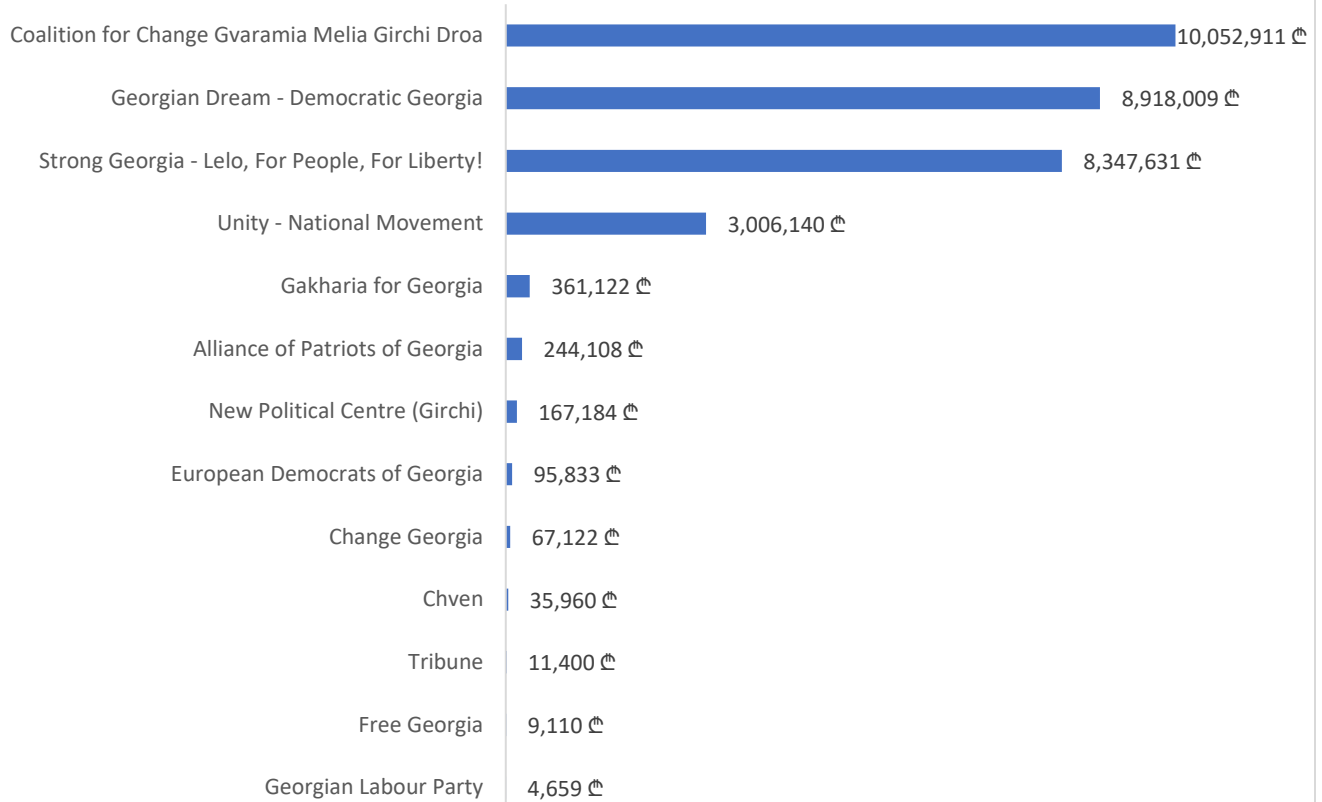
⁷⁰ Political Finance Monitoring, Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia, accessed on January 23, <https://bit.ly/4ka2JV4>

⁷¹ The State Audit Office uploaded the declarations submitted by the parties both in scanned copies and in Excel format, which significantly facilitated the processing and verification of data.

⁷² Information from August 27, 2024 as of the Date of Publishing Final Results, Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia, accessed on January 23, 2025 <https://bit.ly/41kOwx0>

⁷³ Not all parties filled in the forms in the same way – in some cases they provided full information, in some cases – the information was not comprehensive or there were mistakes. As such, all data may not fully reflect reality.

Actual Incomes of Political Parties in the 2024 Election Period



Note: Reporting periods: Free Georgia- 26.08.2024-27.10.2024; Tribune - 27.08.2024-27.10.2024; Chven - 26.08.2024-25.11.2024; all other parties - 27.08.2024-16.11.2024.

Source: Anti-Corruption Bureau 2024

According to the financial declarations submitted by the parties, from the beginning of the official pre-election period, until the election results were summarized, they spent a total of 49,039,263 GEL in actual expenses. In addition, the Georgian Dream spent more money on the election campaign than all the political parties participating in the combined elections, indicating a sizeable financial disparity and a less competitive electoral environment. According to the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, equality of opportunity should be ensured between parties and candidates, which also applies to the election campaign expenses of political parties (especially advertising expenses).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, Guidelines and Explanatory Note, Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 52nd Session (Venice, 18-19 October, 2002), accessed on January 20, 2025 [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2002\)023rev2-cor-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2002)023rev2-cor-e)

Actual Spending by Political Parties in the 2024 Election Period



Note: *Reporting periods: Free Georgia- 26.08.2024-27.10.2024; Tribune - 27.08.2024-27.10.2024; Chven - 26.08.2024-25.11.2024; all other parties - 27.08.2024-16.11.2024.*

Source: Anti-Corruption Bureau 2024

7.2. Oversight activity of the Anti-Corruption Bureau

In addition to publishing financial declarations submitted by parties, the Georgian legislation requires the Anti-Corruption Bureau to study these declarations and respond to any shortcomings and violations identified while monitoring political finances. The Anti-Corruption Bureau is not mandated to conduct criminal investigations, which makes it ineffective in investigating facts containing signs of political corruption. However, the Bureau's powers include identifying and responding to relevant administrative violations.

The Bureau published a report on its activities in terms of monitoring political finance only on the eve of the elections, which stated that 35 administrative proceedings were ongoing in the Anti-Corruption Bureau regarding alleged violations of the rules on legality and transparency of the financial activities of political parties, and that information about the results of the ongoing proceedings would be made publically available upon completion of the relevant procedures.⁷⁵ However, after election day, the Anti-Corruption Bureau did not publish a report on this issue, which poses a problem in terms of informing the public.

The September 24 decision of the Anti-Corruption Bureau was particularly problematic during the pre-election period. By the decision, the Bureau recognized the non-governmental organization Transparency International Georgia and its Executive Director Eka Gigauri, as well as the organization Choose Europe, its Director Khatuna

⁷⁵ 2024 Annual report of Political Finance Monitoring, Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Qqvq2d>

Lagazidze, and the co-founders of the same organization as persons with a declared electoral goal.⁷⁶ With this decision, the Anti-Corruption Bureau illegally and unjustifiably broadly interpreted the standard established by the legislation and relied on the unsubstantiated decision of the Tbilisi Court of Appeal adopted several days earlier, which determined that the activities of Choose Europe fell within the definition of a declared electoral goal. Later, upon the appeal of the Prime Minister of Georgia, the Bureau revoked its own decision.⁷⁷ This process has once again confirmed the questions regarding the institutional independence of the agency, which arose immediately after the bureau was established. The procedure for appointing the head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, according to which the head of the agency is appointed by the Prime Minister, fundamentally weakens the degree of independence of this institution from the political authorities.

8. Media Environment

The media environment for the 2024 parliamentary elections was sharply polarized due to the ruling party's position not to participate in the news programs of media outlets critical of the government, while pro-government media did not invite representatives of the main opposition parties to television programs. Of particular note are the trends in the coverage of the elections by the Georgian Public Broadcaster. OSCE/ODIHR also discussed these trends in its election report. In particular, the Public Broadcaster's coverage of all candidates was mostly positive or neutral in tone (89%), although the majority of the coverage of the election campaign was devoted to the Georgian Dream (61%).⁷⁸ Given the current situation, the media failed to ensure inclusive and balanced coverage of political and electoral processes. In the run-up to the 2024 parliamentary elections, the adoption of the Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence had a particularly negative impact on the media environment. Cases of threats, physical attacks, and pressure on journalists became more frequent.⁷⁹ According to the Press Freedom Index published this year by an international organization defending press freedom - Reporters Without Borders, Georgia had a serious setback in the ranking compared to the previous year - in particular, it moved from 77th to 103rd place in the list of 180 countries.⁸⁰

During the pre-election period, cases of suspension of accreditation of journalists from media outlets critical of the government were revealed in the Georgian Parliament, which can clearly be assessed as a barrier to and an obstruction of journalistic activity. The order of the chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia,⁸¹ stating that in case of refusal to record an interview, an accredited journalist should terminate the interview, was unambiguously used as a punitive mechanism against journalists from critical media outlets in 2024.⁸² As another manifestation

⁷⁶ Anti-Corruption Bureau Decision No. 03/029-24 of September 24, 2024 on the Extension of Restrictions Established by Chapter III of the Organic Law of Georgia On Citizens' Political Unions of Citizens to non-commercial entity Choose Europe, Khatuna Lagazidze, Lela Jejelava, Giorgi Papelishvili, Nikoloz Shurghaia, Shalva Dzebisashvili, Giorgi Taktakishvili, Sopiko Chkonia, Ivane Chkonia and Giorgi Rukhadze. Anti-Corruption Bureau, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://acb.gov.ge/ka/news/antikoruftsiuli-biuos-ufrosis-2024-tslis-24-sektembris-gadatsqvetileba-029>

⁷⁷ Kobakhidze considers it appropriate to remove the status granted to TI by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Radio Liberty, October 1, 2024 <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33142075.html>

⁷⁸ Georgia - Parliamentary Elections 26 October 2024: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, p. 24, Accessed February 20, 2025, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/6/584029_0.pdf

⁷⁹ 2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of Pre-election Environment, ISFED, p.26, accessed on January 7, 2025 <https://bit.ly/4jaxTdp>

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Subparagraph C of Article 15, Paragraph 2, of the Rules for Accreditation of Mass Media Representatives in the Parliament of Georgia approved by the Order of the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia No. 1/31/23 of February 6, 2023, accessed on February 10, 2025 <https://web-api.parliament.ge/storage/files/11/akreditacia-2023.pdf>

⁸² Unofficial Pre-election Campaign Monitoring Report for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections (June 1 – August 26), ISFED, p.28, accessed on January 5, 2025 <https://bit.ly/4jb2wPT>

of obstruction of journalistic activity, on June 28 - the closing day of the fourth spring session of the 10th convocation Parliament - journalists from online media, radio, and press were not allowed to enter and work in the parliament due to the yellow level of security.⁸³

The biased and unequal approach of the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) in the process of monitoring media outlets and reviewing submitted complaints posed a significant problem during the pre-election period. GNCC monitored up to 55 media organizations⁸⁴ during the pre-election period, drawing up 40 violation protocols⁸⁵ against 13 media organizations.⁸⁶ Per ISFED's assessment, the activities of GNCC were not independent - in accordance with reasonable expectations - and there were also signs of political interests being pursued and the Commission being instrumentalized for this purpose.

For example, it was noteworthy that GNCC considered political advertising a component of a news program when the TV Channel Matavari aired videos in which members of parliament who supported the Law On Transparency of Foreign Influence were named and shown in a negative context. The Commission considered that the videos served to hinder the election of political unions and their representatives potentially participating in the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 26, 2024, and accordingly classified the videos as political advertising.⁸⁷ According to ISFED's assessment, "the Communications Commission failed to present a solid argument as to why the video clip covering the so-called "Russian law" was a political advertisement, thus creating a dangerous precedent and the potential to restrict the freedom of expression of critical media organizations."⁸⁸

The GNCC's decision, when during the pre-election period, media organizations refused to air political advertisements depicting the tragedy of the Ukrainian people at war for election purposes on the grounds of violation of media ethics standards, also posed risks of instrumentalization. The Commission considered these cases to be violations of the legislation and imposed fines on the media organizations.⁸⁹ Also problematic was GNCC's decision - allegedly made on political grounds - when the Commission satisfied the complaint of the political union Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia against Mtavari Channel and drew up a protocol of violation of the law against the TV company for refusing to air the political advertisement of the Georgian Dream. This decision was problematic in light of the fact that the video clip incited hatred and violence against representatives of non-governmental organizations and civil activists.⁹⁰

Also noteworthy, problematic, and risky was the reasoning developed by the courts and the GNCC regarding the fact that a public statement by a person about merging with another political party, in circumstances where there was no reorganization and/or merger within the party, could be considered sufficient for the activity of an electoral subject to be considered in favor of another electoral subject. Such an approach violates the principle of legal certainty. It creates the threat of arbitrary decision-making and manipulation in circumstances where

⁸³ Ibid, p. 29

⁸⁴ ComCom Starts Media Monitoring of the Parliamentary Election Period, Georgian National Communications Commission, accessed on January 16, 2025 <https://bit.ly/42b1r3D>

⁸⁵ Administrative Offense Protocols, Georgian National Communications Commission, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://bit.ly/41qsf0F>

⁸⁶ Mtavari Channel: four times, TV Company Pirveli: five times, Formula: six times, Media Holding: four times, TV Imedi: five times, Pos TV: twice, Studio Maestro: twice, Palitraneews: twice, Silk Media: twice, Public Broadcaster: twice, Public Broadcaster Adjara Television and Radio: once, BMG: twice, Non-Profit Media Union Obiektivi: once, TV Company Kavkasia: once, Media Holding Georgian Times: once.

⁸⁷ Unofficial Pre-election Campaign Monitoring Report for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections (June 1 – August 26), ISFED, p. 28, accessed on January 5, 2025 <https://bit.ly/4jb2wPT>

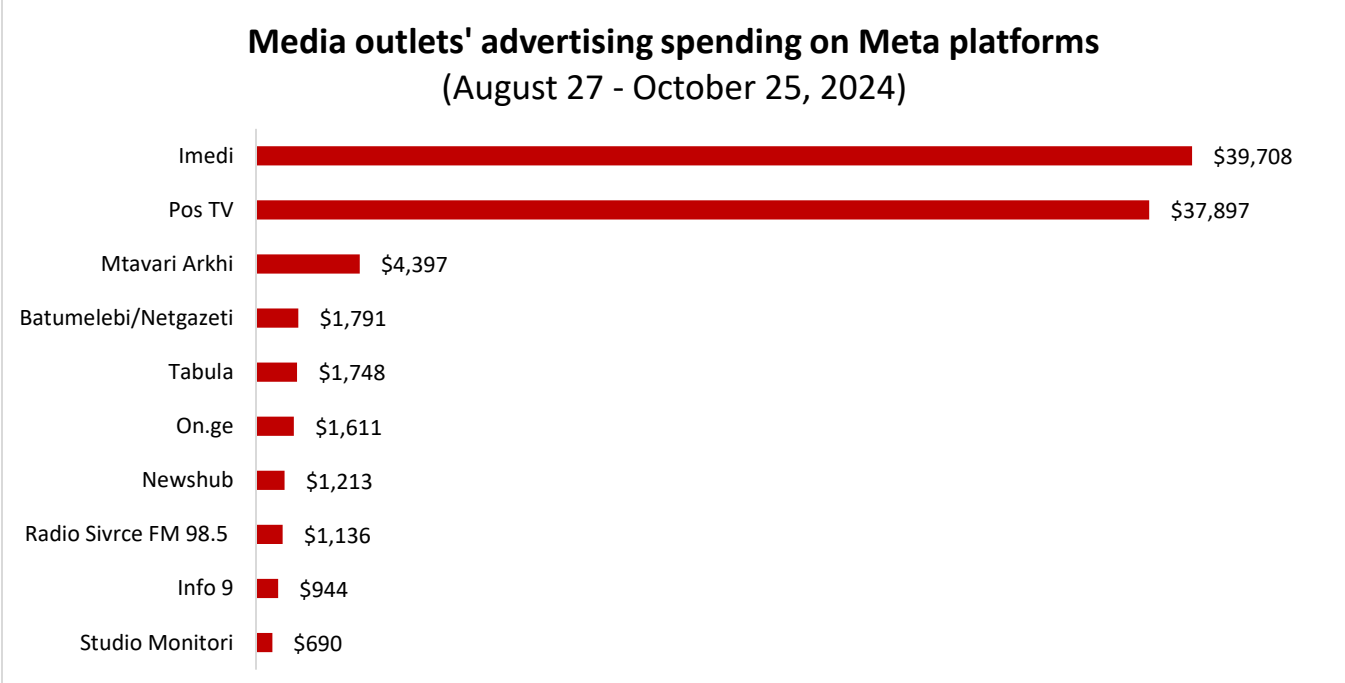
⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 26

⁸⁹ 2024 Parliamentary Elections: Assessment of Pre-election Environment, ISFED, p 17, accessed on January 5, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jaxTdp>

⁹⁰ 2024 Parliamentary Elections: Pre-election Period – Interim Monitoring Report (August 27 – September 30), ISFED, accessed on January 5, 2025 <https://bit.ly/3XErepy>

political statements may be intentionally misinterpreted or used against specific political subjects, which, in aggregate, may be detrimental to democratic processes.

Using media outlets for advertising campaigns on social media was a significant challenge for the 2024 parliamentary. During the pre-election period, a large-scale advertising campaign was recorded on the Facebook page(s) of some media outlets, openly supporting or discrediting the ruling party. Namely, the pages of the TV companies Imedi and Pos TV placed political advertisements worth more than 77 thousand US dollars on Facebook and/or Instagram, mainly campaigning in favor of the Georgian Dream and against opposition political unions. This advertising campaign effectively erased the line between the electoral subject and the given media outlets. In addition, some of the advertisements, especially on the pages of Pos TV, openly used offensive language, spreading homophobic and anti-Western, including anti-EU, campaigns. Considering that the money spent on these advertisements has not been declared to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, it can be regarded as an illegal donation made in favor of the Georgian Dream.



Note: The top ten media outlets that spent the most money on Facebook and Instagram ads during the reporting period are listed in the table; due to limitations in Meta's ad library data, the reported spending may differ slightly from the amount of money actually spent by media outlets on ads during the corresponding period.

9. Election Day

On October 26, 2024 - election day - ISFED observers monitored 1,057 polling stations, the surroundings of 231 polling stations, 45 overseas polling stations, and 73 DECs. The monitoring mission also included 85 mobile teams throughout Georgia (excluding territories occupied by Russia). On election day, ISFED's central office operated data collection and incident centers staffed by 32 operators and 23 lawyers. The organization used Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology to quantitatively and qualitatively process and analyze election day data and findings.

The election day of October 26 was marked by numerous fundamental, systemic, and organized violations, which, taking into account the substantial violations recorded in the pre-election period, had a significant impact on the free expression of the will of the voters and, therefore, the results of the elections cannot be considered as a true expression of the will of the Georgian voters. Hence, for the first time in the organization's history, ISFED did not announce the PVT results. Although the PVT results verification was consistent with the preliminary results announced by the CEC, it could not be used as a valid measurement of the 2024 election process.⁹¹

During the opening of the polling station and the voting process, ISFED's observers recorded facts of ballot stuffing, voting with improper documentation, multiple voting, or attempted voting. Also, cases of violation of the secrecy of the vote and inking procedure, handing over more than one ballot to a voter, presence of unauthorized persons, campaigning, and alleged control of the will of voters were recorded in the polling stations. Problems related to the mobile ballot box and electronic technologies and various procedural violations were also identified in the polling stations.

On election day, observers were subjected to verbal abuse, physical violence, expulsion from polling stations, threats, and pressure, both by commission members and by the Georgian Dream party coordinators and representatives of fake observer organizations. Notably, observers were often not allowed to observe the voter verification process due to the improper setup of polling stations.

In all polling stations where voting was conducted using electronic technologies, traces of a marker were visible on the back of the ballot after voting, violating the principle of secrecy of voting. In addition, in a number of polling stations, representatives of the ruling party conducted constant photo and video recording, which increased the risk of seeing the choice made by the voter and violated both the principle of the secrecy of voting and free suffrage. Photo and video recording was a mechanism for controlling the will of the voters, as well as, presumably, the loyalty of the commission members.

During the voting process, on the outer perimeter of polling stations, suspicious gatherings of people, voter tracking, including the collection of their personal data, campaigning, and organized mobilization/transportation of voters were observed. Also, cases of verbal and physical confrontations and alleged vote-buying were observed. Most of the above-mentioned actions, along with violations of the law, constitute a mechanism for controlling the will of voters. Accordingly, their use violated the principle of free suffrage.

Compared to the previous elections, there was a significant increase in the number of cases of violating the inking procedure (9% of polling stations) and alleged vote-buying (13%). In the last general elections, these figures were 2% and 4%, respectively.

⁹¹ This means that the data obtained as a result of counting the ballots retrieved from the ballot box at the polling station coincides with the data reflected in the summary protocol of voting results published by the CEC.

According to ISFED observers, the main problem in polling stations established abroad was long queues of voters due to the lack of commission members, mostly registrars. As a result, a certain number of voters were unable to enter the polling station and exercise their right to vote.

Compared to the voting process, counting votes and tabulating results took place with fewer problems. However, ISFED observers identified violations related to the summary protocols, the mobile ballot box, and the sealing of election materials. Among them, imbalances in the summary protocols were observed (including cases with more ballots than voters⁹² and fewer ballots than voters⁹³), data in some protocols was changed without drawing up a correction protocol,⁹⁴ and the summary protocols lacked mandatory information.⁹⁵

In a number of polling stations where elections were held using electronic technologies, the data printed on the receipt of the preliminary results from the vote counting machine and the data reflected in the summary protocols of the voting results did not match each other and, in addition, there was no accompanying explanatory note. Some PECs counted the ballots from the mobile ballot box without placing them in the primary ballot box and sent the results to DEC in this form.⁹⁶ In several polling stations, election materials were not sealed in accordance with the procedure established by law and were transferred to DEC as is.⁹⁷

In addition to the above, a case of alleged falsification of documents was revealed in Gardabani. ISFED was informed that during the process of digitizing the used ballots in polling station #14 of Gardabani electoral district, one of the members of the DEC allegedly added other ballot papers to the ballot papers of this precinct, verifying them with the stamps used in polling station #52 of Gardabani electoral district. After the CEC uploaded a digitized copy of all ballots from the polling stations where the elections were held under the old rules to its website, it was revealed that two ballots uploaded from polling station #14 of the Gardabani electoral district did indeed bore the stamp of polling station #52.

9.1. Incidents/violations identified in the polling station and main trends

Ballot stuffing in 2 polling stations (2 cases), proxy voting, and multiple voting or attempted voting in 15 polling stations (17 cases): Several cases of ballot stuffing were recorded. Cases of multiple voting or attempted voting were also detected. Voters who already had inking were allowed to vote again. A voter returning from emigration who arrived at the polling station found that his vote had already been cast, and a man with a female ID card voted. In a number of cases, repeated voting was prevented because the verification machine confirmed that the voter had already voted. In a number of cases, at the request of an observer, the voter's inking was re-checked, which also confirmed that this voter had already cast his/her vote.

⁹² This means that the sum of the votes received by electoral subjects and the number of ballots deemed invalid is greater than the total number of voters participating in the elections

⁹³ This means that the sum of the votes received by electoral subjects and the number of ballots deemed invalid is less than the total number of voters participating in the elections

⁹⁴ The above is prohibited by the Guidelines for Precinct Election Commission Members approved by Decree No. 35/2024 of August 16, 2024 "Guidelines for Precinct Election Commission Members", Central Election Commission of Georgia, p. 61, accessed January 27, 2025, <https://electionreforms.ge/res/docs/უბანი-ბუქნოლოგიური-geo.pdf>

⁹⁵ The summary protocol of the election results was missing one or more requisites: time of compilation, date of compilation, signatures of the members of the precinct election commission, special seal of the precinct election commission

⁹⁶ In those polling stations where voting was conducted using electronic technology, the receipt of preliminary voting results was printed without the data from the mobile ballot box

⁹⁷ The record book, receipts printed from the voter verification machine and the electronic vote counting machine, and unused ballots were not sealed

Voting or attempting to vote with an improper identification document in 10 polling stations (11 cases): Cases of voting or attempts to vote with improper identification documents were recorded at polling stations. Voters voted without an identification card and/or with an expired document. There were also attempts to vote with a driver's license/photo of an ID card.

Illegal restriction of observer's rights/expulsion - 43 polling stations (45 cases): Observers were expelled from polling stations for reporting violations or requesting to correct them. Observers were restricted from filing complaints and/or making entries in the logbook. Observers were not allowed to observe the verification process. In some cases, registration tables in the polling station were positioned so that observers could not freely observe the process, even when the space of the building allowed for the better arrangement of the polling station to ensure transparency of the process. In some cases, the commission did not allow observers to observe the voter verification process. It is noteworthy that commission members and party representatives/coordinators expressed aggression and hostility towards observers.

Violation of the inking procedure in 81 polling stations (88 cases), including 76 statistically selected polling stations, which is 9% of polling stations: PEC members in charge of controlling the flow of voters improperly checked or did not check at all inking of voters arriving at the polling station. Registrars improperly applied or did not apply at all inking fluid to voters. It is also noteworthy that for the first time in the parliamentary elections, there were cases when commission members asked voters whether they wanted to go through the inking procedure. The inking of voters is mandatory by law to exclude repeated/multiple voting in elections. The abundance of such facts raises questions about both the reliability of the voting process and results and the integrity of the commission members participating in this process.

Violation of the secrecy of the vote in 113 polling stations (169 cases): In addition to the massive violation of the secrecy of voting at polling stations equipped with electronic technologies, as manifested by the leakage of marker traces on the back of the ballot, other cases of violation of the secrecy of voting were also recorded - voters themselves took photos and videos in the voting booth. Commission members, while helping voters to place ballots in the vote counting machine, took the ballot from a special frame-envelope and saw who the voter had voted for. There were cases when voters showed the filled-in ballot to commission members. Party representatives/commission members stood near the voting booths and/or registrars' tables were arranged near the voting booths in such a way that it was possible to see the choice made by the voter. There were cases when two voters entered the voting booth together and filled out the ballot. There were cases when another voter followed the voter into the voting booth with the motive of assisting, even in cases where the voter did not need assistance. In some cases, voters left the voting booth without folding the ballot and/or putting the ballot in an envelope. Also, they voted outside the voting booth, to which the Commission did not respond appropriately.

More than one ballot paper was handed out to a voter in 32 polling stations (60 cases): Registrars handed out more than one ballot paper to a voter. One ballot paper was considered spoiled after the observer/voter discovered this fact. The PEC Chair often did not respond appropriately to these facts.

Alleged control of voters' will and campaigning in 30 polling stations (32 cases): Control of voters and photo-video recording were observed in polling stations. In some cases, when issuing instructions for filling out the ballot, registrars pointed to voters which circle in front of which political party they should color. Also, representatives of the electoral subject urged voters to vote for their political party. In several polling stations, there was a mark in front of the electoral subject on the ballot.

Unauthorized persons in 20 polling stations (21 cases): During election day, unauthorized persons periodically entered and lingered in the polling stations. In many cases, they engaged with PEC members and also created a tense and hostile environment when significant violations were discovered.

Violations related to the mobile ballot box in 20 polling stations (23 cases): In some polling stations, after returning to the polling station, fewer ballots were found in the mobile ballot box than the commission members took. Also, all the ballots in the special frame-envelope placed in the mobile ballot box were folded, or not all the ballots were placed in the frame-envelope. Cases were identified when the mobile ballot box returned to the polling station was not sealed, or the list of voters in the mobile ballot box did not contain signatures. In addition, a case was recorded when the mobile ballot box contained more ballots than voters registered in the list.

Problems with electronic technologies in 25 polling stations (27 cases): The voting process was delayed due to the suspension of the work of voter verification machines and/or special vote counting machines. Also, due to a malfunction of the special vote counting machine, in several cases, a vote was lost, as the machine returned the ballot when the voter had already left, and this ballot was considered spoiled. Also, a case was identified where another device (a tablet) was connected to the special vote-counting machine.

Other incidents/violations in 42 polling stations (51 cases): Cases of verbal and physical confrontations were recorded in some polling stations, mainly initiated by PEC chairpersons and/or members against party representatives and/or observers present at the polling station. Cases of improper arrangement of the polling station, early or late opening of the polling station, improper management of election documentation, improper performance of duties by commission members, and other technical shortcomings were observed as well.

Violations related to vote counting procedures and vote tabulation in 165 polling stations (197 cases): The following irregularities were observed: imbalances in the results summary protocols, lack of mandatory details, and correction of data without a correction protocol. Also, preliminary results receipts printed from the special electronic vote counting machine and the data entered into the summary protocols differed from each other, including data on the number of voters participating in elections, ballots considered invalid, and votes received by electoral subjects. In a number of cases, ballots from the mobile ballot box were not placed in the main ballot box, and preliminary result receipts were printed as is. Also, the rule for sealing election materials was not always followed, which mostly resulted in the sending of unsealed election materials to the DECs. In some cases, the rule of invalidating ballots was violated, observers were not provided with copies of the summary protocol, and unauthorized persons participated in the vote-counting process.

Problems identified in polling stations established abroad in 26 polling stations (44 cases): There were not enough commission members, mainly registrars, in polling stations, which led to long queues and some voters leaving the polling station without being able to vote. The number of voting booths in polling stations did not correspond to the number of registered voters. Voters could not vote because they were not included in a special list. Also, the commission members' low qualifications and lack of knowledge of procedures were observed, leading to various procedural shortcomings. Voters voted with an improper document (copy of their passport). Unauthorized persons were present in the polling station. In a number of cases, observers were restricted from observing freely.

9.2. Incidents/violations identified at the outer perimeter of the polling station and main trends

Suspicious gathering of persons within 100 meters of the polling station at 38% of polling stations: During the voting process, suspicious gatherings of persons were observed near the polling stations throughout the day, mainly consisting of representatives of the ruling party, observers from fake monitoring organizations affiliated with the Georgian Dream, and other individuals. In many cases, the will of voters was controlled. According to the ISFED's observers, in some cases, a person was also standing at the entrance to the polling station, reminding

voters to vote in favor of the ruling party. There was also a case of voters being given an obscure card before entering the polling station. Persons mobilized near the polling station also engaged with voters leaving the polling station, including asking them about their choices and often making them sign an obscure piece of paper. The so-called "street boys" also participated in the gathering, creating an intimidating environment for voters. Those gathered near various polling stations engaged in voter registration, collection of personal data, campaigning, voter mobilization, vote buying, and other activities that influenced the course of the voting process.

Voter registration by coordinators at 31% of polling stations: The Georgian Dream coordinators were mobilized near polling stations and registered voters based on pre-drawn lists. In some cases, public servants were also involved in this process. Registration was mainly carried out after voting, and personal data was also collected.

Organized transportation of voters at 19% of polling stations: Organized (multiple) mobilization of voters using the same means of transport was observed near polling stations. The individuals identified in this process were coordinators from the Georgian Dream. Along with them, public servants and representatives of observer organizations were identified as well.

Alleged vote buying at 13% of polling stations: ISFED's observers witnessed facts of alleged vote buying and handing of money to voters. At the same time, observers overheard communications about the alleged vote buying. Some of the individuals involved in the vote-buying have been identified. Some of them are political officials or public servants.

Physical and/or verbal confrontation, pressure, or threats at 11% of polling stations: During the voting process, ISFED observers witnessed verbal and/or physical confrontations both inside and outside polling stations, which sometimes included signs of threats and pressure. Representatives of electoral subjects, commission members, observers from fake observer organizations, and, in some cases, political officials participated in the confrontations. Cases of interference in the activities of ISFED observers and verbal or physical retaliation against them also took place.

Placement of campaign materials within 25 meters of the entrance to the polling station at 3% of polling stations: Despite the prohibition by law, campaign materials belonging to both the ruling and opposition political parties were placed in the vicinity of some polling stations, within a perimeter of 25 meters from the polling station.

9.3. Unnatural characteristics of gender statistics of voter turnout

ISFED discovered a noteworthy trend after studying gender-disaggregated voter turnout data on election day published on the website of the CEC: in some electoral districts, there was a significant difference between the male and female voter turnout. For a more detailed analysis, ISFED requested additional data from the CEC on gender statistics of voters participating in the October 26 elections broken down per precinct across the country. The analysis of the provided data revealed that female and male voter turnout in a significant part of the polling stations deviated from the normal distribution and contained practically impossible or implausible characteristics.

For example, in 62 polling stations, male voters' turnout varied between 80 to 100 percent, while the average turnout of female voters was up to 57%. In addition, in some polling stations, the turnout of male voters was equal to the theoretically impossible figure. In particular, according to the information provided, the turnout of male voters at these polling stations was higher than 100%, and the number of participating male voters exceeded the total number of male voters registered in the unified and special lists of the polling station. Such illogical data, if correct, indicate that manipulations took place at these polling stations.

The CEC data analysis revealed that the difference between male and female turnout was higher than 20% points at 275 polling stations. Among them, at 243 polling stations the excess was in favor of male voters, and at 32 polling stations - in favor of female voters. Out of these 275 polling stations, at 67 polling stations, the turnout of male voters exceeded that of female voters by more than 30%, and at 12 polling stations, the share of women voting in the elections exceeded that of men by the same percentage points. At 23 polling stations, the turnout of male voters was higher than the number of male voters registered on the unified list. Among them, at least six polling stations had a turnout of more than 100% for male voters, even if all registered voters in the special list at those polling stations were male. It is worth noting that in the 275 polling stations where the difference between male and female voter turnout was more than 20%, the Georgian Dream received 66% of the vote.

In a statement issued on November 8, the CEC confirmed that in 11 polling stations recorded, male turnout was higher than male voters registered, explaining this by inaccurate data received from the precinct election commissions.⁹⁸ However, the election administration did not provide accurate data on voter turnout at these polling stations, broken down by gender. Accordingly, it remained unclear how the number of male and female voters participating in the elections was distributed in these polling stations. In addition, the election administration did not address the turnout at polling stations where the difference between male and female voter turnout was suspiciously high.

Despite repeated statements, the CEC failed to adequately answer the questions raised by ISFED in its statement of November 7 regarding the number of voters participating in the elections.⁹⁹ This undermined public trust in the data published by the CEC and reinforced suspicions regarding alleged manipulations at these polling stations.

9.4. Recounting of polling station results at district election commissions

On October 29, 2024, DEC's recounted the voting results of the polling stations identified by the law based on the principle of mandatory random selection. According to the CEC, DEC's recounted the results of 366 polling stations identified through drawing lots. Out of 366 polling stations, the voting results remained unchanged at 334 polling stations, while the data in the summary protocols for the remaining 32 polling stations was slightly amended.¹⁰⁰

After the end of election day, ISFED observers monitored the process of recounting the results of the polling stations by DEC's. According to the information provided by the observers, the process of recounting the results of the polling stations was mainly carried out in accordance with the rules established by law. However, problems were identified in some DEC's. Like the previous elections, recounting the polling stations' results was still carried out simultaneously, making it challenging to observe the process entirely. ISFED's long-term observers were unable to attend the recount of the results of the polling stations in several DEC's because, despite their request, the Commissions did not provide them with information about the date and time of the process. In several cases, the organization's observers were also restricted from observing the recount from a close distance and taking photos and videos.

⁹⁸ The Manipulation of Information Regarding Voter Gender Statistics Continues – Briefing at the CEC, Central Election Commission, accessed on February 19, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3FTYVat>

⁹⁹ According to ISFED's observation, the difference between turnout rates of male and female voters at a significant number of polling stations deviates from the normal distribution and exhibits practically improbable characteristics, ISFED, accessed on February 6, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3QRGMwr>

¹⁰⁰ "Report on the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia", Central Election Commission of Georgia, p. 147, accessed January 30, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Xdsbih>

At some DEC, the following cases were recorded: essentially invalid ballot papers were considered valid ballots, and the corresponding votes were incorrectly recounted in favor of the Georgian Dream;¹⁰¹ valid ballots were placed in a stack of invalid ballots; ballots were not checked individually, and the commission counted the stacks of bound ballots.¹⁰²

10. Election Disputes

One of the significant challenges of the 2024 parliamentary elections was the process of reviewing electoral disputes. The parties involved in the elections submitted a total of 1,436 complaints to the Central and District Election Commissions regarding violations identified both on and after election day, as well as during the pre-election period. However, the election administration and the courts generally failed to ensure impartial and fair consideration of disputes, further reducing public confidence in the elections.

One of the main problems was the narrow and inconsistent interpretation of electoral legislation by election commissions and courts. A significant number of disputes were dismissed on technical grounds without consideration of merits, and decisions were often made unilaterally by election commission chairpersons, which called into question the transparency and fairness of the process. Of particular concern was the lack of independent judicial oversight. Courts generally upheld decisions made by election commissions without further review.

Complaints/claims filed regarding misuse of administrative resources, restrictions on the activities of observers, and violations of the secrecy of the vote were either rejected or improperly reviewed. A formalistic approach to court proceedings and limited timeframes for appealing election disputes further aggravated the situation.

Improper review and decisions on election disputes undermined public confidence in the election results. They once again highlighted the problem of the independence of the institutions involved – the election administration and the judiciary.

10.1. Statistics of complaints/appeals

According to the Election Code of Georgia, after the start of the official pre-election period, registered electoral subjects and observer organizations have the right to submit complaints to election commissions. If the complaint is not upheld, the relevant actor has the right to appeal the decision to a higher election commission and/or court. In addition, voters are entitled to appeal to the election administration to ensure the realization of their electoral rights.

According to the CEC, from the beginning of the pre-election period until the day of voting, 192 complaints were submitted to the District Election Commissions. Of these, 15 were fully upheld, one was partially upheld, and 176

¹⁰¹ The procedure for compiling a ballot is established by the Decree of the Central Election Commission of Georgia No. 230/2024 of October 5, 2024 On Establishing the Procedure for Filling Out a Ballot to Ensure the Conduct of Voting Using Electronic Means for the elections to the Parliament of Georgia, by-elections to Municipal Councils and the elections to the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara to be Held on October 26, 2024, accessed on January 28, 2025 <https://cesko.ge/ge/kanonmdebloba/tseskos-samartlebrivi-agtebi/gankargulebebi/singleview/11034435-gankarguleba-2302024-05102024>

¹⁰² The procedure is determined by the Decree of the Central Election Commission of Georgia No. 22/2023 of February 24, 2023 On Determining the Deadline and Procedure for Recounting Voting Results by District Election Commissions, accessed on January 29, 2025 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5729868?publication=0>

were not upheld.¹⁰³ In addition, a total of 1,201 complaints were filed with DEC's regarding election day, of which 537 complaints concerned the invalidation or recount of the PEC summary protocols, 515 complaints requested disciplinary liability, 102 complaints contained a request to make an appropriate response or implement appropriate action, 47 complaints were filed without a request. Of the filed complaints, 76 were fully upheld, 92 were partially upheld, 923 were not upheld, 107 were dismissed, and three were revoked.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, a total of 43 complaints were submitted to the CEC, of which one requested disciplinary liability, 18 requested the establishment of an administrative offense, 17 requested the annulment of the decree of the District Election Commission/Chairperson, and 7 requested the annulment of the summary protocol/protocols. Of the 43 complaints submitted to the CEC, 41 were not upheld, and two remained unexamined.¹⁰⁵

As for ISFED's complaints, the organization submitted 45 complaints to the election administration during the pre-election period, 9 of which concerned misuse of administrative resources and 36 - violations of the campaign rules. Of the submitted complaints, the election administration upheld five complaints and drew up an administrative violation protocol. Regarding the remaining 40 complaints, the election administration refused to draw up an administrative violation protocol in writing.¹⁰⁶

During the pre-election period, ISFED filed two lawsuits in the Tbilisi City and Appeal Courts regarding establishing polling stations abroad. However, the courts did not uphold the lawsuits.¹⁰⁷

In addition, ISFED submitted 306 complaints to the election administration regarding violations related to the voting process and the subsequent period, of which 104 were filed with PECs, 201 - with DEC's, and 1 with the CEC. The organization's observers also made 64 notes in the record books. Of 202 complaints filed with DEC's and the CEC, 15 were upheld, 46 were partially upheld, 126 were not upheld, 12 were dismissed, the organization withdrew one complaint, and the status of two complaints is unknown.

The complaints submitted were mainly related to violations of the secrecy of voting and the inking procedure, ballot stuffing, multiple voting, proxy voting, voting with improper documentation, illegal restrictions on observer rights, violations related to the results summary protocol, mobile ballot boxes, and other types of breaches.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the election administration, ISFED also filed 14 lawsuits in city/district courts, of which only 1 was partially upheld, although the Court of Appeal later overturned this decision. None of the eight appeals filed with the Court of Appeal were upheld.

¹⁰³ CEC Letter N03-02/138 of February 19, 2025, accessed February 28, 2025, bit.ly/3QBFmpE

¹⁰⁴ "Report on the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia", Central Election Commission of Georgia, pp. 144-145, accessed January 30, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Xdsbih>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 146

¹⁰⁶ Of the five satisfied complaints, three were drawn up by the Chairperson of the **Tsalenjikha** District Election Commission, and all three of them concerned campaigning in favor of an opposition political party. The Chairperson of the **Khobi** District Election Commission drew up violation protocols for the remaining two complaints for campaigning in favor of the ruling party

¹⁰⁷ In the first case, the court discontinued the proceedings, and in the second case, it considered the case but did not satisfy the lawsuit filed by the organization. The lawsuit was also not satisfied in the Court of Appeal

¹⁰⁸ Violations/Incidents Identified by ISFED on Election Day and Submitted Complaints, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, accessed January 29, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4kdVSdg>

10.2. Trends identified in the review of electoral disputes

The main challenge in the process of reviewing electoral disputes included: often only formal review of cases of violations by the election administration and the courts, inconsistent application of legal norms, and making of biased decisions.

DECs did not have a uniform approach to examining evidence during the administrative proceedings. Some DECs, when reviewing complaints, in addition to explanations from the PECs, also checked the documentation produced at the polling stations, while some districts held oral hearings, where they only heard explanations from PEC officials and other members.

During the pre-election period, the election administration's approach to complaints was typically focused on a narrow interpretation of the Election Code not to satisfy the requirements outlined in the complaints, especially when the case involved a decision against the ruling party.

As in previous years, the election administration's approach to campaigning via social media continued to pose a challenge. Given the narrow definition of pre-election campaigning in the Election Code of Georgia, the issue of additional legislative regulation of campaigning via social media remains high on the agenda.

In cases where observers identified significant violations on election day, PEC members often created an intimidating, hostile, and/or humiliating environment for them. In particular, in cases of substantial abuses, such as voting with improper documents or repeated voting, commission members restricted observers' legal right to file a complaint.

On complaints filed regarding violations of fundamental principles of elections, such as violation of the secrecy of voting, election commissions failed to acknowledge their own responsibility and shifted the blame to voters. In this regard, noteworthy were the complaints filed by the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) with DECs, as the organization requested the invalidation of the results of all polling stations (2,263) in the constituencies where elections were held using electronic technologies because traces of the marker were visible on the back of ballot papers.¹⁰⁹

DECs did not uphold the complaints submitted by GYLA, which were then appealed to various district/city courts. Except for one, none of the district/city courts upheld the appeals submitted by GYLA. The exception in this regard was the decision of the Tetrtskaro District Court, which, based on the experiment conducted, established the violation of the secrecy of voting.¹¹⁰ However, this decision was later overturned by the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, which clearly revealed the court's bias and desire to prevent the Tetrtskaro case from becoming a precedent.

Among the problems identified at the stage of judicial review, the lack of independence and professionalism of the court, as well as the choice of a formalistic model of dispute resolution, made the existing legislative framework and established mechanisms for appeal meaningless. The limited time frames established for electoral disputes in court continued to be a challenge.

¹⁰⁹ GYLA is requesting the annulment of the results from all polling stations (2,263 stations) where technology was used, due to violations of voting secrecy, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, accessed on January 30, 2025 <https://gyla.ge/en/post/GYLA-gancxadeba-30octoberi>

¹¹⁰ Tetrtskaro Court Satisfies GYLA's Lawsuit on Vote Secrecy", *Netgazeti*, November 4, 2024, <https://netgazeti.ge/life/750032/>

11. Election Observation

According to the legislation of Georgia, local and international observer organizations that meet certain conditions established by the Election Code and are registered with the CEC or the relevant DEC have the right to observe elections. In addition, representatives of the press and other mass media accredited to the relevant election commission have the right to attend election commission sessions during the election period and to be present in polling stations on election day. In addition, all electoral subjects can appoint their own representatives to election commissions.

According to the CEC, for the October 26 elections, the election administration registered 23,341 observers from 110 local organizations, 1,712 observers from 76 international organizations, and 2,827 representatives of the press and mass media.¹¹¹

The adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence in May 2024 and the continued hostile rhetoric towards civil society by the ruling party negatively affected the work of the leading domestic observer organizations. Although this law was not enforced against observer organizations during the election period, the ruling party used it to stigmatize and demonize the entire civil society, which had a somewhat chilling effect. For example, during the pre-election period, both some DEC's and various state agencies showed uncooperative and, in many cases, hostile attitudes towards long-term observers from domestic organizations. Many prospective observers later refused to participate in the election missions, often citing fear and potential problems they might face.

On election day, PEC members, representatives of the ruling party, and various individuals associated with them obstructed the work of local observers and verbally and physically insulted them.

As in previous elections, a number of fake election observer organizations were registered for these elections, which were used by the ruling and some opposition parties to pursue their own interests. Particularly problematic was the large number of fake observers affiliated with the Georgian Dream, who were engaged in voter tracking and mobilization inside and outside polling stations. They also were aggressive towards opposition-appointed commission members, party representatives, and other observers.

12. ISFED's Elections Observation Mission and Monitoring Methodology

ISFED monitored the pre-election period, election day, and post-election period of the 2024 parliamentary elections throughout Georgia (except for the territories occupied by Russia).

Pre-election period

ISFED monitored the pre-election period of the parliamentary elections for five months, from June 1 to October 25, through its central office and 71 long-term observers in 73 election districts of Georgia. The organization issued a report assessing the pre-election environment, two interim reports, and one summary report on the results of the pre-election monitoring.

¹¹¹ Report on the October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia, Central Election Commission of Georgia, p. 11, accessed on January 30, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3XdSbjh>

Long-term observers followed international standards established for observer organizations, which imply a complete, objective, transparent, and impartial observation of the process. ISFED's observation process is guided by the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, and in its assessments, it relies on and shares the principles and spirit of the OSCE Copenhagen Document.¹¹²

The following issues were monitored during the pre-election period:

- Public meetings and political activities held by political parties/electoral subjects
- The process of composing election administration and its activities
- Cases of political pressure/threats, obstruction of political activities, and vote-buying
- Facts of misuse of administrative resources.

During the monitoring process, both public information requested from public institutions and information received directly from electoral subjects, media outlets, non-governmental organizations, and citizens served as sources of information. Each fact was directly verified with eyewitnesses and parties involved in the incident. In parallel to the observation, in response to the violations observed, ISFED applied to the relevant agencies with a statement/complaint/lawsuit to legally resolve the violations.

Election day

ISFED observed the October 26, 2024, election day in 73 electoral districts across Georgia. The Election Day Observation Mission consisted of 1,057 precinct observers, 45 out-of-country precinct observers, 73 DEC observers, and 85 mobile teams. In addition, ISFED monitored the processes on the polling stations' outer perimeter through 231 observers. On election day, data collection and incident centers staffed by 32 operators and 23 lawyers operated in the central office.

ISFED fully observed the opening of the precincts, voting, and vote-counting processes. The observation of election day, both inside the polling station and outside the polling station perimeter, was based on the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) methodology. The PVT methodology involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data from randomly selected polling stations, which represent the entire country. The PVT included polling stations in cities and villages within the country and polling stations established in exceptional cases and opened abroad.

A complete simulation of the PVT was conducted several days before election day, aiming to test the software's smooth operation and verify the quality and completeness of the information sent by the observers.

In the first stage of preparation for election day, the observation methodology, reporting and communication system, databases, monitoring forms, instructions, manuals, and other election materials were developed.

In preparation for the October 26 election day observation mission, the organization conducted:

- 73 trainings for 1,260 short-term observers;
- 17 trainings for 235 external perimeter observers;
- 2 trainings for 73 District Election Commission observers;

¹¹² Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors, Accessed February 10, 2025, <http://www.gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles>

- 2 trainings for 85 mobile groups;
- Training for 23 lawyers;
- Training for 32 operators.

On election day, data collection and incident centers operated from ISFED's central office. Information received from observers throughout the day at the data collection center was entered into special data processing software and was verified by operators if necessary. A group of experts processed and analyzed the verified information.

On election day, as soon as violations were observed at polling stations or in districts, information was provided to the incident center staffed by lawyers. Based on their advice, observers responded to each violation, including filing complaints with the PEC or DEC. The verified and processed information was entered by lawyers into the incident database, which included data not only on violations but also on complaints filed at polling stations and district commissions.

Per ISFED's strategy, upon discovering a violation at a polling station, the observer would first give a verbal recommendation to the election commission to promptly eliminate the violation. In case of inadequate response, a complaint would be filed with the precinct election commission.

Filing complaints and any other type of reaction to identified violations primarily served three essential purposes: a) detecting and timely eliminating violations; b) identifying incompetent members of election commissions in order, on the one hand, to replace them with qualified personnel, and, on the other hand, to focus the preparatory training for PEC members on the most problematic issues; c) developing recommendations to improve electoral legislation.

On election day, ISFED provided information to the public about the progress of the voting process, identified trends, and recorded violations, as well as voting results through statements and press conferences held at the Election Media Center.

Post-election period

ISFED monitored the post-election period through 71 long-term election observers, 7 regional office representatives, and the organization's central and regional lawyers. The monitoring included observing the tabulation of results by the election administration, including polling station recounts, and reviewing complaints submitted to election commissions and courts.