

## INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Georgia – Parliamentary Elections, 26 October 2024

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### STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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#### PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

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While the 26 October parliamentary elections offered voters a wide choice with 18 candidate lists, they unfolded amid entrenched polarization in an environment marred by concerns over recently adopted legislation, its impact on fundamental freedoms and civil society. Contestants could generally campaign freely while campaign rhetoric and imagery was highly divisive. Reports of pressure on voters, particularly on public sector employees, remained widespread in the campaign. This, coupled with extensive tracking of voters on election day, raised concerns about the ability of some voters to cast their vote without fear of retribution. The legal framework provides an adequate basis for democratic elections, but recent frequent amendments marked a step backwards, raising concerns over its potential use for political gain. Preparations for the elections were well-administered, including extensive voter education on the use of new voting technologies. A significant imbalance in financial resources and advantage of incumbency contributed to an already uneven playing field. The polarized media environment and instrumentalization of private outlets for political propaganda affected impartial news coverage, hindering voters' ability to make an informed choice. Effectiveness of campaign finance oversight was undermined by limited enforcement, and concerns over the impartiality and political instrumentalization of the oversight body. The underrepresentation of women on party lists and in the campaign demonstrates a need for greater commitment to ensure adequate involvement in political life. Election day was generally procedurally well-organized and administered in an orderly manner but marked by a tense environment, with frequent compromises in vote secrecy and several procedural inconsistencies, as well as reports of intimidation and pressure on voters that negatively impacted public trust in the process.

These elections were the first held under a fully proportional electoral system. They also marked the first elections since Georgia was granted European Union (EU) candidacy status, though the accession process has been *de facto* halted by the EU since June 2024, due to democratic backsliding. The political environment was characterized by continued entrenched polarization, deep antagonism between the government on one hand and some of the opposition and the office of the president on the other, rising critical rhetoric towards political and cultural influence from Western Europe and the United States of America, and widespread public protests triggered by the adoption of the controversial Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence earlier in the year. Many national and international organizations have voiced concerns about this law's potential negative impact on freedom of association and expression, as well as about the stigmatization of civil society organizations and independent media, following its adoption. Campaign messages were dominated by geopolitical issues, with the ruling party framing the choice between itself and the opposition as one between peace and war; and the opposition parties presenting the elections as a referendum on Georgia's geopolitical orientation.

Overall, the legal framework provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections, however, recent amendments reversed some of the previous positive provisions, such as the abolition of gender quotas, other temporary special measures, and amendments to the CEC composition, at odds with ODIHR recommendations. While earlier amendments were adopted following inclusive public discussions and addressed several ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations, frequent revisions of the legal framework, over 20 times since 2020, including some made shortly before the elections and without broad cross-party support, undermined its stability and raised concerns about the potential for misusing the changes for political gain, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice. Moreover, several longstanding ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed, including those related to the impartiality of election administration,

comprehensive regulations to prevent misuse of administrative resources, oversight of campaign and campaign finance, media, and electoral dispute resolution. Further, the legal framework for elections is overly complex, lacks clarity in some areas, and retains gaps and inconsistencies, which at times led to diverging implementations by stakeholders. Many stakeholders also raised questions about the impartiality and independence of certain state agencies responsible for implementing the law.

The election administration managed technical aspects of the elections efficiently and transparently. Most IEOM interlocutors had confidence in the election administration's technical and organizational capacities, however, the public perception of the impartiality of election administration was negatively impacted by concerns about recent amendments which vest control over the selection and nomination process of the CEC to the ruling party, the cancellation of the opposition-nominated deputy chairperson position, its decision-making process, as well as perceived links between non-partisan members and the ruling party. The CEC held regular live-streamed sessions and promptly published all relevant materials online, contributing to transparency, and organized extensive voter information and education campaigns.

For the first time, electronic devices were used in most polling stations for voter identification and counting, as well as the establishment and transmission of preliminary results. The introduction of these technologies was supported by most stakeholders. The election administration made additional efforts to tackle widespread misconceptions about the potential for the devices to compromise vote secrecy. Key stakeholders were not provided access to the audit processes and had limited access to related documentation, limiting transparency, at odds with international good practice.

Contrary to international standards, and despite previous ODIHR recommendations, citizens declared legally incapacitated by a court decision and placed in institutional care are disenfranchised. Most IEOM interlocutors did not raise significant concerns about the accuracy or inclusiveness of the voter lists, but some questioned the legitimacy of a number of multiple registrations at the same addresses of voters unknown to the actual residents. The CEC provided several options for verifying voter registration information and requesting corrections, both in person and online.

Party and candidate registration was generally inclusive, with the CEC registering 1,185 candidates on 18 political party lists. The lengthy residency requirement, restrictions on individuals deprived of candidacy rights or sentenced to imprisonment by a court decision, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, and lack of provisions for independent candidacy, are contrary to OSCE commitments, international standards and good practice.

Despite constitutional provisions requiring the state to take special measures to ensure gender equality, the 2024 amendments abolished the mandatory gender quota on parliamentary candidate lists and other temporary special measures aimed at increasing women's political participation, leading to a significant decline in the number of women candidates in these elections. Some 29 per cent of the party list candidates were women, a significant decrease from the 2020 elections, with most of them in non-electable positions. Underrepresentation in elected positions, combined with the repeal of positive legislative measures, further impacted women's political participation. Women involved in politics continue to face entrenched stereotypes, challenges within political parties and various forms of violence. Party programmes largely lacked messages specifically targeting women and did not feature women in their campaigns. Women constituted majority in most of the lower-level commissions, but only 4 of the 17 CEC members.

The campaign was competitive but subdued, and contestants could generally campaign freely, but reports of intimidation, coercion and pressure on voters persisted, especially on public sector employees and the economically vulnerable, raising concerns about the ability of some voters to freely form their opinions and cast their vote without fear, at odds with OSCE commitments and international standards. Representatives of the ruling party openly expressed their intention to file a lawsuit with the

Constitutional Court after the elections, seeking the deregistration of the UNM, deeming its political standing as destructive to the country, and made public statements about banning the key opposition. Campaign rhetoric and imagery were highly divisive, and both ruling and opposition parties reported isolated incidents of violence, disruptions of events, and damage of campaign materials. Cases of campaigning by high-level and local officials and a government amnesty programme, granting clemency to a very large number of individuals for a wide range of crimes, provided an undue advantage of incumbency. Collectively, this blurred the line between party and State, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.

The 2023 amendments reduced the annual expenditure cap for political parties, and prohibited donations from legal entities, addressing some of the previous ODIHR recommendations, but issues related to third-party campaigning and the publication of the conclusions of the oversight body prior to election day remain unaddressed. The ruling party enjoyed a vast financial advantage over all its competitors. Since 2023, party and campaign finance oversight shifted to the newly established Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which enjoys budgetary independence and substantially increased human resources. All contestants submitted their interim finance reports by the legal deadlines, which the ACB promptly published online, contributing to transparency. While the ACB is not legally required to publish its conclusions before election day, it did so one day before the elections. At times, the application of legal provisions by the ACB was selective and lacked consistency, which negatively impacted their independence, raising concerns about political instrumentalization. Overall, the transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight were limited due to outstanding legislative shortcomings and limited enforcement.

Media is diverse but highly polarized, and depends on financing by party-affiliated individuals, undermining independent journalism. The safety of journalists remains a major concern with a number of recent assaults, acts of intimidation and pressure. The ODIHR EOM monitoring showed clear political bias across all monitored outlets, with legal obligations for impartial news coverage unimplemented on commercial television. The public broadcaster covered all parties predominantly in a positive or neutral tone but devoted significantly more time to the ruling party in the news. The instrumentalization of private media outlets for political propaganda undermined independent news production and extended divisive political rhetoric. Lack of impartial analysis of party programmes, and the refusal of leading political actors and parties to debate, challenged voters' ability to make an informed choice.

While the law provides for remedies for election disputes, the effectiveness of dispute resolution remained limited due to restrictions on voters' legal standing, procedural shortcomings, ambiguities in the legislation and inconsistencies in its application. Before election day, some 220 complaints were filed with election commissions regarding the appointment and operation of Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), alleged misuse of administrative resources, and campaign violations. Most decisions were made by election commission chairpersons rather than the full commissions, undermining collegiality and reducing transparency, contrary to prior ODIHR recommendations. Many complaints were dismissed as unsubstantiated, often without adequate investigation of the merits. The trust in the law-enforcement, the election administration and the judiciary to effectively and impartially adjudicate politically sensitive matters remains low.

The law provides for citizen and international observation, and a number of organizations carried out nation-wide long-term observation. Contributing to the transparency of the electoral process, the CEC accredited a total of 23,177 observers from 102 civil society organizations and 1,592 international observers from 76 organizations. Prior to and during the election period, many CSOs reported on the stigmatizing impact of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence following its adoption, and incidents of attacks and intimidation. This, coupled with potential sanctions for non-compliance, has impacted their ability to operate in an environment free from undue pressure.

Election day was generally procedurally well-organized and administered in an orderly manner but marked by a tense environment and several incidents of physical altercations and widespread intimidation of voters, as well as citizen observers. Voter identification (VID) and vote-counting devices (VCDs) were mostly operational, but the majority of voters in observed polling stations had difficulties operating the VCDs. Further, vote secrecy was potentially compromised in 24 per cent of observations, due to the manner of ballot insertion into VCDs or inadequate polling station layout. IEOM observers frequently reported indications of pressure on voters and overcrowding, and procedural inconsistencies. In many cases, party representatives recorded the voting process and tracked voters, raising concerns about potential intimidation. While the presence of citizen and party observers contributed to transparency, many citizen observers appeared to act on behalf of contestants. During counting, procedural omissions included the improper handling of unused ballots, not announcing votes aloud and the IEOM noted inconsistencies in the determination of the validity of ballots. Tabulation was positively assessed, but the completeness and accuracy of results protocols was not consistently checked, with DEC's citing that official results are finalized at the national level.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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### Background and Political Context

The 26 October parliamentary elections were the first to be held under a fully proportional electoral system.<sup>1</sup> They also marked the first elections since Georgia had been granted European Union (EU) candidacy status in December 2023, though accession has been *de facto* halted by the EU since June 2024 due to democratic backsliding.<sup>2</sup>

The political landscape is dominated by the ruling Georgian Dream (GD), in power since 2012. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, 9 political parties and coalitions secured mandates, with GD winning 90 of 150 seats. The United National Movement (UNM)-led coalition became the largest opposition faction with 36 mandates.<sup>3</sup> In the following years, the opposition landscape has become increasingly fragmented due to intra-party instability. For these elections, most opposition parties united into three coalitions: “Coalition for Change” (composed of *Ahali*, *Girchi* – More Freedom, *Droa!*, and Republican Party), “Strong Georgia” (“Strong Georgia – *Lelo*”, For the People, Freedom Square, and Citizens), and “Unity – to Save Georgia” (UNM, European Georgia [EG] and *Strategy Aghmashenebeli* [SA]).<sup>4</sup>

The elections took place amidst entrenched political polarization, deep antagonism between the government and the president, and broad social discontent due to the adoption of various legislation. In 2023 and 2024, large-scale protests emerged against the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2020 elections, members of parliament (MPs) were elected through a mixed system, with 120 proportionally elected in a single nationwide constituency, through closed party lists, and 30 in single-member constituencies.

<sup>2</sup> Georgia applied for EU membership in March 2022 and received candidate status in December 2023, contingent on taking the steps outlined in the European Commission’s (EC) [recommendations](#). The June 2024 [conclusions](#) of the European Council stated that the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence represents backsliding on these steps, *de facto* leading to a halt of the process. The [European Council conclusions](#) of 17 October 2024 reiterated that the current “course of action jeopardises Georgia’s European path, and *de facto* halts the accession process”, and it calls on Georgia to “adopt democratic, comprehensive and sustainable reforms”. See the 9 October European Parliament (EP) [Resolution](#) “On the democratic backsliding and threats to political pluralism in Georgia”.

<sup>3</sup> Other parties were: European Georgia (EG) with 5 seats; “Strong Georgia – *Lelo*” with 4; *Strategy Aghmashenebeli* (SA) with 4; Alliance of Patriots (AoP) with 4; *Girchi* with 4; Citizens with 2; and the Labour Party (LP) with 1.

<sup>4</sup> Electoral blocs are not envisioned by the law, and coalitions registered their candidates under the lists of their leading parties. Other parties, such as Alliance of Patriots (AoP), “For Georgia”, and *Girchi* – New Political Centre (*Girchi* – NPC), decided not to enter into coalitions.

initially withdrawn in 2023, but adopted in May 2024.<sup>5</sup> During and immediately following the protests, many IEOM interlocutors reported violence and intimidation against the protesters, civil society, and journalists. The adoption of the law has had a negative impact on the public perception of civil society organizations and independent media.<sup>6</sup> On 17 September, the parliament adopted the Law on Protection of Family Values and Minors, which introduced measures that discriminate the LGBTI community and could limit freedom of assembly and expression, contrary to Georgia’s international obligations and OSCE commitments.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the constitutional provisions requiring the state to ensure gender equality, in May 2024, the parliament abolished mandatory gender quotas and other temporary measures aimed at increasing women’s participation in public life, leading to a significant decline in the number of women candidates in these elections.<sup>8</sup> Women held 19 per cent of seats in the outgoing parliament, 3 out of 64 mayoral positions, and only 2 out of 12 ministerial posts. The underrepresentation in elected positions, combined with the repeal of positive legislative measures, has further negatively impacted women’s political participation.<sup>9</sup>

## **Legal Framework and Electoral System**

The Election Code has been amended over 20 times since the last parliamentary elections, with the most significant changes in 2022 and 2024.<sup>10</sup> The 2022 amendments, while not providing the recommended comprehensive reform, were adopted through consultations and cross-party support, and addressed some previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations related to impartiality of lower-level election bodies and citizen observers, additional grounds for automatic recounts, and election dispute resolution deadlines. The 2024 amendments, which altered the CEC decision-making process, allowing the CEC to circumvent the required two-third majority in repeat voting, cancelled the position of the opposition-nominated deputy CEC chairperson, and revised the selection procedure for CEC members,

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<sup>5</sup> The law introduces new registration, reporting, and public disclosure requirements for civil society organizations (CSOs) and media with more than 20 per cent of their non-commercial revenue from foreign sources, labelling them as “organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power”. After the initiation of the law, various CSOs and media [announced](#) that they would not register, arguing that the law is unconstitutional and constitutes stigmatization. Over 100 CSOs announced that they would halt cooperation with the government in any formats. To date, 476 CSOs applied for the status of “organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power”.

<sup>6</sup> See critical assessments of the law in the [Opinion](#) by ODIHR, [Opinion](#) by the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission, the OSCE PA [statement](#), [Statement](#) by the High Representative with the European Commission, and NATO PA [Declaration 490](#). See Statement of Director of ODIHR which calls on Georgian authorities to reconsider this legislation. In July, the president, along with 38 MPs, and over 120 civil society and media, challenged the law at the Constitutional Court and requested provisional measures to suspend its enforcement. On 9 October, the Court ruled the case to be admissible but refused to suspend applicability until its final decision. On 17 October, 16 media organizations, 120 civil society organizations, and four individuals filed a joint complaint with the European Court of Human Rights for its non-compliance with the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Convention.

<sup>7</sup> The law bans gender reassignment, adoption by non-heterosexual individuals and gatherings or the dissemination of information in schools that “aim to popularize” non-heterosexual relationships. Among others, the [Venice Commission](#) (26 June), the [European Union External Action Service](#) (4 September), and the [UN Human Rights Office spokesperson](#) (17 September) criticized the law.

<sup>8</sup> *Girchi* MPs, who initiated the amendments, secured the ruling party’s support in exchange for their votes for the candidate supported by GD for the CEC chairperson. Representatives of the ruling party argued that gender quotas are a form of positive discrimination and have already achieved their main task. See the June 2024 ODIHR [Opinion](#) and the Venice Commission [Opinion](#) on abolition of gender quotas.

<sup>9</sup> According to the 2022 [UN Report on Violence Against Women in Politics in Georgia](#), “[m]ore than half of the [women] respondents (54 per cent) have experienced some form of harassment or violence during their tenure as an appointed official or during their campaign work. [...] The most common forms of violence against women in politics are psychological violence and violence on social media.”

<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary elections are governed by the 1995 Constitution, the 2011 Election Code, the 1997 Law on Political Unions of Citizens (LPU), and regulations of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Other relevant laws include the 2004 Law on Broadcasting, the 1999 Criminal Code, the 1984 Administrative Offences Code, the 1999 Code of Administrative Procedure, and the 1999 General Administrative Code. Georgia is a party to international and regional instruments related to the holding of democratic elections.

were adopted without an inclusive consultative process or broader political support.<sup>11</sup> Recent amendments reversed some of the previous consensus-based positive provisions, at odds with ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.

Overall, the legal framework provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections; however, despite numerous changes, several longstanding ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed.<sup>12</sup> These relate to the appointment and nomination of election administration members, comprehensive regulations to prevent the misuse of administrative resources, enhancing campaign finance regulations and oversight, improving campaign regulations in the media, and strengthening the framework for electoral dispute resolution. Further, frequent revisions of the legal framework, including a number made shortly before the elections and without broad cross-party support undermined its stability, and raised concerns about the potential for political manipulation, contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the law is overly complex, lacks clarity in some areas, and retains gaps and inconsistencies, which at times led to diverging implementations by stakeholders.<sup>14</sup>

The 150-member parliament is directly elected for a four-year term under a fully proportional system in a single nationwide constituency with closed candidate lists. Parties must surpass a five per cent threshold to qualify for seat allocation. The formation of pre-electoral blocs is not permitted.

## Election Administration

The elections were administered by the CEC, 73 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 3,111 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). Elections were not held in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, territories currently not under the control of the government.<sup>15</sup> All commissions are composed of eight non-partisan members and up to nine members nominated by parties represented in parliament. The CEC and DECs are permanent bodies, and PECs are temporary bodies formed ahead of each

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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) states that the legislation should be adopted at the end of a public procedure.

<sup>12</sup> The 2024 changes did not consider key concerns raised by the ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). The 2023 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Opinion](#) and the 2024 [Follow-up Opinion](#), stated that "amendments are clearly insufficient to ensure a consensus-based political process crucial for the independence and impartiality of the CEC and for public trust in this institution".

<sup>13</sup> Section II.2.b of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission 2002 [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) (Code of Good Practice) states that "fundamental elements of electoral law, in particular the electoral system proper, membership of electoral commissions and the drawing of constituency boundaries, should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election", while paragraph 64 of its explanatory report stresses that "care must be taken to avoid [...] even the mere semblance of manipulation". The 2024 Venice Commission [Revised Interpretative Declaration](#) on the Stability of Electoral Law suggests that amendments within a year to elections are permissible if they are in accordance with international electoral standards and based "on consensus between government and opposition and on broad public consultations".

<sup>14</sup> The Election Code and other laws contain references to provisions that no longer exist or are not applicable. Articles 51 and 186 refer to the abrogated article 30.12 of the LPU for determining which electoral subjects are eligible for free airtime. The Election Code contains a significant number of provisional norms, adopted to regulate particular elections only, many of which are no longer applicable. Certain concepts are ambiguous, such as 'campaigning to serve the goals of another electoral subject', 'donations to refrain from supporting another electoral subject', 'persons with declared electoral goals', as well as eligibility to free airtime, as electoral blocs are not permitted, and at times resulted in overly broad discretionary interpretation by enforcement bodies and courts, disputes and sanctions (see also *Media, Campaign Finance, Election Dispute Resolution* sections).

<sup>15</sup> Including 67 polling stations in 42 countries where out-of-country voting was organized. Additional in-country PECs were established in 13 electoral precincts established in penal institutions, and in-patient facilities. See the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) 2024 [judgment](#) in the case of Georgia v. Russia.

election.<sup>16</sup> Women constituted the majority in most of the lower-level commissions, but only 4 of the 17 CEC members are women.<sup>17</sup>

Most DEC and PEC were established within the legal deadlines, despite the compressed timeframe for processing applications. The pool of candidates for vacant non-partisan positions was limited, with one per cent surplus at the PEC level, effectively reducing competition for most positions.<sup>18</sup> Several political parties reported difficulties in recruiting PEC members, and many DEC and PEC experienced significant turnover in membership after appointment. DEC attributed this to low remuneration, insufficient understanding of the role of PEC members, and, in some cases, reluctance to represent political parties. Political parties also cited fear of pressure from local authorities and supporters of other parties as reason for such withdrawals.<sup>19</sup> There is no deadline for the replacement and withdrawal of non-partisan PEC members. Many replacement PEC members were not sufficiently trained, not in line with international good practice.<sup>20</sup>

The election administration managed technical preparations in a timely and efficient manner. Contributing to transparency, the CEC held regular live-streamed sessions and promptly published its decisions and other relevant materials online. Election commissions generally reached consensus on technical matters, but on contentious issues, opposition-nominated members frequently abstained, and decisions were passed by a simple majority.<sup>21</sup> While most IEOM interlocutors had confidence in the election administration's technical and organizational capacities, concerns about recent amendments which vest control over the selection and nomination process of the CEC to the ruling party, its decision-making processes, as well as perceived links between non-partisan members and the ruling party negatively impacted the public perception of the impartiality of election administration.<sup>22</sup>

The election administration prepared a comprehensive training programme for PECs, DEC, contestants, media representatives, and CSOs. Sessions observed by the ODIHR EOM were informative and interactive, but they did not sufficiently address pre-election responsibilities, leading to

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<sup>16</sup> The CEC and DEC members are appointed for five-year terms. For the election period, the five permanent members at each DEC were joined by three temporary non-partisan and up to nine party-nominated members. The current CEC chairperson was appointed for six months in August 2021, with the term later extended following legal amendments aimed at unblocking the appointment process, which was deemed controversial by some opposition parties. In April 2024, four non-partisan CEC members, including the chairperson, were re-elected for the full term, while the mandates of the remaining non-partisan members are set to expire in 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Women constituted 67 per cent of DEC members and 73 per cent of PEC members, holding 55 per cent of leadership positions in DEC and 78 per cent of PECs.

<sup>18</sup> The CEC received 263 applications for 219 vacant positions of temporary non-partisan DEC members. In 56 per cent of DEC, the CEC received the exact number of applications as vacancies. Within a four-day period, DEC selected 24,047 non-partisan PEC members from 24,425 applicants. For the 9,090 PEC leadership positions, DEC received 9,111 applications. Non-partisan members must hold professional certificates and meet additional legal requirements aimed at ensuring their impartiality, such as not having been appointed by a party as a commission member or representative, having served as contestants in any of the last two general elections, or having been political party donors since the last general elections. The competitions for numerous vacancies were relaunched due to the insufficient number of candidacies and resignations.

<sup>19</sup> ODIHR EOM Long-Term Observers (LTOs) noted that some party-appointed members in the districts of Ambrolauri, Bolnisi, Mtatsminda (Tbilisi) and Sagarejo were unaware of their appointments or who nominated them.

<sup>20</sup> See paragraph II.3.1.g of the [Code of Good Practice](#) which states that "Members of electoral commissions must receive standard training."

<sup>21</sup> The 2024 amendments changed the requirement for CEC decision-making, to allow for re-voting on issues with a simple majority at the same session, if support of at least two-thirds of the full membership cannot be reached.

<sup>22</sup> The 2023 and 2024 amendments shifted the responsibility for the nomination of non-partisan members, including the chairperson, from the president to the speaker of parliament, and abolished the position of the opposition-nominated deputy chairperson, raising concerns that these changes vest full control over the selection and nomination process of the CEC in the ruling party, and eliminate the need to build trust across political platforms. Paragraph 20 of the [General Comment 25](#) to the ICCPR underlines the need to conduct the electoral process "fairly, impartially and in line with established laws compatible with the Covenant". Paragraph II.3.1 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) underlines that "an impartial body must be in charge of applying electoral law".

inconsistencies in the implementation of some PEC procedures.<sup>23</sup> The CEC organized extensive voter information and education campaigns, featuring in-person meetings, audio-visual materials in the media and online, and mock election days, focusing on the verification of voter registration data, voting procedures, including using election technologies, and ballot validity.

Positively, the CEC provided voter information materials in accessible formats as well as assistive tools in polling stations. Voter education materials included sign-language interpretation, and videos for citizens with hearing impairments. However, the general physical accessibility of electoral premises, including DEC offices and polling stations, remained inadequate (see *Election Day*).

## Election Technologies

The 2022 amendments introduced the use of technologies at polling stations with the stated aim to reduce the risk of manipulation and human error. In August 2023, the private vendor *Smartmatic* was selected to provide optical vote-counting devices (VCDs), voter identification devices (VIDs), and technical support for the configuration of technology. For these elections, 2,263 polling stations (75 per cent) were equipped with VCDs and VIDs, covering some 90 per cent of the electorate.<sup>24</sup> Tablets for transmitting preliminary results were used in all in-country polling stations. By law, results provided by the VCDs were considered preliminary, with only manually counted results included in the results protocols.<sup>25</sup> According to the CEC, since 2023, pilot projects and voter education campaigns reached approximately 600,000 voters.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the election administration made additional efforts to tackle widespread misconceptions about the potential for the devices to compromise vote secrecy. Most IEOM interlocutors supported the introduction of election technologies as a means to enhance confidence in election-day procedures.

The law does not provide for independent verification and certification of the electronic technologies.<sup>27</sup> In October 2023, the CEC selected a private company to conduct a compliance audit, which they stated confirmed that the devices complied with international standards and national legislation.<sup>28</sup> In October 2024, shortly before elections, the CEC tasked the same company with conducting a new audit specifically related to the parliamentary elections. Despite the completion of two out of the three audit phases, the related audit report was not published before election day. Key stakeholders, such as political parties and citizen observers, were not provided access to the audit processes and had limited access to the related documentation, limiting transparency, which is at odds with international good practice.<sup>29</sup>

## Voter Rights and Registration

Citizens who are at least 18 years old on election day have the right to vote, except those serving a prison sentence for a particularly grave crime. Contrary to international standards and despite previous ODIHR recommendations, citizens declared legally incapacitated by a court decision and placed in

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<sup>23</sup> Various PECs visited by ODIHR EOM LTOs showed a lack of understanding of procedures related to handling applications for changes in voter lists or voting with mobile ballot box.

<sup>24</sup> VIDs and VCDs were used in polling stations with at least 300 registered voters that were located in municipal centres or within a 20 km radius.

<sup>25</sup> Each precinct had one VID per 700 registered voters, with up to five interconnected VIDs in larger precincts. Only the voter lists specific to each precinct were loaded in the respective VIDs. Each polling station was equipped with two ballot boxes with mounted and interconnected VCDs, with an additional one provided in precincts of over 2,700 registered voters. Preliminary results were transmitted to the CEC via a secure virtual private network (VPN).

<sup>26</sup> The CEC also tested the technologies in eight by-elections since 2018 and in a nationwide mock election on 11 September in 598 electoral precincts, allowing 122,864 voters to experience the technology.

<sup>27</sup> See the 2022 Joint Opinion ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Opinion](#)'s recommendations B, H, I and paras. 37 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> See the 2023 [report](#) of the audit conducted by the US-based company "Pro V&V".

<sup>29</sup> Paragraph 7 of the 2022 [Council of Europe Guidelines on the use of information and communication technology \(ICT\)](#) states that "[t]ransparency also includes providing observers with access to documentation and to the processes". See also paragraphs 4 and 8 about transparency requirements in evaluating ICT systems.

institutional care are disenfranchised.<sup>30</sup> Voter registration is passive and continuous.<sup>31</sup> The CEC is responsible for maintaining the unified voter list (UVL), based on data managed by the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) and other state institutions. Voters with valid identification documents are automatically included based on their current or previously registered domicile or actual address.<sup>32</sup>

Voters with expired documents were excluded from the UVL unless they renewed their documents, and requested inclusion before 8 October.<sup>33</sup> Exclusion from voter lists due to expired ID documents poses an unnecessary burden for citizens who are otherwise eligible to vote, at odds with international standards.<sup>34</sup> Following the 2023 amendments, ID cards issued prior to July 2011 with no expiration date ceased to be valid in July 2024. To ensure timely renewal of documents, the PSDA launched a large-scale campaign to issue new ID cards free of charge. According to the PSDA, 195,016 of the approximately 260,000 affected citizens changed their IDs free of charge by 14 October, after which the UVL closed for changes.<sup>35</sup>

The PSDA made continued efforts to improve data accuracy.<sup>36</sup> Voters also had a range of opportunities to verify their registration data online, at government service centres, and PSDA offices, and request corrections. Special voter lists were compiled for election officials on duty, voters in hospitals, inpatient facilities, penal institutions, or staying abroad, as well as for homebound voters.<sup>37</sup> Mobile voting was available for specific categories of citizens.<sup>38</sup> Most IEOM interlocutors did not raise significant concerns regarding the accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter lists.<sup>39</sup> However, some questioned the legitimacy of registrations where multiple voters were reported to be listed at a single address but were unknown to the actual residents.<sup>40</sup> The final UVL contained 3,508,294 voters.

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<sup>30</sup> Articles 12 and 29 of the 2006 [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) oblige states to “recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others”. See also the CRPD [Committee’s General Comment no. 1](#) “person’s decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising their political rights, including the right to vote, [and] the right to stand for election”

<sup>31</sup> Citizens living abroad, while automatically included in the UVL, need to apply to be included in out-of-country voter lists.

<sup>32</sup> Voters with internally displaced status are registered under their current place of residence. Voters with valid IDs but without a registered address or whose registration has been declared void by the PSDA are included in the UVL based on their last place of registration. In absence of a registered address, voters had the opportunity to inform the PSDA of their actual address until 5 October. The PSDA informed the ODIHR EOM that between 12 September and 8 October, some 1,400 citizens, previously without valid documents or registered address, were included in the UVL.

<sup>33</sup> Between 8 and 14 October, any amendments to the UVL could be made only upon a court decision. As of 15 October, the UVL was closed for any additional amendments.

<sup>34</sup> Paragraph 11 of the [UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No. 25](#) requires that “States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right. Where registration of voters is required, it should be facilitated and obstacles to such registration should not be imposed”.

<sup>35</sup> Of the remaining citizens with expired ID cards, 25,733 held valid passports, allowing them to vote.

<sup>36</sup> The PSDA improved the accuracy of the data by removing duplicates and identifying entries of deceased voters, it proactively contacted citizens with deficiencies in their records, conducted on-site inspections, and informed citizens whose documents were about to expire.

<sup>37</sup> Voters abroad registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were automatically included in special voter lists; others could apply for registration until 7 October. The CEC issued a decree on 5 October to facilitate the inclusion of voters with address registration deficiencies in out-of-country voter lists. In total, 95,910 voters were entitled to vote abroad.

<sup>38</sup> Mobile voting was made available for those unable to attend polling stations due to health issues, as well as for voters in penal institutions, administrative detention, hospitals, hard-to-reach areas, and military and security personnel on duty. While the law limits the number of accepted applications for mobile ballot box voting to a maximum of three per cent of registered voters at a given precinct (unless specifically permitted by the DEC to exceed this limit), it does not specify any additional requirements. In total, DEC received 64,238 applications for mobile ballot box voting.

<sup>39</sup> Four political parties and two observer organizations requested copies of the UVL; according to the CEC, none of them submitted correction requests based on their verification.

<sup>40</sup> Legal provisions permit citizens to retain their previous registered residence for inclusion in voter lists. However, a number of voters from the districts of Didube, Nadzaladevi, and Saburtalo (Tbilisi) and Kutaisi informed the ODIHR EOM that they had identified persons registered at their addresses who were not known to have resided there previously. The PSDA received 259 requests to deregister such individuals. Based on different legal grounds, the PSDA deregistered 956 citizens in the electoral period.

## Candidate Rights and Registration

Registered voters aged 25 or older on election day who have resided in Georgia for at least 10 years are eligible to stand. The lengthy residency requirement, the restrictions for individuals deprived of candidacy rights or sentenced to imprisonment by a court decision, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, and the lack of provisions for the independent candidacies are at odds with international standards and good practice.<sup>41</sup> Only political parties may submit candidate lists. Parties represented in parliament are entitled to a later registration deadline, are exempt from collecting support signatures, and have the option to retain their previous ordinal number on the ballot.<sup>42</sup>

The party and candidate registration process was generally inclusive. Of the 30 applicants not represented in parliament, the CEC rejected 11 for submitting insufficient signatures or failing to meet other requirements, and dismissed 2 applications.<sup>43</sup> Ten parties represented in the parliament applied for registration. In total, the CEC registered 27 political parties as contestants. By the 6 October deadline, the CEC registered 18 of the 19 candidate lists submitted.<sup>44</sup> While many political parties had pledged to comply with internal gender quotas, only 341 of the 1,185 parliamentary candidates (29 per cent) were women; in 2020, the gender quota requirement resulted in 44 per cent of the party list candidates being women. Women led 3 out of 18 lists and comprised only 22 per cent of candidates in the top 10 positions.<sup>45</sup>

## Campaign Environment

The campaign period began on 27 August, over a month before the candidate registration concluded, which resulted in disputes related to free airtime allocation and different financial reporting periods. The campaign was competitive but subdued, and contestants could generally campaign freely. However, highly divisive rhetoric and imagery were used in the campaign, and both ruling and opposition parties reported isolated incidents of violence, event disruptions, verbal abuse, and the destruction of campaign materials.<sup>46</sup> Opposition parties did not report the majority of incidents to the police, citing perceived

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<sup>41</sup> Paragraph 15 of the [UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 25](#) states that “persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation.” Moreover, Guideline I. 1.1 c. iii the Code of Good Practice states that “a length of residence requirement may be imposed on nationals solely for local or regional elections”. Paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that participating States will “respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organisations, without discrimination”.

<sup>42</sup> Parties not represented in parliament require at least 25,000 supporting signatures to register, while parties represented in parliament can participate in the elections without collection of signatures.

<sup>43</sup> One party’s application was dismissed due to the cancellation of its registration by the National Agency of Public Registry, and another was rejected because of the termination of the party chairperson’s authority.

<sup>44</sup> One candidate list submitted contained deficiencies, and the submitters failed to rectify the deficiencies due to which the list comprised fewer than the required number of candidates.

<sup>45</sup> The Party of Georgian Unity and Development and “Change Georgia” had the highest representation of women candidates, at 52 and 51 per cent, respectively. “For Georgia” had 45 per cent women candidates. In the “Strong Georgia” coalition, women made up 30 per cent, while on the “Coalition for Change” list, women constituted 26 per cent. In the “Unity – to Save Georgia” coalition, the figure was 23 per cent. On the GD list, 16 per cent of the candidates were women, with only two in the top 10 and none between positions 21 and 51.

<sup>46</sup> On 16 September, the leader of *Ahali* was pelted with stones during campaigning in Pankisi (Akhmeta municipality). On 19 September, UNM activists were attacked while campaigning in Zugdidi, with UNM alleging GD-affiliation, which GD denies. On 6 October, an UNM campaign event in Gurjaani was attacked, allegedly by GD-affiliates, resulting in one member being hospitalized. On 12 October, a GD activist allegedly attempted to run over a “For Georgia” party member; the case was reported to the police. On 22 October, the car of a UNM activist in Zugdidi was attacked with stones. On 23 October, a “For Georgia” member was attacked by a group of people in Tbilisi. On 4 September in Tskaltubo, a GD member died following a verbal assault by a UNM supporter. Party leaders and activists from either *Ahali*, “For Georgia” or “Strong Georgia – *Lelo*” were assaulted during canvassing in Dedoplistskaro, Gurjaani, Tbilisi, and Kareli. UNM offices in Batumi, Keda, Tbilisi, and Zestaponi were vandalized, defaced, or robbed. In Chkhorotsku, a “For Georgia” member allegedly damaged a GD activist’s car.

unwillingness by the authorities to investigate. Some opposition parties claimed difficulties in obtaining poster locations as well as, initially, securing campaign offices.<sup>47</sup>

Contestants engaged in traditional campaign methods as well as campaigning online, with activities remaining relatively subdued throughout the campaign period.<sup>48</sup> While most political parties included socio-economic issues in their platforms, campaign messages were dominated by geopolitics. The ruling party framed the elections as a choice between peace, represented by GD, and war, represented by its opponents. Most opposition parties presented the elections as a referendum on Georgia's geopolitical position, expressing fears that government policies may hinder accession to the EU, a stated aim in the Constitution.<sup>49</sup> Representatives of the ruling party openly expressed their intention to file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court after the elections, seeking the deregistration of the UNM, deeming its political standing as destructive to the country, and made public statements about banning the key opposition. The president took an active role in the campaign by publicly consulting the opposition about pre-electoral coalitions and the composition of a prospective government, potentially acting outside of her mandate as a neutral arbitrator between the state institutions.<sup>50</sup> The ruling party criticized various CSOs for allegedly actively campaigning for the opposition.

In 2021, partially in line with previous ODIHR recommendations, the Election Code was amended to strengthen the regulation of campaigning by public sector employees.<sup>51</sup> However, campaign regulations do not fully protect against the potential misuse of administrative resources.<sup>52</sup> Campaigning by high-level officials provided an undue advantage of incumbency and, in some cases, blurred the line between party and State, contrary to OSCE commitments and good practice.<sup>53</sup> While not at odds with the law, in the months leading up to the campaign, the government made decisions to create financial incentives

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<sup>47</sup> Initial issues with renting office space were reported by *Ahali*, "Aliance of Patriots", "For Georgia", "Strong Georgia – Lelo", and UNM in seven municipalities. In 10 municipalities, the opposition initially also reported that most public spaces for posting campaign materials were occupied by the GD or that access to billboard space was limited, as it had already been rented out to GD. UNM reported problems with access to campaign venues in 2 municipalities.

<sup>48</sup> ODIHR EOM LTOs observed 50 campaign events in 20 municipalities, organized by 6 electoral contestants. Some 88 per cent of the campaign events were assessed as accessible for persons with disabilities. In the week preceding the elections, some parties held final rallies, gathering tens of thousands of people. On 20 October, CSOs and opposition parties organized a joint rally, expressing their support for EU integration, during which the president addressed the participants. GD's final rally, on 23 October, enjoyed sizable attendance from the regions; the ODIHR EOM received a number of reports about public sector employees instructed or coerced to attend the rally.

<sup>49</sup> Article 78 of the Constitution mandates state bodies to "take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization."

<sup>50</sup> Article 49 states that "The President of Georgia is the Head of the state of Georgia and is the guarantor of the country's unity and national independence." According to Article 56 of the Constitution, the formation of the government is beyond the president's mandate, with the prime minister candidate proposed to parliament by the party that won the most seats in the elections. A 2023 [Constitutional Court](#) decision described the president as 'a politically neutral figure who does not hold political power' and 'plays the symbolic role of arbitrator between the branches of government'. The president informed the ODIHR EOM that she acts in line with Article 78 of the Constitution. GD unsuccessfully attempted to impeach the president over unauthorized foreign visits in October 2023, and announced plans to impeach the president on 7 October 2024.

<sup>51</sup> The law prohibits campaigning during state or municipality-funded events, as well as by public sector employees during working hours or in their official capacity. It also forbids unequal access to state or municipal spaces for contestants, the use of state-owned means during campaign, and holding meetings with public sector employees.

<sup>52</sup> The provisions do not apply to state trustees (regional governors) and mayors, some of whom were observed actively campaigning. The prime minister is the campaign co-ordinator of the ruling party. The ODIHR EOM LTOs observed the mayors and deputy mayors of Dmanisi, Kharagauli, Keda, Kvareli, Ozurgeti, Rustavi, Shuakhevi, Tbilisi, Zestaponi, and Zugdidi, engaging in the campaign. The mayor of Ambrolauri stated that he took a leave of absence for the campaign period. In the [2018 Second Addendum to the Second Compliance Report on Georgia, GRECO](#) stated that it "considers the deletion of the provision allowing for the unlimited campaigning by high-level public officials long overdue".

<sup>53</sup> Paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) calls for "a clear separation between the State and political parties. Paragraph II. B. 1.1 of the of the [2016 ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Preventing and Responding to the Misuse of Administrative Resources during electoral process](#) (Joint Guidelines) stipulates that "the legal framework should provide effective mechanisms for prohibiting public authorities from taking unfair advantages of their positions by holding official public events for electoral campaigning purposes".

for a large number of citizens from various social groups.<sup>54</sup> In September, the parliament enacted a law giving amnesty to a wide range of convicted individuals.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, reports of intimidation, coercion and pressure on voters persisted, especially on public sector employees and the economically vulnerable, raising concerns about the ability of some voters to freely form their opinions and cast their vote without fear, at odds with OSCE commitments and international standards.<sup>56</sup>

Party programmes largely lacked messages specifically targeting women. Women candidates from “Strong Georgia” publicly addressed issues like gender equality, gender quotas, and the pay gap. GD emphasized traditional family values, with the party’s women wing organizing events for leading women candidates. At only 20 of the 50 campaign events observed by ODIHR EOM Long-term Observers (LTOs), women were featured as speakers. Women were more active as local party coordinators and activists. Women constituted 42 per cent and youth under thirty 23 per cent of the attendees at observed campaign events.

Campaigning on social networks is unregulated. All contestants actively campaigned online, focusing on the economy, local issues, and EU integration, with significant criticism of the ruling party by the opposition.<sup>57</sup> The three opposition coalitions coordinated their campaigns, posting largely the same organic content across the accounts of their political parties and leaders. The tone of campaigning on the official social network accounts of parties and their leaders was largely neutral, with isolated cases of derogatory and defamatory content.

## Campaign Finance

Campaign finance is regulated by the LPU and the Election Code, supplemented by regulations of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). In line with some of the previous ODIHR recommendations, the 2023 amendments reduced the annual expenditure cap for political parties and prohibited donations from

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<sup>54</sup> In February 2024, the Minister of Education [announced](#) a student internships programme for up to 3,000 students, starting in September 2024. The same month, the government [reduced](#) interest rates for over 150,000 pensioners who had taken loans before 2023. In April, parliament [increased](#) pensions for law enforcement officers, and the government [waived](#) tax liabilities for 145,000 tax payers incurred before 2021. In June 2024, the prime minister [announced](#) the exemption of 1,855 individuals from COVID-19 penalty charges, totalling 5.6 million GEL.

<sup>55</sup> According to [official estimations](#), following its adoption, over 1,000 prisoners were supposed to be released from penitentiary institutions; the law also impacted approximately 22,000 probationers, with 7,000 released from probation immediately. The law provided complete or partial reduction of punishment for those serving prison terms, probation and on parole on broad range of offences.

<sup>56</sup> ODIHR EOM interlocutors in 16 municipalities alleged pressure on public employees and those dependent on social assistance to support the ruling party. According to the [National Statistics Office of Georgia](#), 838,100 voters are pensioners and 181,900 persons receive social transfers; every fourth employee (320,500 out of 1,334,600 employed) [works](#) in the public sector. Concerns regarding the intimidation of voters were raised by the ODIHR EOM interlocutors from the opposition parties in 10 out of 64 observed municipalities. On 18 October, the Ombudsperson acknowledged allegations of voters’ intimidation, including confiscations of identification documents, and called for prompt investigation of the issue by the law enforcement bodies; similar cases from the last week of the campaign were reported by ODIHR EOM LTOs. On 21 October, GD’s honorary chairman, in a televised interview, threatened the leaders and members of “For Georgia” with “strict punishment” after elections for its political stances. Paragraph 7.7 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) requires that campaigning “be conducted in a fair and free atmosphere in which neither administrative action, violence nor intimidation bars the parties and the candidates from freely presenting their views and qualifications, or prevents the voters from learning and discussing them or from casting their vote free of fear of retribution”. Paragraph 19 of the 1996 [UNCHR General Comment 25](#) to the ICCPR stipulates that “voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind.”

<sup>57</sup> Between 20 September and 26 October, the ODIHR EOM monitored campaigning on social networks for a qualitative analysis of its narrative and tone. The analysis included a sample of over 60 electoral contestants and stakeholders, whose activities were followed on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. According to [Meta Ad Library](#), the official Facebook accounts of *Ahali* and GD spent the most on paid advertisement in last 30 days preceding elections – 70,000 EUR and 60,200 EUR, respectively. This was followed by the official Facebook account of “Strong Georgia” – *Lelo*, which spent 45,900 EUR, UNM – 32,200 EUR and Girchi – NPC – 31,000 EUR.

legal entities.<sup>58</sup> However, several ODIHR and Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption’s (GRECO) recommendations related to political party finance remain unaddressed, including explicit regulations on third-party campaigning and legal provisions related to the publication of conclusions from the review of interim campaign finance reports prior to election day.

Political parties that passed a one per cent threshold in the last parliamentary elections receive annual public funding.<sup>59</sup> Campaigns may also be financed from monetary or in-kind donations from natural persons. Citizens can donate up to 60,000 GEL per year.<sup>60</sup> Some opposition parties reported limited campaign budgets, further constrained by a lack of donations. In 2024, GD received the highest amount of donations, significantly surpassing those of other contestants.<sup>61</sup> The ruling party enjoyed a vast financial advantage over all its competitors. The ACB investigates on average 75 per cent of the donations given to a party, checking donors’ financial capacities to make the reported donations.<sup>62</sup> Such high level of scrutiny can deter individual donations.

Since 2023, party and campaign finance oversight shifted from the State Audit Office to the newly established ACB. The head of the ACB is appointed for a six-year term by the prime minister, and several IEOM interlocutors raised resulting concerns over the independence and impartiality of the institution.<sup>63</sup> The ACB enjoys budgetary independence and substantially increased human resources in comparison with the previous oversight body.<sup>64</sup> It can impose sanctions for non-compliance with party funding requirements and campaign finance violations, which need to be approved by the court. Political parties are obliged to provide reporting on an annual basis, as well as in case of *ex officio* requests from the ACB, and submit periodic campaign finance reports.<sup>65</sup>

All contestants submitted their interim finance reports in line with the law, which the ACB promptly published online, allowing for the possibility of public scrutiny.<sup>66</sup> The reports varied in the level of detail provided and were only published as scanned documents, making external data analysis difficult,

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<sup>58</sup> Donations from foreign, anonymous, publicly funded and religious entities, as well as cash donations, are prohibited.

<sup>59</sup> Public funding is calculated based on the number of votes received. After the 2020 elections, 14 parties qualified for public funding, with GD receiving 41 per cent of the total annual allocation of 12.5 million GEL. Following the 2021 amendments to the LPU, which deny state funding to any political party that does not take up at least half of the parliamentary mandates that they won, and which suspend funding for six months, if half of its members do not attend parliamentary sessions without valid reasons, two parties lost their right to receive state funding. The 2022 and 2023 amendments reduced the annual expenditure cap of political parties from 0.1 per cent of the national GDP to 0.04 per cent, amounting to 32 million GEL for this year.

<sup>60</sup> EUR 1 equals approx. GEL 3.

<sup>61</sup> According to [ACB data](#) of 25 October, in 2024, GD fundraised 14.5 million GEL, followed by *Ahali* (9.5 million GEL), and “Strong Georgia – *Lelo*” (6.6 million GEL).

<sup>62</sup> According to the ACB report, 1,190 donations given in 2024 to 16 political parties were being verified. In case of the EG, “Generations for Georgia”, GD, the Christian-Conservative Party of Georgia, and People’s Party, the ACB decided to verify all received donations.

<sup>63</sup> The head of the ACB is selected for a six year-term by the prime minister from among candidates identified by a commission comprised different state agencies and a CSO representative. Venice Commission, in its [2023 Opinion on the Provisions of the Law on the Fight Against Corruption Concerning the Anti-Corruption Bureau](#), recognised the competition element in the selection process, but found the composition of the commission, dominated by members representing the political majority, “not sufficiently pluralistic”. Paragraph 277 of the 2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that “[l]egislation shall define the procedure for appointing members to the regulatory body and clearly delineate their powers and activities. The respective appointment procedure needs to be carefully drafted to avoid political influence over members”.

<sup>64</sup> The ACB is composed of 70 employees, including former State Audit Office civil servants.

<sup>65</sup> While the ACB can also receive notifications from legal entities and private persons, it does not specifically seek information from civil society organizations. The ACB informed the ODIHR EOM that some CSOs have not responded to its reported openness to cooperate.

<sup>66</sup> The first interim report was submitted by all 27 political parties registered as electoral contestants, while the second was submitted by all 18 political parties that registered their candidates lists. The interim campaign report [template](#) includes 19 forms requiring disclosure of donations membership fees, loans, staff remuneration, business trips and advertising expenses, non-financial assets, and registers of real estate, vehicles, leased and rented properties.

thus undermining the transparency of campaign finances.<sup>67</sup> One day before the elections, the ACB published its conclusions on the interim campaign finance reports, informing that it required five contestants to provide clarifications regarding expenditures related to online advertising, foreign visits, as well as public meetings and events.<sup>68</sup> The ACB has not issued any sanctions on violations of campaign finance provisions before election day.<sup>69</sup> In the first two interim campaign finance reports, GD and *Ahali* declared the highest campaign spending, GEL 9.1 million and 5.6 million, respectively.<sup>70</sup>

On 27 August and 24 September, the ACB designated several entities and individuals as ‘subjects with a declared electoral goal’.<sup>71</sup> In its decision, the ACB found that they were conducting campaigns in line with opposition messages.<sup>72</sup> With this designation, the affected organizations, including Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia), would become subject to the same financial regulations and limitations as political parties, including with regard to the prohibition on receiving international funding. Subsequently, TI Georgia suspended its observation activities, leading to international reactions. On 1 October, the prime minister acknowledged that the decisions were in line with the law, but urged the ACB to review them and refrain from such designations in the campaign period. On 2 October, the ACB revoked all related decisions, citing “national interests”.<sup>73</sup> The ACB and the court exercised broad discretionary powers in making these designations which negatively impacted the perception of their independence. Several IEOM interlocutors considered these politically motivated.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the ODIHR EOM observed instances of third-party campaigning, which the ACB did not react to.<sup>75</sup>

While the establishment of a specialized party finance oversight body with an extended mandate and capacity is in line with previous ODIHR and GRECO recommendations, its application of legal provisions was selective and lacked consistency, and raised concerns about political instrumentalization. Overall, transparency and effectiveness of campaign finance oversight were limited due to outstanding legislative shortcomings, and limited enforcement.

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<sup>67</sup> Paragraph 258 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states “[d]igitalizing information and submitting it to the regulatory body in its digitalized, easily searchable and reusable form can facilitate oversight and therefore minimize the need for paper-based procedures”.

<sup>68</sup> According to the report, clarifications were requested from Ahali, GD, SA, “Strong Georgia – Lelo”, and UNM. The ACB verified the accuracy of party reports by comparing them with data gathered by its monitoring of political activities conducted by six field monitors, media monitoring, and by comparing market prices with expenses reported by political parties.

<sup>69</sup> During the campaign period, the ACB sanctioned five individual candidates for failure to provide their property declarations, required by law.

<sup>70</sup> According to the data from the first two interim campaign finance reports, political parties spent 1.36 million GEL on online advertising, of which GD spent 0.5 million GEL, “Strong Georgia” – 407,000 GEL and *Ahali* – 352,000 GEL.

<sup>71</sup> Third-party campaigning is underregulated; however, the law provides for entities not registered as contestants to campaign if they publicly declare an intention to gain power, and bounds these ‘subjects with a declared electoral goal’ by campaign finance regulations.

<sup>72</sup> On 27 August, the ACB [designated](#) as ‘subjects with a declared electoral goal’ the “Freedom Square” movement and the Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy, their director and 24 members. On 24 September, Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) and its executive director, as well as the “Vote for Europe” movement, its director, and board members, received the same designation. While the law defines “subjects with a declared electoral goal” as those who openly declare their desire to come to power, the Tbilisi Court of Appeal broadly interpreted this provision to extend to any campaign activities.

<sup>73</sup> GD representatives informed the ODIHR EOM that the given status could preclude these organizations from taking part in election observation, and the ACB wanted to avoid the discreditation of the electoral process.

<sup>74</sup> On 6 September, the Tbilisi City Court granted the ACB’s motion to authorize access to bank information for the purpose of monitoring the financial activities of “Vote for Europe” and its founders. On 17 September 2024, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals upheld the judgment of the first instance court.

<sup>75</sup> The CSO “United Neutral Georgia” advocated against voting for the main opposition parties through online videos and statements.

## Media

The media landscape is diverse but highly polarized, reinforcing broader political power structures.<sup>76</sup> It operates in a financially challenging environment with an insufficient advertising market, dependent on political and business interests.<sup>77</sup> The safety of journalists remains a major concern with a number of recent assaults, acts of intimidation and pressure.<sup>78</sup> Despite legal safeguards for civil defamation procedures, many recent defamation claims by public officials were decided against opposition-affiliated media and journalists, undermining investigative journalism and further challenging a financially fragile media environment.<sup>79</sup> Most IEOM interlocutors also reported significant barriers in accessing public information.<sup>80</sup>

The Georgian National Communications Commission (ComCom), vested with oversight of broadcast media, decides on media-related complaints which, in case of violations of the Election Code, are subject to mandatory judicial review.<sup>81</sup> Legal provisions mandate impartiality, fairness, and pluralism in broadcasting; however, these are subject to self-regulation only, while provisions on free and paid advertising, as well as debates, are overseen by ComCom. The appointment procedure for ComCom members does not ensure its independence and the body holds excessive sanctioning power.<sup>82</sup>

The law obliges most broadcasters, including commercial, to provide a significant amount of airtime to contestants.<sup>83</sup> However, contrary to an ODIHR recommendation, free airtime and participation in debates were only granted to qualified electoral subjects.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, provisions on campaigning

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<sup>76</sup> The most watched TV stations include *Imedi*, *Rustavi 2* and *PosTV*, perceived as affiliated with GD, and *Mtavari Channel*, *TV Pirveli* and *Formula*, perceived as affiliated with opposition parties.

<sup>77</sup> The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and Adjara TV and Radio have limited audience, while commercial TV remains the main source of political information. Smaller, primarily internet-based outlets providing more independent coverage are reliant on international grants and are concerned about the potential impact by the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence on their work. The [2018 Joint declaration](#) by UN, OSCE, OAS and ACHPR stipulates that politicians and public officials should refrain from taking actions which undermine the independence of the media, such as interfering politically in the operations of or taking commercial control over regulatory bodies or commercial, community or public service media.

<sup>78</sup> See the CoE Safety of Journalists Platform [alert](#) of 18 June and the [state's reply](#) of 19 September. On 6 July, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media "denounced the mass violence against journalists reporting on protests...".

<sup>79</sup> According to the CSO [Georgian Democracy Initiative](#), there are around 36 pending defamation cases, mostly filed by public officials, primarily against *Formula*, *Mtavari Channel* and *Pirveli TV*. Since beginning of the year, *Pirveli TV* alone has been ordered by courts to pay a total amount of 45, 565 GEL in damages.

<sup>80</sup> On 22 November 2023, a [decree](#) issued by the Speaker of the Parliament restricted the access of accredited journalists to the Parliament.

<sup>81</sup> On 27 August, ComCom started quantitative monitoring of 55 TV stations, as well as quantitative and qualitative monitoring of 7 TV stations, but did not publish any conclusions prior to election day. The 2023 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting introduced enforcement measures by the ComCom on 'hate speech', 'incitement to terrorism', and 'obscenity', previously subject to self-regulation to align the law with the EU Audio-Visual Media Services Directive.

<sup>82</sup> Despite the November 2023 amendments introducing a "competition commission" to shortlist candidates for ComCom members, the Government still retains undue influence in the selection of ComCom management. The [2003 Joint declaration](#) by UN, OSCE and OAS representatives states that "all public authorities which exercise formal regulatory powers over the media should be protected against interference [...] including by an appointments process for members which is transparent, allows for public input and is not controlled by any particular political party." In case of a repeated violation after imposing a fine, ComCom has the authority to suspend the license of a broadcaster.

<sup>83</sup> Public and community broadcasters were required to provide a total of five minutes free airtime per hour, distributed among qualified contestants, while commercial TV stations with nationwide coverage had to offer a total of 7.5 minutes every three hours. Additionally, GPB, in accordance with the law, provided a total of 5 minutes of free airtime per hour, distributed among 12 'non-qualified' contestants, along with up to 20 minutes of daily live coverage of campaign events per contestant.

<sup>84</sup> By law, political parties and electoral blocs that are in the parliament qualify for free airtime, if they are entitled to public funding. Attempts by "For Georgia" to receive free airtime on additional legal grounds, were rejected by ComCom and courts. The [2021 Joint Opinion](#) of ODIHR and Venice Commission stresses that "the allocation of free airtime to political parties on an equal basis is a part of equal suffrage rights".

that “serves the campaign goals of another election subject” and their narrow interpretation, resulted in six broadcasters sanctioned by ComCom and the courts, and unduly limited opposition parties’ right to campaign in the media. (see *Election Dispute Resolution*).<sup>85</sup>

Broadcasters are held liable for the content of political advertising.<sup>86</sup> Following complaints by GD, three TV stations were repeatedly fined for refusing to air particular GD campaign ads which, in their reasoning, violated the law, including on “hate speech”.<sup>87</sup> Prior requests by some TV stations to ComCom for clarification were rejected on procedural grounds. Subsequently, the two government-aligned TV stations monitored by the ODIHR EOM stopped airing any campaign advertisements by opposition parties on 11 October.<sup>88</sup> Complaints filed by “Strong Georgia” and “Unity – to Save Georgia” were upheld in court and several government-aligned broadcasters were fined.<sup>89</sup> However, as the law did not provide for expedited procedures, the violations were not remedied, undermining equal opportunities for opposition to campaign.<sup>90</sup>

Between 18 September and 25 October, the ODIHR EOM conducted quantitative and qualitative monitoring of six TV stations and two online media outlets.<sup>91</sup> The monitoring showed bias across all monitored outlets, with legal obligations for impartial news coverage unimplemented on commercial television. Most TV stations dedicated the majority of campaign coverage in news to GD. However, the tone on commercial TV reflected the publicly perceived party alignments.<sup>92</sup> The GPB, while mostly positive or neutral in tone in its coverage of all contestants (89 per cent), the majority of its campaign coverage was allocated to GD (60 per cent). The only debate aired on GPB did not engage representatives of some major opposition parties, after they declined their participation, therefore, no debate between the ruling parties and major opposition took place.

The instrumentalization of private media outlets for political propaganda undermined independent news production and extended divisive political rhetoric. Together with the lack of impartial analysis of party programmes and the refusal of senior political actors and prominent parties to debate, voters’ ability to make an informed choice was challenged.

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<sup>85</sup> GPB, Adjara TV and Radio, Mtavari Channel, TV Pirveli, Formula and Silk Media were issued warnings, while Citizens, EG and SA were fined 10,000 GEL respectively by the CEC and court for the same, repeated, violation.

<sup>86</sup> A 2021 [Supreme Court Decision](#) and the 2024 ComCom [Guidelines](#) require broadcasters to ensure that content is in line with the Constitution and the law, including vaguely defined provisions on “incitement to aggression and chaos” and “dangerous actions”. A [2009 Joint declaration](#) by UN, OSCE, OAS and ACHPR stipulates that media should “be exempted from liability for disseminating unlawful statements made directly by parties or candidates”.

<sup>87</sup> Mtavari Channel, Pirveli TV and Formula were fined with a total amount of 15,000 GEL, respectively, for refusing ads, which portrayed CSOs members in the context of “moral degradation”, and the choice between war and peace with pictures of war-torn Ukraine.

<sup>88</sup> Statements by [Imedi](#) and [PosTV](#) on 10 October announced that they would not air any ads by the “collective UNM” in order to “eliminate the disbalance”.

<sup>89</sup> Following repeated complaints by “Strong Georgia – Lelo”, [Imedi](#) and [Rustavi 2](#) were fined for ceasing to air their paid ads, while the party was not qualified for free airtime. “Strong Georgia – Lelo’s” request for immediate enforcement was not granted. In addition, upon UNM complaints, [Imedi](#), [Rustavi 2](#), [Maestro](#) and [Pos TV](#) were fined for not airing their advertising.

<sup>90</sup> See Paragraph 7.8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#), which provides for “unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process”. See also section I.2.3 of the Code of Good Practice which requires equality of opportunity.

<sup>91</sup> GPB, Formula, Imedi, Mtavari Channel, TV Pirveli and Rustavi 2, as well as [netgazeti.ge](#) and [tabula.ge](#).

<sup>92</sup> GPB, Formula, Imedi, Mtavari Channel, TV Pirveli and Rustavi 2 devoted 60, 56, 82, 51, 51 and 80 per cent of their campaign news coverage to GD, respectively. On Formula, 89 per cent of GD’s campaign was presented in a negative tone, while 88 per cent of “Coalition for Change’s” campaign was positive. On Imedi, 83 per cent of the Unity – to Save Georgia campaign coverage was negative, while 80 of GD’s campaign was positive. On Mtavari Channel, 90 per cent of GD’s coverage was negative, while 82 per cent of “Coalition for Change’s” coverage was positive. On TV Pirveli, 91 per cent of GD’s campaign was negative, while 50, 54 and 56 of the “Coalition for Change”, “Strong Georgia” and “Unity – to Save Georgia’s” coverage was positive. On Rustavi 2, 66 per cent of Unity – to Save Georgia coverage was presented in a negative tone, while 68 per cent of GD’s was positive.

## Participation of National Minorities

National minorities are underrepresented in public and political life.<sup>93</sup> While ethnic minorities constitute 13 per cent of the population, only 5 per cent of the candidates in these elections represented minority communities, with only a few in advantageous positions on candidate lists. In at least one instance during the campaign period, alleged belonging to an ethnic minority was used as a derogatory accusation.<sup>94</sup> At campaign events observed by ODIHR EOM Long-Term Observers, no specific messages were directed towards national minorities, and the presence of minority representatives among the speakers was limited.<sup>95</sup>

Positively, the CEC prepared voter education and electoral materials, including ballot papers, in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. However, PEC members in national minority areas were primarily trained in Georgian, with an option to receive materials written in other languages. The user interface of the electronic devices was only available in Georgian, which may have limited the ability of PEC members and voters from minority communities to fully understand and effectively operate the devices.<sup>96</sup> National minorities constituted only two per cent of the DEC members.<sup>97</sup>

## Election Dispute Resolution

The law grants broad legal standing to contestants and registered observer organizations to file complaints, but voters can only lodge complaints on their voter registration data and voting rights.<sup>98</sup> In December 2022, some deadlines for election dispute resolution were extended, partially addressing previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.<sup>99</sup> However, most deadlines for the handling of complaints and appeals do not guarantee an efficient process to handle violations of the election legislation.<sup>100</sup> While expedited procedures are applied for the first instance court, in most cases,

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<sup>93</sup> Azerbaijanis (6.3 per cent) and Armenians (4.5 per cent) being the largest groups. The 2024 [Fourth Opinion on Georgia](#) of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities states that “At the government level, persons belonging to national minorities are still very rarely or not at all represented in central government bodies [...] The representation of national minorities in local councils of the municipalities where persons belonging to minorities live in substantial numbers is disproportionately low [...] with the exception of local councils of two municipalities.”

<sup>94</sup> For example, on 11 October, POSTV alleged that a “Strong Georgia – Lelo” leader was of Armenian descent; the Public Defender deemed the broadcast discriminatory.

<sup>95</sup> Of the campaign events observed by the EOM, Azerbaijani was used at an *Ahali* event in Mtskheta and a UNM one in Kabali. *Ahali*, GD, and “Strong Georgia – Lelo” placed posters in Azerbaijani in Sagarejo. “*For Georgia*” distributed campaign materials in Armenian in Akhalkalaki and “Strong Georgia – Lelo” in Azerbaijani in Gardabani.

<sup>96</sup> The 2023 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) [Report on Georgia](#) states that “according to the 2014 census, 44.5% of the ethnic Armenians and 73.9% of the ethnic Azerbaijani citizens had poor competence in the state language.” Paragraph 1 of the 2017 [Council of Europe \(CoE\) Recommendations on E-voting](#) stipulates that “[t]he voter interface of an e-voting system shall be easy to understand and use by all voters”.

<sup>97</sup> According to the CEC, of the 1,241 DEC members, 24 are of Armenian and 1 is of Azerbaijani ethnicity.

<sup>98</sup> Article 2.3(a) of the [ICCPR](#) states that “any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy...”. Guideline II.3.3.f of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that “all candidates and all voters registered in the constituency concerned must be entitled to appeal.”

<sup>99</sup> Decision of the PEC chairpersons can be appealed within three calendar days of its receipt to the relevant DEC, which will consider the appeal within four calendar days of its receipt. Several previous ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations related to election dispute resolution remain unaddressed, including comprehensive reforms to ensure timely, transparent, and effective resolution of election-related disputes, aligning deadlines with international good practice, handling all disputes collegially and in open sessions by election commissions, and broadening legal standing for voters.

<sup>100</sup> The law provides administrative bodies with different timeframes to handle election-related administrative offences. The CEC has 10 days to consider and adjudicate certain election-related complaints, compared to the two-day deadline provided to ComCom. Guideline II.3.3.g of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that “time-limits for lodging and deciding on appeals must be short (three to five days for each at first instance).”

the Court of Appeal operates under regular procedure.<sup>101</sup> By law, most complaints are handled by CEC or DEC chairpersons rather than the full commissions, weakening their status as a collegial body and negatively impacting transparency. In addition, trust in the law-enforcement, the election administration and the judiciary to effectively and impartially adjudicate politically sensitive matters remains low.<sup>102</sup> Overall, these issues undermine the right to an effective remedy, contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards.<sup>103</sup>

Before election day, 217 complaints were filed with election commissions, mostly by contestants and citizen observers, concerning the appointment and operation of PECs, mobile voter lists, alleged misuse of administrative resources, and campaign violations.<sup>104</sup> Only 19 complaints lodged with election administration were handled in open sessions.<sup>105</sup> The CEC maintains an online database of complaints filed with election commissions and courts against election administration decisions, contributing to transparency, but not all protocols of administrative offences are made public. Courts and administrative bodies did not publish judgments on administrative offences, citing a lack of human resources to redact personal data, challenging transparency of the process.<sup>106</sup>

Most complaints were considered on merits and dismissed as unsubstantiated, sometimes without adequate investigation.<sup>107</sup> Administrative bodies initiated proceedings into some 50 administrative offences, mostly against contestants and broadcasters for violations of airtime allocation rules, and did not draw a protocol in some 60 cases, mostly related to the alleged misuse of administrative resources and violations of campaign rules. All motions related to administrative protocols, sanctioning the contestants and broadcasters were upheld by court. In open sessions, the Tbilisi City Court handled more than 50 election-related disputes, and only two rulings appealed in the Court of Appeals were partially satisfied. Adjudication of cases by the court revealed both ambiguities in the legislation and inconsistencies in its application (see *Media and Campaign Finance*); moreover, some decisions and judgments lacked sufficient substantiation, particularly where the legal interpretation was questionable.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The law grants 10 days to appeal a judgment of the first instance court, and the Court of Appeal has up to 30 days to decide. In the case of “Strong Georgia” and UNM, this resulted in limiting the opportunity to campaign on *Imedi* and *Rustavi 2*, pending final court ruling, following broadcasters’ refusal to air political ads of opposition parties.

<sup>102</sup> See also the 2022 [Concluding observations](#) by the UN Human Rights Committee, which expressed concerns over “reports of the persistent lack of independence and impartiality in the judiciary of the State party”.

<sup>103</sup> Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that everyone shall “have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity.”

<sup>104</sup> Of these, 15 complaints related to the appointment of PEC members, alleging links with or support to the ruling party, while 83 were filed overwhelmingly by the UNM, mostly on the same day, in selected locations, concerning the late opening of PECs and their operations. Eighty-five complaints concerned alleged violations of campaign rules, and misuse of administrative resources, among other issues. In total, disciplinary measures were requested in 70 complaints, with three being satisfied. Over 60 per cent of complaints were filed by the UNM.

<sup>105</sup> The CEC chair may deny consideration of any complaint without it being reviewed by the commission, and majority of all complaints were dismissed following this procedure.

<sup>106</sup> Article 13 of the Law on Common Courts mandates that all court decisions shall be published in a depersonalised form online.

<sup>107</sup> Some 40 cases were pending as of election day. Some complaints regarding the alleged misuse of administrative resources, particularly at DEC level, were dismissed solely based on the denial or response of the alleged violator. For example, cases of alleged campaigning online by public officials and members of the election administration through their personal social media accounts in support of the ruling party were dismissed based on the argument that this was done by their family members.

<sup>108</sup> The law contains conflicting provisions on the eligibility of free airtime, the obligation of broadcasters to air political ads of qualified electoral subjects, non-permission to form pre-electoral blocs and the use of airtime to ‘serve the campaigning goals of another electoral subject’. Coupled with the discrepancy in the campaign timeframes, this resulted in three opposition political parties and six broadcasters being sanctioned by the CEC, ComCom, and courts respectively for airing political ads against the ruling party that were attributed ‘to serve the campaigning goals of another election subject’, including a member of the de facto coalition that was announced publicly, but non-existent de jure. However, the CEC did not follow the same reasoning in a case of alleged use of administrative resources by a person who publicly stated its intention to run with GD, arguing that restrictions apply only after the completion of candidate registration.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) launched investigations into 31 incidents concerning election-related violence and property damage; however, no charges have been filed by election day. In some publicly reported instances of damaging party property and campaign materials, MIA did not launch inquiries, citing a lack of official criminal reports.<sup>109</sup>

## Election Observation

The law provides for citizen and international election observation of the whole electoral process, as well as observation by contestant representatives. The December 2022 legal amendments introduced provisions to prevent party-affiliated individuals from serving as citizen observers; however, some registered citizen observer groups continued to pursue political purposes (see *Election Day*).<sup>110</sup> In an inclusive manner, the CEC accredited 102 citizen observer organizations with 23,177 observers and 76 international observer groups and diplomatic representations with 1,592 observers.

Contributing to the transparency of the electoral process, several civil society groups conducted long-term observation activities, focusing on the assessment of the legal framework, pre-electoral environment, misuse of administrative resources, electoral dispute resolution, and issued various reports.<sup>111</sup> Prior to and during the election period, many CSOs reported on the stigmatizing impact of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence following its adoption. This, coupled with potential sanctions for non-compliance, although not applied so far, has impacted their ability to operate in an environment free from undue pressure.<sup>112</sup>

## Election Day

The administration of the elections was generally orderly, but election day was marked by a tense environment, overcrowding in many polling stations and several incidents of physical altercations and intimidation.<sup>113</sup> Women made up 73 per cent of commission members, including 72 per cent of chairpersons. Despite efforts to improve accessibility, 65 per cent of polling stations were difficult for wheelchair users to access, and 38 per cent had unsuitable interior layouts. Most polling stations opened on time, with only a few delays noted due to organizational issues and difficulties in setting up voter identification devices (VIDs) and vote counting devices (VCDs). IEOM observers positively assessed

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<sup>109</sup> These included instances of physical violence and damaged property, which, together with other cases, were discussed at the Interagency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF), mandated to prevent and react to election-related violations by public officials, established on 28 June. By the election day, the IATF had nine meetings and mostly discussed issues reported in media.

<sup>110</sup> A person cannot be registered as a citizen observer if they currently hold certain public offices, have been a party-nominated election commission member, electoral contestant, or contestant's representative in the last two general elections, or have been a donor to a political party since the last general elections.

<sup>111</sup> The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) assesses the electoral legal framework and electoral transparency. The Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) focuses on human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance. TI Georgia monitors political finance. The Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG) advocates for ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities.

<sup>112</sup> On 24 September, the ACB designated TI Georgia as a 'subject with a declared electoral goal', following which the organization suspended their election observation activities. These activities only resumed after the ACB withdrew the designation on 2 October. Paragraph 8 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that "the participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place". See also section II.3.2.a of the Code of Good Practice which states that 'both national and international observers should be given the widest possible opportunity to participate in an election observation exercise.

<sup>113</sup> Most notably, there were reports of UNM activists injured in altercations in Marneuli and Tbilisi, where one of the UNM members required hospitalization. In Khobi, Tbilisi, Tsalenjikha, and Zugdidi, both opposition and ruling party supporters initiated verbal and physical confrontations. Opposition parties reported the presence of alleged criminal groups in the vicinity of polling stations in Batumi, Bolnisi, Kutaisi, Lagodekhi, Markopi, Marneuli, Martvili, Tbilisi, and Zugdidi. During the election day, the [President](#) and the [Public Defender](#) called for a prompt and adequate response of the law enforcement agencies.

the opening process in 212 of the 223 polling stations observed, with procedures largely followed. Negative assessments were made due to insufficient knowledge of the procedures, or presence of unauthorized persons, including candidate representatives and citizen observers, assisting in preparations for the opening.

In most cases, voting was assessed as procedurally well-organized. However, in 6 per cent of the 1,924 observations, a significantly high number, the process was assessed negatively, mainly due to indications of pressure and intimidation of voters, which in some cases was coupled with tension or unrest inside the polling stations and overcrowding. In 24 per cent of observations, vote secrecy was potentially compromised by the manner of inserting the ballots by the voters into ballot boxes, or the layout or setup of polling stations in 7 per cent.<sup>114</sup> While not against the law, in most polling stations, party representatives, mostly from GD, recorded the voting process. This, as observed, had an intimidating effect, as the cameras were often directed at VIDs or polling booths, potentially compromising the secrecy of the vote. Unknown individuals were also seen tracking voters outside (10 per cent) and party representatives inside polling stations (7 per cent). IEOM observers reported group or family voting in 4 per cent of the polling stations. In some instances, IEOM observers received allegations of vote buying.<sup>115</sup>

Some observed procedural inconsistencies included voters' fingers not consistently being checked for ink (7 per cent) or not always being inked before voting (4 per cent). The combination of the introduction of new technology and an increase in the number of voters per polling station led to long queues in 40 per cent of polling stations using devices and at times delayed the process. When applicable, VIDs and VCDs were fully operational in 99 and 98 per cent of observations, respectively, with exceptions mainly due to defective equipment and occasional synchronization issues between VIDs. While almost all PECs were familiar with the handling of the devices, in 9 per cent, not all voters received adequate instructions on marking and casting ballots. In 54 per cent of the polling stations, some voters experienced difficulties in casting their ballots through VCDs.

Party representatives were present in 97 per cent of polling stations, and citizen observers in 89 per cent, contributing to transparency. However, several citizen observers reported obstruction by PEC members, being prevented from entering or restricted in observing. Conversely, IEOM observers noted in 28 per cent of observations that citizen observers appeared to be acting on behalf of contestants, raising concerns about their impartiality and the misusing of the citizen observation role, at odds with a longstanding ODIHR recommendation. In 7 per cent, unauthorized persons, contestant representatives and citizen observers, interfered in PEC activities, verifying voters' identities, instructing voters, or assisting with ballots. In one instance, IEOM faced direct intimidation and damage to their vehicle.

In polling stations with VCDs, preliminary results were established based on the consolidated counts by individual devices, uploaded on USB drives and transmitted via a tablet application to the CEC. Official results will be based on mandatory manual count. IEOM observers assessed the counting process negatively in 24 of the 193 polling stations, due to procedural errors and tension or unrest inside the polling stations. Contestant representatives and citizen observers were present in nearly all polling stations (188 and 176 observations, respectively), and the process was considered transparent in 181 cases. However, contrary to procedures, the selection of two observers and two contestant representatives to supervise the count was not done in 49 and 47 cases, respectively. Interference by contestant representatives, local or state officials, or citizen observers was observed in 27 instances. Tension and unrest was noted in 29 observations and attempts to obstruct the counting in 7 cases.

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<sup>114</sup> IEOM observers attributed breaches of vote secrecy to PEC members, contestant representatives, or observers standing near VCDs or polling booths (16 per cent), overcrowding (16 per cent), improper use of secrecy sleeves (9 per cent), wrong layout (8 per cent), or marks showing through ballots (6 per cent).

<sup>115</sup> In addition, the CEC reported that voting was cancelled at one polling station in Marneuli due to ballot box stuffing.

Procedural omissions during vote count included not following the prescribed order in 50 cases, PECs failed to invalidate unused ballots in 40 cases, and did not pack electoral materials according to procedures in 67 cases. During counting, the choice on each ballot was not announced aloud in 28 cases. At polling stations with devices, in 38 cases, the mandatory manual count showed minor discrepancies from the VCD results. Importantly, in the manual count the validity of the vote was not fully determined according to regulations in 23 cases and was inconsistent in 21 cases. Further, the validity of contested ballots was not determined by vote in 80 observations. Difficulties in filling in the results protocols were noted in 31 cases, leading to revisions of figures in previously completed PEC protocols in 6 observations. As a result of counting errors, corrections or repeated counts were requested in 42 instances. In 37 polling stations, the PECs did not publicly display a signed copy of the results protocol, limiting transparency.

The initial phase of processing results protocols and election materials by DECAs, observed in all 73 electoral districts, was generally positively assessed. Procedural omissions were reported in 6 observations, problems with the integrity of materials delivered in 17 observations, inadequate premises in 8 observations, and overcrowding in 6 cases. While DECAs are tasked with summarizing district-level results, members did not consistently verify the completeness and accuracy of results protocols in 9 cases, and 5 DECAs did not perform these procedures at all, citing that official results are finalized at the national level. Discrepancies in PEC protocols were noted in 10 DECAs.

On election day, DECAs received 439 complaints from observer groups and party representatives regarding delays in opening polling stations, alleged issuance of multiple ballots, restrictions on observers' and party representatives' rights, breaches of vote secrecy, procedural violations, mobile box voting, material shortages, malfunctioning of electronic devices, filming, campaign materials at or near polling stations, and violations outside polling stations. By the close of voting, all complaints were under review. After the closing of the polls, the CEC began posting partial results, received electronically from polling stations with devices, and announced preliminary results based on results from 90 per cent of these polling stations at 21:45.

***The English version of this report is the only official document.  
An unofficial translation is available in Georgian.***

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**MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Tbilisi, 27 October 2024 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

Mr. Pascal Allizard was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. Ms. Pia Kauma headed the OSCE PA delegation, Mr. Iulian Bulai headed the PACE delegation, Mr. Antonio López-Istúriz White headed the EP delegation, and Mr. Faik Öztrak headed the NATO PA delegation. Mr. Eoghan Murphy is the Head of the ODIHR EOM, deployed from 11 September.

This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the count, tabulation and announcement of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some months after the completion of the electoral process. The OSCE PA will present its report at its next statutory meeting. The PACE will present its report at its next plenary session. The EP will present the report at a DEG meeting and at the foreign affairs committee of the EP. The NATO PA will present the report at the Standing Committee meeting in Montréal on 24 November.

The ODIHR EOM includes 18 experts in the capital and 30 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 530 observers from 42 countries were deployed, including 30 long-term and 332 short-term observers deployed by ODIHR, as well as a 60-member delegation from the OSCE PA, a 39-member delegation from the PACE, a 12-member delegation from the European Parliament and a 38-member delegation from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Opening was observed in 223 polling stations and voting was observed in 1,924 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 193 polling stations, and the tabulation in 73 DECs.

The observers wish to thank the authorities for their invitation to observe the elections, and the Central Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia for the assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties and civil society organizations and the international community representatives for their co-operation.

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