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GEORGIA'S 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS





2025

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STOLEN CHOICE: GEORGIA'S 2024 RIGGED PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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The October 2024 election in Georgia was not an expression of the people's will - it was a carefully choreographed performance designed solely to serve the Georgian Dream's hunger for power. What should have marked a turning point for democracy instead became a showcase of deception and manipulation. Georgian Dream did not compete in this election; they controlled it, scripted every move, and ultimately stole it.

This document exposes how GD transformed democratic institutions into instruments of electoral manipulation, employing tactics that ranged from subtle legal adjustments and media control to overt voter intimidation and surveillance. The party leveraged fear, nationalism, and anti-Western propaganda to recast electoral choice as a stark, existential contest between national survival and foreign control.

Georgia is not the first country to follow this dangerous path. The blueprint, born in the Kremlin and haunting several European countries like a ghost, has become all too familiar: concentrating power, controlling media to shape public opinion, labeling critics as foreign agents, and using patriotism to silence questions and criticism. These are not mistakes that democracies make by accident, but intentional strategies adopted by modern autocrats.

The repercussions of these manipulated elections resonate far beyond Georgia's borders. At stake is not merely the future of one country, but the credibility of democratic governance in a geopolitically vital region. Georgia's fate will signal either a reaffirmation of democratic resilience or a troubling acceptance of electoral autocracy, setting a dangerous precedent for neighboring states caught between European aspirations and authoritarian influences.

This report is a call to action for international observers, EU policymakers, and democratic allies worldwide. If the global community is serious about defending democratic ideals, then confronting the theft of Georgia's democracy is not optional but essential. The choice made now will have mirror effect through the region, shaping the broader struggle between democratic openness and authoritarian repression.

CHAPTER 02

THE OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT

This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the manipulation and rigging of the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. It draws on extensive evidence from domestic and international election observation missions, media reports, and analyses from international organizations, including the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission).

The methodology involves synthesizing findings from these diverse sources to document the systematic erosion of democratic safeguards. This includes interviews with observers from the election monitoring coalition MyVote, who provided insights into the election-day atmosphere and the events occurring both inside and outside polling stations, contributing to a deeper understanding of the overall picture. The report examines the pre-election political context, the specific legal and institutional manipulations employed, the role of media, disinformation, the detailed mechanics of election day violations, the failure of justice institutions, and the statistical evidence that confirms widespread irregularities.

By comparing these methods with patterns observed in other countries experiencing democratic backsliding, the report contextualizes Georgia's situation within broader international trends. Ultimately, it aims to expose the methods employed to subvert the democratic will of the Georgian people and provides recommendations for restoring electoral integrity and Georgia's democratic path.

CHAPTER 03

DEMOCRACY'S FRONTLINE

Strategically situated in the South Caucasus region, Georgia has traditionally symbolized democratic resilience and liberty within a complicated geopolitical environment. Its ongoing quest for deeper ties with the European Union and NATO clearly reflects its alignment with Western democratic values, setting Georgia apart from many neighboring nations.

A significant and consistent majority of the Georgian population strongly favors European integration, clearly opting for democratic governance over alternative political systems.¹ In all essential aspects of democracy, such as freedom of assembly and association, the rule of law, human rights, and civil liberties, the Georgian people have continuously showcased their steadfast commitment. This strong public mandate positions Georgia as a crucial partner, closely aligned with European values cherished by its citizens. Thus, Europe's support is reinforced by a genuine public resolve – one that the people of Georgia have boldly upheld for many years.

Nonetheless, Georgia's democratic aspirations place it squarely in the midst of clashing geopolitical forces and internal challenges. The nation faces significant challenges, as illustrated by the 2024 elections, concerns about judicial independence, restrictions on media freedom, and increased pressure on civil society. These domestic challenges are further exacerbated by Russian authoritarian influences attempting to obstruct Georgia's Western trajectory and enhance regional dominance. Hence, Georgia's internal political stability is deeply linked to the broader global struggle between democratic principles and a resurgence of authoritarianism.

Why should the West pay attention to Georgia's path? Because the country's democratic future is a measure of the credibility and effectiveness of the European Union's enlargement strategies and the overall success of its Eastern Partnership initiative. The direction Georgia takes, whether toward strengthening democracy or sliding into authoritarianism, holds consequences that extend well beyond its borders, affecting regional stability and sending signals to neighboring countries about whether aligning with European values leads to genuine support and security.

A stable and democratic Georgia has the potential to bolster Europe's strategic interests, encourage positive democratic movements throughout the region, and enhance the resilience of democratic governance against authoritarian encroachments.

CHAPTER 04

VECTOR SHIFT: HOW GEORGIAN DREAM SET THE STAGE

4.1.

Declining democratic standards, rising authoritarianism, and populist

The geopolitical landscape in Georgia underwent a notable transformation following the onset of the war in Ukraine in 2022, which catalyzed the emergence of clear anti-Western and pro-Russian rhetoric. Before the Russian invasion, the Georgian Dream (GD) had been cautious in its public messaging. However, the war marked a significant turning point, as the party began openly disseminating Russian talking points through propaganda channels, official statements, and policy decisions, revealing a deeper ideological alignment.

The erosion of democratic values, the rise of authoritarianism, and the growth of populist nationalism are concerning trends worldwide. Regrettably, the results of Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections represented not only a setback for democracy but also a critical moment indicating a more troubling change in the nation's political direction. This change was not accidental; it stemmed from a strategic, years-long effort by the GD to reshape the political arena for its advantage.

The GD methodically undermined the pillars of democratic pluralism by employing a combination of institutional manipulation, legal tactics, and narrative control. Key elements of this reorientation included the weakening of judicial autonomy, the politicization of electoral institutions, and the diminishing space for media and civil society. Following the elections, these trends became even more pronounced.

The GD's stated policy of geopolitical pseudo-neutrality, justified by regional turmoil, the conflict in Ukraine, and perceived threats from Russia, was increasingly used to cloak the consolidation of authoritarian power. This neutrality did not represent a balanced or pragmatic foreign policy; instead, it functioned as a political tactic to distance Georgia from EU standards and values while reinforcing internal control. The decision to suspend the efforts to start the accession negotiations with the EU until 2028,² shortly after the elections, highlighted the superficial nature of pre-election promises regarding European integration.

This shift was significantly propelled by the GD's use of populist nationalism, which purposefully fostered narratives framing internal and external adversaries. It characterized Western allies as a "Global War Party"³ seeking to destabilize Georgia, while also branding domestic NGOs as "foreign agents" or traitors. This predominantly anti-Western rhetoric, despite Georgia's formal status as an EU candidate, was employed along with the exploitation of "traditional values", often illustrated through hostile rhetoric and legislative measures aimed at the LGBTQ+ community, to polarize the populace, cultivate a siege mentality, and legitimize increased governmental control as a means of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty and national identity.

4.2.

The Influence of Russian Law

The so-called Law of Georgia on Foreign Influence⁴ triggered massive public protests and resistance, but simultaneously provided GD with a political instrument to consolidate control ahead of the 2024 elections.

The law required NGOs and media outlets receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power." This label created a Stigmatizing effect, branding watchdog institutions and independent journalists as foreign agents in the public eye. GD employed this strategy to discredit critics and undermine the credibility of those who highlighted corruption, electoral manipulation, or human rights violations, effectively neutralizing oversight in the lead-up to the election.

Beyond political interests, the law was used to pressure civil society organizations. With the increased threat of penalties, many organizations were compelled to scale back their operations. This hindered the development of election monitoring efforts and restricted voter education initiatives, especially in regions.

By reintroducing the law six months before the election, GD shifted the political conversation away from governance failures, economic challenges, or democratic backsliding, and toward controlled debate about "sovereignty" and "foreign interference." This reframing shifted the focus of opposition messaging and public attention, compelling political parties to concentrate on resisting the law instead of launching electoral campaigns.

CHAPTER 05

LEGAL REFORMS AS A TOOL OF ELECTORAL CONTROL

In the run-up to Georgia's October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections, the political independence of electoral institutions was steadily eroded through targeted legal amendments and procedural changes. Rather than pursuing comprehensive reform that would enhance transparency and fairness, the Georgian Dream party opted for a piecemeal legislative strategy, introducing changes that were often abrupt and carried out in apparent disregard of recommendations from international actors, such as the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR.⁵

5.1.

Legal Barriers to Opposition Visibility and Cooperation

Legislative adjustments significantly limited the flexibility of opposition parties. Political parties were newly required to use only the official names specified in their charters for electoral purposes, removing the previous allowance to include party leaders' names on the ballot, a critical branding tool, especially for lesser-known parties. Furthermore, a new rule prohibited placing members of other political parties on a candidate list, which dealt a severe blow to opposition parties attempting to form broader alliances in the absence of electoral coalitions, given the high threshold.

5.2.

Introduction of “Delegate” System and Return to Majoritarian Dynamics

In May 2024, further amendments introduced the mechanism of designating list-based parliamentary candidates as “delegates” of specific electoral districts.⁶ Though the elections were based on a nationwide proportional system, this measure effectively reintroduced majoritarian dynamics by assigning candidates to districts that mirrored the pre-reform single-member constituencies. Under this model, a candidate could be presented as a delegate of a district and be recognized as such if their party received the most votes in that area, despite no direct link between district-level results and the allocation of mandates.

5.3.

Procedural Changes: Timing of PEC Role Assignments

On 16 August 2024, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC),⁷ Giorgi Kalandarishvili, issued a decree altering the timeline for allocating duties among members of the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). Under this new directive, drawing lots to assign specific roles within the PECs was required to occur no later than seven days before Election Day, rather than on Election Day itself, as previously practiced. The CEC justified this procedural adjustment by citing logistical challenges tied to the introduction of electronic voting, claiming that additional time might have been needed on election morning to prepare polling stations.

This change had significant implications for the integrity of the electoral process. Allowing the early disclosure of each PEC member's specific responsibilities created an opportunity for GD to exert targeted influence in the lead-up to election day. This shift deepened concerns regarding the neutrality of the electoral administration.

5.4.

Abolition of Gender Quotas

In April 2024, the Georgian Parliament removed mandatory gender quotas for candidates on parliamentary and local self-government lists. This decision was widely criticized by civil society⁸ and international organizations⁹ as a step backward for gender equality. While presented by GD as a “correction” to a now-unnecessary mechanism, the political context revealed an explicit quid pro quo between the ruling party and the Girchi party. Specifically, Girchi initiated the legislative proposal to abolish the quotas. In exchange, Girchi voted in favor of the Georgian Dream-backed candidates for CEC chairperson and professional members - votes that were critical for the GD to push through their preferred nominees without broader consensus.¹⁰ This agreement strengthened Georgian Dream's control over election administration while undermining an essential legal safeguard for women's political participation.

5.5.

Preservation of High Electoral Threshold

Despite the formal transition to a fully proportional electoral system in 2024, which should have marked a milestone in Georgia's democratic development, the changes implemented in the lead-up to the vote served to reinforce the Georgian Dream's grip on power. A critical example was the preservation of a high % electoral threshold at 5%, which directly contradicted the 2021 EU-mediated Charles Michel Agreement¹¹, which had envisioned reducing the threshold to 2% to allow for broader political representation. This decision, coupled with the continued prohibition of electoral blocs, significantly hindered the electoral chances of smaller and emerging parties, restricting political diversity and entrenching the dominance of larger players.

CHAPTER 06

INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE AND TAKEOVER OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

6.1.

From Temporary to Full Control of the CEC

The systematic undermining of the Central Election Commission's (CEC) independence by the Georgian Dream was clearly illustrated by their efforts to appoint Giorgi Kalandarishvili as Chairperson of the CEC. In February 2024, GD amended the Election Code, shifting the power to nominate the CEC Chair and its members from the President, who opposed this change, to the Speaker of the Parliament. This move directly opened the way for Kalandarishvili's long-term appointment.

Kalandarishvili first took on the role in August 2021¹² during a time of opposition boycott¹³ and was reappointed every six months without obtaining support from opposition parties. This contradicted the EU-mediated April 19 agreement, which required a supermajority for full-term appointments.¹⁴

President Salome Zurbishvili had the authority to veto these legislative changes and did so, but the parliament overrode her veto in March 2024.¹⁵ This chain of events culminated on April 30, 2024, when Kalandarishvili, notably the only candidate in the race, was appointed to a full five-year term. His appointment not only highlights the strategic bid by the Georgian Dream party to consolidate power over Georgia's electoral administration but also emphasizes their determination to ensure Kalandarishvili's leadership.

6.2.

Removal of the Deputy Chair and Simplified Control within the CEC

Further amendments abolished the position of CEC deputy chair, a role traditionally filled by an opposition nominee, and simplified the commission's internal decision-making rules by allowing key decisions to be adopted by a simple majority. These changes weakened pluralism within the CEC, diminished checks on partisan control, and created a structure in which a single-party majority could dominate the electoral oversight process.¹⁶

6.3.

Politicization of District and Precinct Commissions

The selection process for professional members of District and Precinct Election Commissions unfolded within a politically skewed and low-competitive environment. As the OSCE/ODIHR reported, the pool of candidates was "limited, with only one per cent surplus at the PEC level, resulting in minimal competition for most vacant posts."¹⁷

Appointees were frequently elected via simple majority votes, often employed in public institutions or other entities funded by the budget. Instances where opposition-appointed members of District Election Commissions were obstructed in their participation underscored legal rights violations and highlighted the entrenchment of partisanship within the electoral framework. As noted by OSCE/ODIHR, "the election administration's decision-making at times lacked collegiality, with opposition members reporting insufficient information sharing and marginalization."¹⁸

To sum up, in the face of declining public support and uncertainty brought by the transition to a fully proportional electoral system, Georgian Dream's strategic control over election commissions appears to have been designed to mitigate the risks of electoral defeat. As OSCE/ODIHR concluded, "allegations of ruling-party affiliation at all levels further eroded public trust."¹⁹ In an environment where the judiciary is perceived as politically compromised and civil society organizations face increasing pressure, the ruling party's grip on election administration has become a critical lever for consolidating and retaining power.

CHAPTER 07

NO VOICE FOR CITIZENS IN A CONTROLLED MEDIA NARRATIVE

In the 2024 elections, the media became a tool of domination rather than a platform for dialogue. Instead of amplifying citizens' concerns and everyday struggles, Georgian Dream (GD) weaponized media channels to enforce a controlled narrative, disseminate propaganda, and silence dissent.

The media landscape was characterized by sharp polarization, with major outlets often perceived as aligned with either the GD or the opposition.²⁰ This polarization intensified as Georgian Dream actively boycotted critical media outlets, refusing to participate in their news programs or debates, while pro-government media reciprocated by excluding key opposition voices. This limited voters' access to diverse perspectives.²¹

While legally mandated to be impartial, the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) showed bias in its coverage. Although its tone towards all candidates was mainly neutral or positive, it devoted a significantly disproportionate amount of airtime, 61% in news coverage, to the GD party, effectively amplifying the government's message.²² Commercial television stations, particularly those aligned with Georgian Dream, such as Imedi (82%) and Rustavi 2 (80%), functioned overtly as propaganda arms. They exhibited clear political bias, broadcasting overwhelmingly positive coverage of Georgian Dream and negative coverage of the opposition.²³ These outlets engaged in large-scale, often undeclared, advertising campaigns promoting the GD party and discrediting opponents, blurring the line between media and political actors.

Furthermore, the media regulator, the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), demonstrated bias and political instrumentalization, often making decisions favoring the GD party's interests and penalizing critical media. This included questionable interpretations of campaign regulations and sanctions against broadcasters that hindered opposition campaigning efforts.²⁴

CHAPTER 08

PROPAGANDA AND ENEMY CONSTRUCTION

8.1.

FRAMING THE ELECTIONS AS A BATTLE FOR NATIONAL SURVIVAL

Throughout the pre-election period, GD consistently framed the upcoming voting day not as a choice between competing visions of governance, but as a referendum on national survival. In a statement²⁵ published on August 20, 2024, the Georgian Dream Political Council posed the issue as follows: "The 2024 parliamentary elections are a kind of referendum where the Georgian people must finally decide whether they choose war or peace, whether they choose moral degradation or traditional values, whether they choose Georgia's slavish dependence on external forces or whether they choose an independent and sovereign state, whether they choose the collective "National Movement" or whether they choose the "Georgian Dream"."

Georgian Dream rejected democratic discourse, choosing instead to divide society into two factions: those who were "with the nation" and those who were "against it." This approach also helped GD to shift the focus away from pressing issues such as poverty and socio-economic challenges.

8.2.

Weaponizing War-Driven Fear

GD introduced a second, equally powerful tactic: using fear driven by war as a weapon. Its narrative did not merely portray the elections as necessary; it described them as a literal referendum between war and peace. Voters were warned, in increasingly stark terms, that a vote for the opposition was a vote for national destruction. GD officials constructed images of chaos, suffering, and devastation, suggesting that if Georgian Dream were not granted overwhelming support, Georgia would share Ukraine's tragic fate.

This narrative was reinforced through a billboard campaign and contrasted images of war-torn Ukraine with peaceful scenes in Georgia. The tragedy of the Ukrainian people was explicitly used for electoral purposes.



The photo shows a church destroyed by bombing in the village of Bohorodichne, Donetsk region, and on the right is a color photo of the Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi.

In addition to billboard campaigns, GD produced a video featuring footage from Ukraine, contrasting the peace in Georgia with the ongoing conflict on the battlefields.²⁶ On October 5, 2024, three television channels, Mtavari Arkhi, Formula, and TV Pirveli, issued a statement announcing that, despite the expected fines, they would not air the videos. Subsequently, on October 9, the Communications Commission imposed a fine of 5,000 GEL on each of the three channels.²⁷

In this climate, Georgian Dream replaced political choice with emotional blackmail. Voting ceased to be a civic duty or a reflection of policy preferences; it became a test of loyalty, framed as a matter of national survival. The party cast every ballot against it as a threat to the country's stability and a step toward national ruin.



The main message on all billboards was: Choose peace (41 Georgian Dream) - no to war (opposition parties: 4 - "Coalition for Change," 5 - "Unity-National Movement," 9 - "Coalition Strong Georgia," and 25 - Party "Gakharia for Georgia").

8.3.

Inventing Enemies: The Many Shades of the "Global War Party"

Once they had seeded fear, Georgian Dream needed enemies to sustain it. "Global War Party" (GWP) was consequently invented. The GD constructed a villain, so elastic that it could be an invisible force behind everything if it opposed the Party's interests. They portrayed the GWP as a secretive syndicate whose membership gradually expanded to include the European Parliament, the U.S. administration, and foreign ambassadors. Even the Freemasons could be occasional guests in the GWP, as one GD MP was kind enough to explain to the public.²⁸ Over time, the Global War Party also became associated with the American military-industrial complex and corporations such as BlackRock and Vanguard.²⁹

The core narrative surrounding the GWP focused on opening a "second front" to destabilize Georgia and provoke military conflict with Russia.³⁰ The party emphasized that external forces, in collaboration with internal enemies, conspired to establish this front. According to GD, these foreign actors aimed to undermine Georgia's stability, drag it into a war with Russia, and threaten its sovereignty.³¹ Peace was presented as fragile, dependent on Georgian Dream's continued control to prevent chaos.

GD divided enemies into two categories. It claimed that both groups were linked to the Global War party, suggesting they were carrying out directives aimed at destabilizing the country and inciting unrest within its borders.

The first group consisted of opposition parties, collectively referred to as the "Collective National Movement."³² This coalition sought to portray the entire political opposition as a single, undermined entity. In an official communication, GD stated, "Immediately upon obtaining a constitutional majority, we will initiate legal proceedings to declare the United National Movement and all its satellite and successor parties unconstitutional."³³ This declaration underscored not just political rivalry but also outlined a plan to dismantle the opposition parties.

The second category of domestic enemies comprised civil society organizations, which GD characterized as "foreign agents" acting at the behest of external forces to destabilize Georgia. GD's narrative accused these organizations of orchestrating "revolutionary scenarios" and blamed international actors for shielding domestic "criminals".

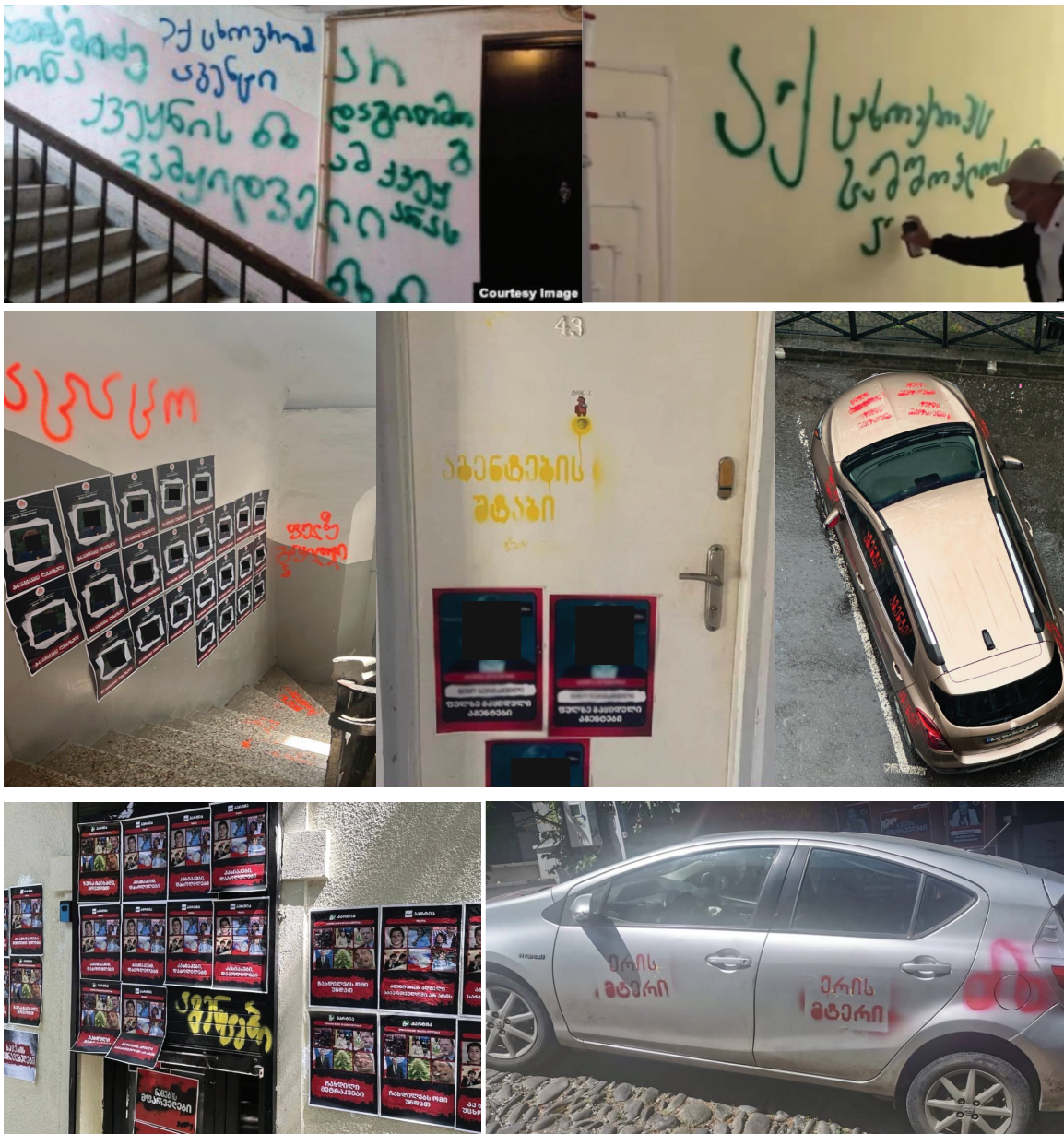
8.4.

Attacking Liberal Values as Threats to National Identity and Sovereignty

At the beginning of May 2024, graffiti and posters appeared on the walls of NGO offices and near the homes and entrances of human rights advocates, journalists, and politicians. It was part of a hate campaign organized by the GD targeting these individuals because of their protest against the "Russian law."

GD openly called human rights organizations as vectors of "pseudo-liberal ideology" whose real aim was to "produce slaves of the lowest grade that can be easily manipulated".³⁷ Here, civil activism, LGBTQ+ rights, and even educational reforms were rolled up as part of an existential assault on Georgian identity, morality, and sovereignty.

Through this relentless construction of enemies, Georgian Dream justified its demand for a constitutional majority, arguing that only by permanently eliminating its opponents could it "save" democracy and national sovereignty. By redefining dissent as treason and labeling opposition as criminality, Georgian Dream weaponized democratic institutions against democratic competition itself. This transformed the election into a project of political purification rather than a genuine choice.



offensive and hate-filled graffiti and posters such as "traitor", "agent" and "enemy of the nation" on the homes and vehicles of CSO representatives

8.5.

The Silence on Russian Interference but Loud Against the West

While Georgian Dream warned that opposition parties were plotting with Western backing to “open a second front” and drag Georgia into war with Russia, it remained silent when Russia itself launched a coordinated campaign of disinformation targeting Georgia’s electoral process.

In August and September 2024, Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) accused the United States of orchestrating electoral interference in Georgia through the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission. The allegations, absurd yet strategic, painted ODIHR as a puppet of American intelligence, preparing the ground for a post-election “color revolution.”³⁸ These accusations mirrored the rhetoric GD had already entrenched in the domestic information space, casting foreign support, international monitoring, and civic engagement as existential threats to Georgian sovereignty.

GD’s lack of response was intentional and consistent with its broader political messaging. For months, the GD had depicted Western engagement as interference, cast civil society as foreign-controlled, and positioned itself as the sole guarantor of peace and sovereignty. The refusal to condemn the SVR’s statements was, therefore, not a lapse in foreign policy but a deliberate alignment with the Kremlin’s framing.

CHAPTER 09

HOW GEORGIAN DREAM ENGINEERED THE CONDITIONS FOR A RIGGED ELECTION

Pre-Election Manipulations

Georgian Dream did not rig the 2024 parliamentary elections in a single day—they executed a systemic, multi-phase operation that deliberately blurred the line between state and party. Although observers widely documented serious violations on election day, those abuses did not occur in isolation. They culminated from an electoral process the party had structurally compromised long before the vote. By illegally profiling voters, pressuring socially vulnerable groups, confiscating identity documents, and operating precinct-level call centers, Georgian Dream built a centralized system of behavioral control. These tactics shattered the foundations of electoral integrity and turned voting from an act of democratic choice into a choreographed performance of compliance under surveillance.

9.1.

A Centralized System of Turnout Monitoring and Control

The system of electoral control operated through three mechanisms that functioned in sequence and reinforced one another:

1

A Secret Voter Profiling Network

an illegally constructed database used to track, categorize, and influence voter decisions and their free will.

2

The Pressure

applied through surveillance, oppression, threats, and ID confiscation.

3

A Network of Precinct Call Centers

served as operational units to enforce turnout and report real-time updates to the party’s central headquarters.

These components worked together and formed a centralized command structure that transformed Georgia's electoral process into a monitored and manipulated event. To fully comprehend how election day violations unfolded, with breaches of vote secrecy, voter intimidation, manipulation of turnout, and unlawful presence of unauthorized actors, it is crucial to unpack the systems that made such abuses not only possible but inevitable. Let's take a closer look at the mechanisms.

9.1.1.

A Secret Voter Profiling Network

With the creation of an extensive voter profiling system and leveraging access to state databases, the Georgian Dream compiled detailed dossiers on citizens, including sensitive categories of personal data, such as employment status, social benefits ever received from the government, health records, criminal records, and political affiliations.³⁹ This data allowed the party to categorize voters based on their perceived loyalty and susceptibility to influence.

The investigation revealed that Georgian Dream obtained personal data through collaborations with various government institutions, including the Ministries of Health, Justice, Education, Internal Affairs, and the Central Election Commission.⁴⁰ Particularly concerning was the party's focus on identifying voters who had emigrated yet remained on the electoral roll, potentially paving the way for misusing their identities during elections.

Georgian Dream collected the data through party activists, local coordinators, and individuals linked to state institutions.⁴¹ Sensitive personal information, such as health, criminal, and social records, was allegedly provided by ministries and enriched by "influential persons" like school principals or officials assigned to monitor and influence voters.⁴²

Crucially, this was not a new tactic. A joint study by ISFED and Transparency International Georgia revealed that from 2018 to 2020, Georgian Dream ran a large-scale, coercive voter mobilization scheme. ⁴³Leaked documents showed that state institutions, including law enforcement and public agencies, were systematically used to collect personal data, especially on employees of budget-funded organizations. Georgian Dream did not simply monitor individuals—they profiled them to identify vulnerabilities and used those pressure points to exert electoral control. High-ranking party officials offered legal and administrative favors in exchange for votes, including lifting conditional sentences, arranging early prison releases, and reinstating driver's licenses. They coerced many into compliance by tying political loyalty to job security or legal status. The scheme reached beyond individuals to their families, targeting the relatives of probationers and convicts, and pulling them into a system where votes were not earned through persuasion, but extracted through fear and dependence.

9.1.2.

The Pressure

As the election date drew nearer, Georgian Dream employed various tactics to pressure voters and manipulate electoral behavior. These methods were particularly targeted at vulnerable populations and often involved exploiting state resources and institutional networks. The key forms of pressure included:

- **Aggressive Voter Outreach and Monitoring through Public Servants**
- **Exploiting Social and Economic Vulnerability**
- **Confiscation of Identity Documents (ID cards)**

Aggressive Voter Outreach and Monitoring through Public Servants.

Those responsible for mobilizing voters started outreaching activities via phone calls, chats, emails, and, at times, in-person visits. Initially, these reminders were delivered in a gentle manner; however, they increasingly adopted a more assertive tone. The key message conveyed to voters underscored the importance of their participation in the electoral process.

Journalistic investigations revealed how the Georgian Dream directed public servants to compile a list of family members who intended to vote for their party.⁴⁴ The instructions specified that the so-called responsible person had to include parents, siblings, children, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, godparents, godchildren, and anyone regarded as a close friend or relative. Furthermore, the responsible public servant was required to ensure that each listed individual participated in the elections.⁴⁵

Exploiting Social and Economic Vulnerability

One of the most widespread tactics used by the Georgian Dream was exploiting economic dependence to ensure political loyalty.⁴⁶ Citizens who depended on state benefits, such as pensions, housing support, subsidies, or even public employment, were repeatedly warned directly and indirectly that failure to vote for the Georgian Dream could result in losing this support or jobs.⁴⁷ These threats were often communicated informally through municipal workers, social service intermediaries, or party-affiliated persons.⁴⁸

This climate of fear turned political choice into a survival calculation. The threat did not always need to be spoken aloud; for many, especially those in vulnerable socioeconomic positions, dependency on the state became a tool of political control. Civic participation was no longer free - it was conditional, transactional, and shaped by fear.

Confiscation of Identity Documents (ID cards).

Another alarming pattern observed during the 2024 pre-election period in Georgia was the seizure of voters' identity documents. This tactic gravely undermined the principles of free suffrage, personal autonomy, and electoral secrecy.

Incidents documented by Transparency International Georgia revealed that confiscating identity documents was neither isolated nor sporadic but indicative of an organized and deliberate campaign. In Zugdidi, individuals suspected of having opposition sympathies were pressured to surrender their ID documents.⁴⁹ These actions were carried out under the pretext of securing votes but, in effect, amounted to coercion and voter surveillance. In Rustavi, investigative journalism exposed that cleaning service employees had their identity documents collected by supervisors allegedly acting on instructions from Georgian Dream headquarters.⁵⁰ Workers were aware of the handover, and group leaders confirmed their involvement, suggesting an institutionalized method of mass ID collection.⁵¹

There were cases where ID cards were taken from individuals with disabilities under threat.⁵² The night before the election, an employee of the Gomi village administration of Samtredia region approached a family of four, who had members with disabilities, and demanded their ID cards while threatening physical violence.

9.1.3.

A Network of Precinct Call Centers

On election day, Georgian Dream established call centers near polling stations as close as 200 to 400 meters away. It is still under review why call centers had to be located within a certain distance from polling stations, despite suspicions that voter activity was monitored live by cameras placed at those locations.⁵³

According to the obtained information, these centers were intended to register voters who cast a ballot. They were operating through a specific program, www.sheavse.ge, accessible only via certain IP addresses. The personnel of call centers included:

- **“Captains”**
- **Call center operators (who worked with the program)**
- **Contact persons (telephone operators)**

Additionally, a group of individuals known as Responsible Persons, appointed by the Georgian Dream, were required to promptly inform the contact persons in the call centers about the voters they had brought to the precincts, based on a pre-compiled list. Upon receiving information from the Responsible Persons, the contact persons in the centers put the names and surnames of voters on the relevant list, marked them, and recorded the unique code of each voter on a small piece of paper. They then handed this paper to the call center operator assigned to the program. The call center operator entered the unique number into the appropriate field of the program, filtered the results, and marked the respective name and surname.

GD people from headquarters desperately requested that all call center staff refrain from answering any calls without proper authorization. They feared that the call center scheme would be revealed: “I kindly ask you to take it into account, and do not answer any unfamiliar people and do not provide information...These processes have already begun, and you know how it happens. Please take all this into account and be careful...”⁵⁴

The audio recordings also reveal that Georgian Dream compensated call center employees with cash rather than utilizing bank transfers, which could suggest an attempt to conceal the total expenditure and its source.⁵⁵

9.2.

Abuse of administrative resources

The 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia were marked by the Georgian Dream's large-scale and systemic abuse of administrative resources. The distinction between the state and the Georgian Dream was effectively erased. The GD elite mobilized public institutions, state funds, and civil servants to consolidate its electoral advantage, creating an environment of profound inequality among electoral competitors. This sub-chapter outlines the main mechanisms of administrative resource abuse that shaped the pre-election landscape:

9.2.1.

Electorally-Motivated State Programs

From the beginning of 2024, Georgian Dream launched a series of state-funded programs and initiatives to provide citizens with material benefits in the lead-up to the elections. These programs were timed strategically to build electoral loyalty and included:

- **Increases in pensions for former law enforcement officers (November 2023);⁵⁶**
- **Reduction of loan interest rates for pensioners (February 2024);⁵⁷**
- **Forgiveness of outstanding tax arrears for thousands of taxpayers (April 2024);⁵⁸**
- **Write-offs of COVID-19-related fines (June 2024);⁵⁹**
- **Increases in teacher salaries nationwide (June 2024);⁶⁰**
- **Paid internship programs for university graduates (July 2024);⁶¹**

These measures were framed as social policies, but in practice, they operated as covert electoral mobilization tools, providing direct benefits to large and politically significant segments of the population.

9.2.2.

Use of Budgetary Allocations for Political Gain

In July 2024, the government decreed an additional 20 million GEL allocation under the "Promoting Citizen Engagement" initiative.⁶² Every municipality received 100,000 GEL.⁶³ Although nominally framed as an effort to promote civic participation, the timing, scale, and absence of substantive programming made it clear that the real goal was to enhance local Georgian Dream networks in the final months before elections.

9.2.3.

Amnesty Law as a Political Instrument

Another key example of politically motivated state action was the adoption of the Law on Amnesty, which released or reduced the sentences of individuals convicted of certain crimes.⁶⁴ This amnesty targeted 4,839 prisoners, with 1,000 individuals eligible for immediate release and approximately 7,000 probationers receiving a one-year reduction in their conditional sentences.⁶⁵ Although this pre-election amnesty initiative was positioned as a humanitarian act, it functioned in reality as another attempt to generate gratitude and electoral support.

9.2.4.

Politicization of State Events and the Instrumentalization of Public Sector Employees

Georgian Dream engaged in a systematic strategy of politicizing state-organized events and mobilizing public sector employees for electoral purposes. Candidates nominated by Georgian Dream were routinely featured at public events funded by the state budget. Infrastructure inaugurations, awards distributions, and various state-sponsored gatherings were leveraged to give GD party candidates privileged exposure.⁶⁶ These events, formally presented as neutral governmental activities, functioned de facto as campaign platforms, enabling candidates to deliver political speeches and engage directly with voters under the auspices of public institutions.

Simultaneously, the GD party implemented large-scale mobilization of public sector employees to create the appearance of mass support at campaign events.⁶⁷ Employees of public schools, kindergartens, municipal bodies, and legal entities of public law were directed to attend rallies and meetings organized by Georgian Dream.⁶⁸ These mobilizations frequently occurred during official working hours, with public resources utilized to facilitate transportation and attendance, including from neighboring municipalities. Attendance was not voluntary but often organized through institutional hierarchies, exerting implicit pressure on employees dependent on public sector employment.⁶⁹

Furthermore, official social media accounts administered by state institutions and administrative bodies were utilized to disseminate content favorable to the GD party, thereby violating the principle of political neutrality in public administration.⁷⁰ Although these activities constituted apparent infringements of established electoral standards, the election administration's response to documented complaints, including those submitted by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), was markedly inadequate. No comprehensive investigations were conducted, and the violations were effectively disregarded, contravening domestic legal obligations and international commitments to safeguard the impartiality of state resources during electoral processes.⁷¹

9.3.

Limited Out-of-Country Registration

The 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia presented significant challenges for citizens residing abroad who sought to exercise their right to vote. While the Central Election Commission (CEC) is responsible for establishing polling stations abroad, the mechanisms employed prior to the elections proved inadequate in ensuring effective access.

Under Georgian legislation, polling stations abroad must be organized to serve a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 3,000 registered voters. Historically, the CEC has confined such stations to diplomatic and consular premises. For the 2024 elections, the Commission authorized 67 polling stations across 53 cities in 42 countries⁷² - a numerical increase from the previous 2020 elections.⁷³ In total, 95,910 voters were registered to participate through these overseas facilities.⁷⁴

However, the process faced significant controversy. Many Georgian citizens living abroad called for the establishment of additional polling stations in cities with large diaspora populations that lacked official diplomatic missions.⁷⁵ Despite precise demands supported by evidence of consular registration, the CEC chairperson formally dismissed these appeals on September 5, 2024. Efforts to challenge this decision through legal channels proved unsuccessful. Complaints submitted by ISFED were filed seeking to compel the CEC to expand the number of polling stations, but in favor of the CEC.⁷⁶

These developments reveal an overarching failure by both the CEC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to demonstrate proactive engagement with the diaspora's electoral rights. While technically compliant with basic legal obligations, the approach fell short of fulfilling the broader principle of universal suffrage. Many citizens abroad were effectively deprived of the opportunity to participate due to the absence of accessible polling stations, particularly in regions with substantial Georgian communities but no diplomatic coverage.

Additionally, many displaced Georgian citizens (IDPs) living abroad were excluded from voting, even though they were registered with consulates. Because they had no actual address in Georgia-controlled territory, they were left out of the voter list and denied the right to participate.⁷⁷

This shortcoming highlights a critical gap between the formal structures of electoral management and the substantive guarantees required for a genuinely inclusive election process. As documented further in the Election Day analysis, the limited overseas voting infrastructure contributed to the disenfranchisement of a significant segment of Georgia's electorate.

9.4.

Targeting of Civil Society by the Anti-Corruption Bureau

One month before the elections, while non-governmental organizations were preparing for their election observation missions, the Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia (ACB) initiated proceedings against one of the most prominent NGOs operating in Georgia - Transparency International Georgia, along with their employees and founders, by designating them as entities with a “declared electoral goal.”⁷⁸

The ACB is responsible for monitoring the financial activities of political parties and individuals who publicly declare electoral goals, meaning they aim to gain political power by running in elections.⁷⁹

In TIG's case, the ACB went far beyond what the law allowed. It claimed that Transparency International Georgia and its director had “declared electoral goals,” despite neither having ever expressed any intention to run for the election. There was no public statement, no campaign activity, and no attempt to influence elections in a way that would justify such an aim.

The OSCE/ODIHR considered this issue to be an interpretation of rules concerning third-party campaigning that could potentially jeopardize freedom of expression.⁸⁰ In response to substantial criticism from both local⁸¹ and international⁸² stakeholders, and following a statement from Transparency International Georgia⁸³ indicating that they would be unable to observe the elections due to a decision made by the ACB, the Prime Minister urged the head of the ACB on October 1 to reconsider this decision and avoid making such designations during the campaign period.⁸⁴ On 2 October, the ACB revoked all related decisions, citing “national interests.”⁸⁵

CHAPTER 10

ELECTION DAY

On October 26, 2024, voters across Georgia headed to the polls with the expectation of casting a free and fair ballot. What unfolded instead left deep cracks in that promise. Something far more coordinated and unsettling was at play. What was meant to be a democratic process began to resemble something else entirely.

10.1.

A Massive Violation of Vote Secrecy and Free Will

What occurred on election day was more than just a technical flaw; it represented the largest violation of vote secrecy in Georgia's democratic history. This incident turned marked ballots into open declarations, as ink bled through, cameras monitored too closely, and ruling party operatives transformed polling stations into sites of abuse.

Recognizing how this happened is not just about looking back - it is about being equipped to recognize it if it happens again. A clear understanding of these methods is essential for knowing what to watch for at the polls and how to respond when the basic promise of a secret vote is quietly dismantled before your eyes.

10.1.1.

Ink Bleed-Through on Ballots

A personal choice made at polling stations turned into a public statement on election day. Thousands of voters unknowingly exposed their preferences, not by accident, but due to a systemic, fundamental breach. In all 2,263 precincts where technologies were used, the design of the ballots failed to protect voter anonymity, breaking the most fundamental promise of any democratic election: the secrecy of the vote.

The problem was severe but straightforward: the ink used to mark the ballots bled through, leaving dark spots on the back of

the ballots. As voters placed their completed ballots into ballot boxes, anyone nearby could detect whether a person voted for the GD or the opposition party. It did not matter whether the paper was too thin or the marker too strong: the result was the same - secrecy was compromised at scale. "It was very clear who was voting for whom; you could see the leaked ink. I've said it a dozen times - people, secrecy is not maintained, it's obvious - but not a single ballot was abolished," said an observer from Batumi.

Some voters believed they had caused the problem themselves, having pressed too hard or used a faulty marker.⁸⁶ In reality, the issue was systemic and built into the very design of the voting materials. The responsibility lay with the authorities who failed to prevent a known and fixable risk.

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) had flagged this issue months before the election, during a training session conducted by the Central Election Commission (CEC). On September 28, after GYLA formally requested a remedy, the CEC responded:⁸⁷ "The ballot paper used at the [educational and informational] meetings is a test version... the quality of the paper used on Election Day will be different, which will ensure the protection of secrecy."

The CEC promise was not fulfilled. Later, during a court experiment conducted by Judge Vladimir Khuchua in Tetritskaro, a CEC representative intentionally deviated from official procedures⁸⁸ to hide the ink visibility when demonstrating how ballots were placed - an attempt to cover up the breach of secrecy, even though the ink was still clearly visible.

Six months after the vote, on April 29, the CEC announced it would install special covers over ballot box openings to prevent future exposure of marked ballots. While framed as a technical adjustment based on OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, the decision was, in effect, a de facto admission that secrecy had not been maintained during the election.⁸⁹

10.1.2.

Controlling the Will of the Voter

The leaked ballots were not an isolated breach. A range of infractions at the polling station revealed systemic failures that deeply compromised the integrity of the entire voting process.

According to the "My Vote" coalition, violations of voting confidentiality were recorded in 365 out of 1,200 polling stations. These included voters being followed into the booths, party representatives or election officials observing the votes, and cameras positioned to allow ballot choices to be seen.⁹⁰

An observer at one of the polling stations in Batumi recounted her efforts to minimize electoral violations, filing numerous complaints. However, she believes that the election's outcome was predetermined: "Near the voting booth, behind it was a chair occupied by a representative of the Dream Party. He was monitoring the booth and occasionally taking photos of voters. There was an incident where he entered the polling station with an elderly person, and later, when this person voted, he told him he had done what the representative instructed. I also witnessed this man going outside to meet two GD representatives, who were bringing in voters, and he guided them to the polling station."

In the Marneuli region, where significant violations of election rules were observed, an interviewed observer recalled that there was complete control at the polling station: "Everyone's ballot was checked and controlled, citing reasons such as voters being persons with disabilities or elderly individuals".

ISFED documented cases of allegedly controlling voters' will. In some cases, registrars instructed voters to circle the concrete party. The representatives of the electoral subject encouraged voters to cast their votes for their preferred political party. In several polling stations, there was a mark in front of the electoral subject on the ballot. Additionally, Voters were seen photographing or filming their ballots, whether voluntarily or under pressure, clearly undermining vote secrecy. While assisting voters, Commission members often removed ballots from secrecy sleeves before scanning, revealing the vote. In other cases, voters displayed their completed ballots or voted outside the booths without receiving a warning from the Commission.⁹¹

10.1.3.

Gathering of Unauthorized and Unknown Individuals at the Precinct and Nearby

The presence of unauthorized and unfamiliar individuals near and inside polling stations played a central role in shaping a climate of manipulation during the 2024 parliamentary elections. These individuals were directly linked to the call centers operated by the Georgian Dream (see sub-chapter 9.1.3), and their roles varied widely. Some acted as "Responsible Persons," while others were tasked with counting voters using lists from the Voter Profiling Network (see sub-chapter 9.1.1). Some were involved in "Carousel"; others served as escorts to the polling station, while some aimed to create a hostile and intimidating atmosphere at the polling location.

Audio recordings obtained by TV Pirveli journalists indicated the GD central office was concerned about the number of voters being brought in and the significant disparity in voter turnout. They needed to respond quickly to avoid any mistakes and ensure they followed their planned strategy:

The responsible Persons are very slow in providing us with information... It is extremely important to provide us with information about the citizens from their list who they brought to the election precincts... We are somewhat blind; we have about a 30% lag... Without this information, we may make a mistake, be too late, and suffer the consequences..."⁹²

ISFED revealed suspicious gatherings of persons at 38% of polling stations, voter registration by coordinators at 31% of polling stations, and organized transportation of voters at 19% of locations.⁹³

Analysis of interviews conducted with observers of the MyVote observation mission

- Mobilize and direct voters to specific polling stations.
- Accompany voters to the entrances or inside to oversee the process.
- Instruct individuals on how to vote, sometimes under the pretext of being relatives or assistants.
- Operate in parallel with Georgian Dream's call center infrastructure, often maintaining close communication with individuals stationed in nearby vehicles.
- Collaborate with members of fake local observation missions.

Observers reported that in several cases, those individuals operated with a level of impunity, moving freely between indoor and outdoor areas of the polling stations, often without being challenged by election officials. One observer recounted a disturbing scene: *"These individuals almost physically assaulted a journalist in my precinct. Meanwhile, a little further away, the governor's wife and her friends were seated in a minivan with a list of votes and were controlling voter flow... By the end of the day, even more had gathered in the neighborhood, causing me to feel extremely stressed."*

An observer from the Gori polling station reported seeing individuals holding a coded list that contained unique numbers. These numbers had been entered into a program by call center operators to track voters at the polling station. The observer noted, *"Two representatives from the Georgian Dream party were present, assisting voters in casting their ballots. These same individuals were holding a list in their hands and making marks on it. When I requested to see the list, I received one with special codes; it was a coded list."*

These actors disrupted the electoral process's orderly functioning and contributed to a broader atmosphere of psychological pressure in which voters and observers felt closely monitored and unsafe. Their strategic presence functioned as a tool of control, intended to influence turnout and voting choices in favor of the GD party.

10.2. Modern Election "Carousel"

The so-called "Election Carousel," a ghost of the authoritarian past, returned in Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections - this time with an upgrade.

With all the finesse of a state-sponsored heist, Georgian Dream operatives managed to break every safeguard designed to prevent multiple voting. It was a four-step fraud, where each checkpoint, typically intended to ensure electoral integrity, was repurposed as a revolving door for illegal ballots. The Scheme worked in the following way:

STEP 1

The Open Door to Carousel Fraud

The carousel began at the polling station's entrance, breaching the ink-checking procedure designed to prevent individuals from voting twice.

Flow controllers failed to check voters for ink marks before granting entry, while in others, the checks were superficial or entirely omitted. In some instances, voters with visible ink marks were allowed to vote again after offering implausible explanations, such as staining from fruit. There were also cases where groups of voters with apparent ink traces entered polling stations and were permitted to vote after exerting pressure on election officials. Technical malfunctions further facilitated breaches: ultraviolet lamps used to detect ink were nonfunctional, emitted weak light, or ceased working midday. In one polling station, a previously inked individual successfully re-entered and passed undetected. Observers also reported ink marks fading within a few hours, making detection nearly impossible.⁹⁴

An observer of Marneuli recalled that the ink-checking procedure was entirely skipped at the polling station where he was stationed. When questioned, the commission members said there was no need because they trusted each other.

STEP 2

ID Forgery

Due to insufficient identity verification and weak security measures at registrar desks, forgers managed to register using someone else's personal identification number (PIN).

This manipulation occurred in various ways:

- **Someone else's personal identification number was written on paper and placed inside the passport.⁹⁵**
- **Another personal identification number was attached to the ID card.⁹⁶**
- **A photo of an ID card on the phone was presented to the registrar.⁹⁷**

Additionally, GYLA reported several attempts to vote using improper identification. In one instance, a father used his son's ID card to cast his vote. In another case, a man attempted to vote with his wife's ID card. A man also tried to use a woman's ID card to vote. Furthermore, another individual attempted to vote using someone else's identification card. Beyond the misuse of IDs, there were also cases involving expired identification.⁹⁸

STEP 3

Breaking the Inking Barrier

The inking was either not applied correctly or not applied at all.

This allowed individuals who had already voted, or those impersonating others, to re-enter the station as if they were new voters. In the Gori region, one observer reported a confrontational response from commission members when she attempted to intervene after they failed to ink voters correctly. Instead of correcting the mistake, the officials responded with hostility, questioning her legitimacy: "How do you know what the rules are?!" In a disturbing escalation, one member threatened her, stating: "I will bathe you in this liquid."

Another observer from the same area highlighted the ineffectiveness of the inking, noting: "They sprayed ink on me, and there was no visible difference." When she raised concerns, commission members dismissed her remarks with sarcasm, replying: "Oh, I forgot."

ISFED identified violations of the inking procedures in 9% of polling stations nationwide. Notably, this election marked the first time that commission members were reported to have asked voters whether they wanted to be inked, a clear departure from the mandatory protocol. The MyVote coalition identified 153 precincts out of 1,200 where voters were improperly inked or voted without being inked. Additionally, according to GYLA's observation, during the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, the number and scale of violations related to voter inking significantly exceeded those recorded in previous elections.⁹⁹

STEP 4

Vote Cast, Repeat Cycle

Once past these checks, carousel participants voted using someone else's identity and exited the polling station clean.

A journalistic investigation carried out by TV Pirveli uncovered the election "carousel" and fraud scheme associated with the Georgian Dream in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The reporters conducted an experiment, posing as representatives of the Georgian Dream's monitoring service to the local residents. Several individuals reported that they had participated in voting in multiple villages. Some admitted to handing over their passports to the village governor for financial compensation, while others mentioned sending passports to facilitate payments so that another person could cast their votes on their behalf.¹⁰⁰

Another journalistic investigation conducted by Mtavari Arkhi TV broadcast a confession interview of a man who shared how he and his associates repeatedly voted for Georgian Dream in the Oct. 26 elections: ***"There were four of us in my car, all men, driving as part of a group of five vehicles. We traveled through Gori, from one village to another, and voted for Georgian Dream about 30 times each. In total, 120 or 130 cars like ours were driving around."***¹⁰¹

10.3.

Illegal Restriction of Observers' Rights, Intimidation, and Expulsion

The 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia were conducted under an extraordinary climate of pressure, intimidation, and obstruction specifically targeting independent election observers. Many observers were systematically prevented from fulfilling their duties, with some unable to even file formal complaints due to the hostile and threatening conditions they encountered at polling stations.

The MyVoTe Coalition documented violations of observers' rights in 160 polling stations. These included denial of access to observe voter registrars, prohibitions on documenting irregularities through photos or videos, refusal by precinct officials to accept complaints, and in several cases, direct intimidation and expulsion of observers from polling stations.

Observers repeatedly described the polling station environment as extremely hostile and psychologically taxing. Interviewees reported explicit threats, a constant fear of physical violence, and emotional breakdowns that left lasting trauma. One observer was even forcibly removed from a polling station.

Many noted about the feeling of isolation they experienced in unfamiliar cities, often with no one to defend or assist them during confrontations. The presence of aggressive individuals loitering around polling stations, combined with the absence of institutional protection, led these observers to choose to remain on duty, underscoring their sense of civic responsibility even under duress. An observer of the Gori polling station recalled: ***"This day was extremely stressful for me. I experienced facial swelling and had a panic attack at the polling station. For months after the elections, I found it difficult to talk about that day, often bursting into tears. If we had been asked to leave the polling station, I honestly don't know what would have happened to me."***

Several observers described being pressured by commission members to reveal footage on their personal devices. In one notable incident, a physical confrontation occurred after an observer documented voters handing ballots directly to commission members for verification. ***"I filmed voters who were directly handling ballots to commission members so that they could verify whom they had voted for. When they noticed me recording, commission members rushed towards me, leading to a physical altercation. They intended to seize my phone. I ultimately managed to forward the video to a safe location and, in an attempt to defuse the situation, pretended to have deleted it."***

Moreover, female observers were subjected to a particularly degrading and sexist environment. They reported being targets of misogynistic comments, mockery, and gender-based intimidation that undermined their role and dignity. Remarks included: ***"What do you look like?" "Why do you talk so much? It is not proper for a woman." "How are you behaving?" "Don't lose your feminine face."***

One female observer reported that commission members took her photograph, and she feared retaliation, referencing similar patterns of surveillance and threats used against activists before the election.

Across all interviews, observers emphasized a persistent sense of insecurity and vulnerability, severely limiting their ability to monitor violations, especially when operating alone. ***"I was alone at the station, and it was extremely challenging for me to observe everything. There had to be others there with me... at least for me to feel safe."*** - Observer, Gori Region.

10.4.

The Diaspora That Keeps the Georgian Economy Alive was Left Without a Vote

Significant issues have emerged regarding the ability of Georgian citizens residing abroad to participate in national elections. The primary concern centered around the deliberate restriction on establishing an adequate number of polling stations overseas, a measure that severely limits voter turnout and overall participation.¹⁰²

As mentioned above, the Central Election Commission (CEC) opened only 67 polling stations internationally, located across 53 cities in 42 countries. Despite repeated appeals from Georgian expatriates and legal interventions by domestic observer organizations such as ISFED and "My Vote," the CEC consistently denied requests to establish additional polling stations, especially in areas without Georgian diplomatic missions.

This strategic limitation on overseas polling stations significantly influenced electoral outcomes, particularly evident from voting patterns abroad. Data revealed a significant preference among overseas voters for opposition parties, which collectively secured around 75% of the votes, compared to approximately 15% garnered by the Georgian Dream party. This disparity provided a clear motive for Georgian Dream to minimize opportunities for expatriates to vote.

Voting spaces were often inadequate and poorly managed, contributing to disorganization and long queues. In many locations, the number of open polling stations and available staff was insufficient to handle the volume of voters. As a result, individuals who had waited in line for hours were ultimately forced to leave without voting. Additionally, many voters discovered that they were registered in a different city, despite having completed registration at their correct address.

Furthermore, incidents of threats and violence against observers were documented. An observer at a polling station in Frankfurt documented intimidation from the deputy head of commission: ***"Zurab Kalandadze was particularly aggressive, he used abusive language and threatened me when 'these elections would be over'. He even drank cognac in the lounge."***

CHAPTER 11

THE BALLOT WAS GUARDED BY REAL OBSERVERS AND UNDERMINED BY THE FAKES

11.1.

Election Monitoring Mission by Independent Domestic Organizations

On October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections were held in Georgia, marking the largest observation mission in the country's independent history. Three major domestic election observation organizations - ISFED, GYLA, and MyVote- deployed 3,500 observers across polling stations within and abroad.

ISFED provided approximately 1,000 short-term observers (STOs) at polling stations and 231 observers around the perimeters of these locations. They also ensured coverage in every district electoral commission and deployed 85 mobile teams. MyVote, a coalition of 30 NGOs, deployed static observers at over 1,200 precincts, 133 mobile teams, and approximately 150 observers at polling locations worldwide. GYLA operated with approximately 610 static and mobile observers, monitoring more than 1,500 polling stations. Additionally, GYLA analyzed all 3,111 precinct summary protocols.

All ten observers interviewed expressed a deep sense of civic responsibility that underpinned their decision to participate in the election observation mission. They consistently described the 2024 parliamentary elections as a critical juncture for Georgia, with far-reaching implications for its future as a democracy. Motivated by a commitment to democratic principles and a desire to contribute meaningfully to the electoral process, each observer emphasized the importance of their engagement. As one election observer stationed in Batumi reflected: ***"I create content about books on TikTok. On election day, I brought the book 1984 with me and told myself that when I came out of the election, I would be able to say that nothing written in that book would happen to me."***

While some observers maintained cautious optimism regarding the integrity of the elections, others perceived their participation as a necessary measure to defend the country's democratic trajectory, which they believed was under imminent threat. As one election day observer in Tbilisi noted, ***"The shift in Georgia's political orientation and signs of autocratic governance were already apparent, beginning with the adoption of the so-called Russian law and a broader concentration of power. I feared that Georgia's future could be entirely undermined within the next four years, so I chose to serve as an observer on election day."***

Alongside the fight against Russian legislation and its consequences, NGOs demonstrated resilience in carrying out a monitoring mission under highly challenging conditions. The training provided to observers included a comprehensive overview of relevant legal frameworks, clearly outlining their rights, duties, and limitations, as well as practical simulations based on recurring patterns of electoral violations documented in previous election cycles. Observers were expected to maintain neutrality, impartiality, and fairness in carrying out their duties. As one observer emphasized, ***"I did not participate to expose government violations; my goal was to stand for fair elections. Whoever won through a legitimate process deserved to govern."***

11.2.

Politically Affiliated Observer Groups

In the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia, the integrity of the electoral observation process was significantly compromised by the proliferation of politically affiliated so-called "fake observer" organizations. While not novel, this phenomenon reached new levels of concern due to the scale of involvement and the direct interference in polling station operations. Rather than serving their intended purpose as neutral watchdogs, these organizations often operated as extensions of the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party's political structures.

The strategic registration of observers under the pretext of civic oversight enabled political actors to embed their affiliates within precinct election commissions (PECs) and around polling stations. Observers aligned with the ruling party were frequently reported to engage in voter control and mobilization efforts on Election Day, particularly near polling locations. This practice blurred the line between observation and political campaigning, contributing to an environment of coercion and undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

Reports by the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) highlighted that such observers did not limit themselves to passive monitoring but were actively involved in PEC operations and voter tracking activities. This behavior directly contravened the norms of impartial observation and raised serious concerns regarding the intimidation of voters and independent observers.¹⁰³

The scale of deployment of politically affiliated observers further illustrates the systemic nature of the problem. The largest groups, including the International Observatory of Advocates and Lawyers (2,491 observers), the Politics and Law Observer (2,654 observers), and the Training and Development Institute of Georgia (1,364 observers), were reported to be closely tied to Georgian Dream. Meanwhile, other organizations with substantial observer counts, including Free Voice (1,610 observers) and the Monitoring Centre – Society (1,038 observers), appeared to be linked with opposition parties.¹⁰⁴ Despite their significant presence, these groups failed to publish any public findings or analytical reports on the electoral process, raising further doubts about their legitimacy and reinforcing the perception that their true purpose was political rather than civic. One observer who monitored the elections in the Marneuli region recalled an incident regarding the legitimacy of certain accredited observers: ***“It was quite a funny story. One of the men I saw was walking around in a very unusual way and had a badge that read ‘Civil Tolerance’ or something similar. Since there were many ethnic minorities in the area where I was observing, I approached him and asked in Russian which organization he represented. He responded with, ‘Yes, yes, 41 41’, referencing the ruling party’s electoral number. Then he suddenly realized he had made a mistake and quickly ran away.”***

Another observer stationed at a polling place in Gardabani recounted the presence of individuals representing so-called GONGOs, whose actual role appeared to involve voter mobilization, informal counting, and direct campaigning at the polling station. ***“At my polling station, the village governor was present as an observer wearing an NGO badge - if I recall correctly, it said ‘Law Observer.’ Several others were also there representing different organizations, but it turned out they were her sons. I felt threatened by them because I was documenting violations. I was filming how they were breaking the rules. This governor and her group were actively mobilizing people from the villages.”***

11.3.

Fake International observers legitimizing the Georgian Dream’s victory

A significant and sophisticated layer of deception was created through the use of politically biased “fake international observers” during the October 2024 elections. These individuals were not there to monitor the polls impartially; instead, their role was to legitimize the electoral fraud committed by the Georgian Dream party in the eyes of both domestic and international audiences.

Investigation conducted by the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) and the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) identified 23 individuals, many with prior affiliations to controversial observation missions in Russia, Belarus, and occupied Ukraine, who were accredited as election monitors in Georgia.¹⁰⁵ These individuals issued public statements describing the electoral process as “transparent,” “fair,” and “European”. Their immediate post-election statements were weaponized by Georgian Dream to dismiss criticism.

CHAPTER 12

JUSTICE DENIED: SYSTEMATIC FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE AND REMEDY ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS

One of the central weaknesses of Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections was the failure of electoral and judicial institutions to address complaints in a substantive manner. While the compressed post-election timeframe legally required expedited proceedings, this procedural urgency was used to justify superficial and dismissive reviews, rather than to ensure timely yet meaningful adjudication.

A total of 1,436 complaints were submitted to the Central and District Election Commissions, covering violations across all phases of the electoral process.¹⁰⁶ Yet, both the commissions and the courts prioritized speed over substance. Complaints were frequently rejected without engaging with the core legal or factual issues raised. In many cases, commission chairs issued decisions unilaterally, bypassing collegial deliberation and undermining procedural fairness.

12.1.

The Tetrtskaro Case: A Rare Instance of Judicial Independence

Among the hundreds of electoral complaints filed across Georgia following the 2024 parliamentary elections, only one led to a judicial ruling that meaningfully challenged the official results. The Tetrtskaro case, adjudicated by Judge Vladimer Khuchua, emerged as the sole instance where the judiciary acted independently and substantively, examining evidence in detail and delivering a verdict prioritizing electoral integrity over political expedience.

The complaint, submitted by non-governmental observer organizations, concerned 30 electronic polling stations in the Tsalka and Tetrtskaro districts. The court hearings, held over two consecutive days and lasting nearly 16 hours, went far beyond the formalistic treatment that characterized most other post-election legal proceedings. In a rare exercise of investigative diligence, Judge Khuchua ordered an in-court experiment using an official vote-counting machine and ballots identical to those used on election day.

The experiment produced a conclusive result: ink from the marker used to fill in the ballots visibly leaked onto the reverse side of the paper, making it possible to trace individual votes. The implications were clear and grave; voters could be identified based on the sequencing of ballots or through reconstruction of voting patterns. Judge Khuchua ruled that the design of the ballots, in conjunction with the electronic counting method, violated the fundamental right to vote in secrecy. ***"The court clearly and unequivocally finds that, based on the examination of the evidence - this election apparatus, this ballot paper, and this ballot envelope - the voter had no guarantee of the security and secrecy of their vote. This is a matter of fundamental democratic guarantees,"***

he stated upon delivering the verdict on November 4.¹⁰⁷

But the court's findings went further. Judge Khuchua determined that the Tsalka District Election Commission had committed severe procedural violations. These included the failure to address complaints appropriately and instances of manipulation and interference with observers. Such conduct, the judge concluded, further undermined the credibility of the electoral process in these districts.

By invalidating the results of 30 precincts, Judge Khuchua set a precedent. His ruling demonstrated that when applied with independence and integrity, the legal system possessed the tools to address even systemic electoral violations.

12.2.

The Case That Could Have Changed the Election

Unfortunately, the Tetrtskaro District Court's ruling did not last long. The session before the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, one of the longest continuous hearings in the country's judicial history, which lasted nearly 24 hours without a substantive break, overturned it. The hearing encompassed three separate appeals: a recount request from the MyVote coalition; a petition from the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) seeking annulment of results across all electronic precincts on grounds of violated vote secrecy; and an appeal by the Central Election Commission (CEC) seeking to overturn the Tetrtskaro court's decision mandating repeat elections in specific districts.

Despite the complexity and gravity of the issues presented, the appellate process showed several procedural and institutional shortcomings that severely compromised the possibility of a well-founded decision:

PROCEDURAL CONSOLIDATION WITHOUT CAPACITY FOR DELIBERATION

Rather than assigning separate court panels to consider each legal claim, the Court of Appeal consolidated all into a single proceeding before one three-judge chamber. The claims were sufficiently divergent in legal nature. Thus, a comprehensive and reasoned assessment within the allocated time was functionally impossible.

COMPRESSED TIMELINES AND DENIAL OF SUSPENDING MOTIONS

The trial began at 15:00 and continued uninterrupted until 13:00 the following day, with only minimal breaks. Multiple motions submitted by civil society organizations requesting adjournments or rest periods, essential for meaningful engagement with the voluminous evidentiary record, were denied. This procedural rigidity, while not unlawful in itself, deprived the process of the deliberative depth required to assess thousands of pages of documentation and multiple layers of legal argumentation.

UNADDRESSED CONCERNS OF JUDICIAL IMPARTIALITY

During the proceedings, NGOs filed a motion to recuse Judge Dimitri Gvritishvili, citing his prior public statements critical of the civil sector and raising concerns over impartiality. The motion was dismissed without substantive justification, reinforcing perceptions of institutional bias and lack of procedural safeguards against conflicts of interest.

CONTROL OF EVIDENTIARY PROCEDURE BY INTERESTED PARTY

A critical point of contention in the proceedings was the secrecy of the ballot in electronic precincts. NGOs requested that independent experts - not CEC officials - conduct the in-court experiment on ballot traceability. This request was denied. The CEC representative at the court placed the ballot into the voting box, attempting to conceal the main issue: the ink bleed-through that had been previously examined in the Tetrtskaro court.

Given the scope and scale of the material presented, the court could not have reasonably conducted a substantive review within the timeframe. The judgment, delivered at the conclusion of the session, lacked legal reasoning and appeared pre-determined. It annulled the Tetrtskaro District Court's decision and rejected all claims brought by civil society organizations.

12.3.

Ready For Recognition, But No Voice Heard

Following the October 26, 2024, elections, Georgian Dream pursued a single objective: to convene Parliament as soon as possible, recognize its own authority, and proceed with the election of a new president.

In parallel, the GD sought to convince the public that it was receiving indications that the United States and the European Union would recognize the legitimacy of the elections. To simulate this appearance of international endorsement, Georgian Dream even turned to its political ally, Viktor Orbán. The Hungarian Prime Minister rushed to Georgia on the second day of the elections for a public appearance and to offer congratulations. However, even for the GD electorate, it was not persuasive.

At first glance, it appears paradoxical: how can a government be so eager for Western validation while simultaneously severing the very ties that make such recognition possible? If European acceptance was indeed so vital, why did the GD move to suspend Georgia's EU integration process just three days after the GD recognized its Parliamentary mandates?

The answer lies in Georgian Dream's political modus operandi: to sustain its electoral base through a carefully constructed illusion, one in which the aspiration of European integrity is claimed rhetorically while being actively undermined in practice.

Returning to the matter of parliamentary legitimacy, on November 25, 2024, the newly elected Parliament convened for its first session, behind locked doors and under the watch of public protest. Georgian Dream made no effort to wait for the Constitutional Court's review of the lawsuit filed by the President and several MPs, which questioned the constitutionality of the

election. Ironically, had they waited, the very act of convening might have at least met the minimum threshold of procedural legality. Instead, the drive to consolidate power has only proven that the Georgian Dream has put the country on an unprecedented fast track to establishing an authoritarian regime over the last six months since the elections.

CHAPTER 13

STATISTICAL EVIDENCE: THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY

In democracies, numbers should speak with clarity. But in Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections, statistical data whispered something else - an underlying pattern of manipulation. While the Central Election Commission (CEC) reported a stable and legitimate victory for Georgian Dream, multiple independent sources, particularly the Edison Research and HarrisX exit polls, uncovered discrepancies that cast doubt on the official results. These anomalies were not random; they reflected a deeper systemic orchestration aimed at shaping the outcome.

13.1.

Exit Polls and Pre-Election Trends: A Clear Discrepancy

Edison Research and HarrisX, both internationally respected pollsters, conducted exit polls using models tested in Georgia. Edison's exit poll put GD at **41%**,¹⁰⁸ while HarrisX estimated **44%**.¹⁰⁹ The Central Election Commission (CEC), however, announced **53.9%**, a difference of nearly **13 percentage points** in Edison's case and over **10 points** in HarrisX's. Both pollsters declared these deviations statistically impossible under standard confidence intervals and demographic adjustments. Edison had consistently predicted GD outcomes with a deviation of under 2% in past elections. In 2024, however, this historical continuity broke sharply. Edison Executive Vice President Rob Farbman commented, .

Edison had consistently predicted GD outcomes with a deviation of under 2% in past elections. In 2024, however, this historical continuity broke sharply. Edison Executive Vice President Rob Farbman commented, *"The 13-point difference between Edison's estimate and the official result of 54% for Georgian Dream cannot be explained by normal variation alone and suggests local-level manipulation of the vote."*

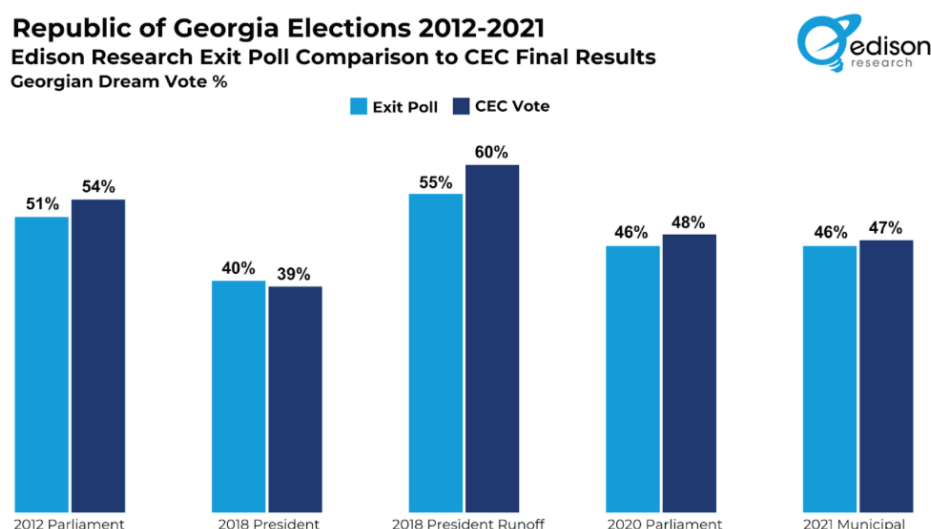


Figure: Comparison of Edison Research Exit Polls and CEC Final Results in Georgia (2012–2021). Source: Edison Research, "Edison Research Exit Poll Comparison to CEC Final Results: Republic of Georgia Elections 2012–2021,"

HarrisX's final report provided further statistical substantiation. Based on over 12,000 interviews and a turnout-weighted model, it concluded that the CEC's reported result for GD was "statistically impossible."¹¹⁰ Notably, HarrisX highlighted **172,523 votes** - about **8% of the total vote** - that were unaccounted for by any legitimate statistical adjustment. Their precinct-level analysis revealed **27 electoral districts** with mathematical anomalies, with the most extreme being Marneuli, where the CEC reported **80%** support for GD versus **40%** in HarrisX's data. The firm noted that even under 95% confidence intervals accounting for demographic weighting, the deviation was outside explainable bounds.

Region	District	GD Vote 2020 (ElectionsData.ge/data)	GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia)	GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)	VARIANCE: GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia) vs. GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)	GD Vote 2020 (ElectionsData.ge/data)	GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia)	GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX Estimates)	VARIANCE: GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia) vs. GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)
Tbilisi	01.Mtatsminda	43%	42%	30%	+12%	13,003	14,699	10,586	+4,113
	02.Vake	41%	38%	28%	+10%	25,237	28,997	21,022	+7,975
	03.Saburtalo	41%	39%	27%	+13%	30,908	37,705	25,412	+12,293
	04.Krtsanisi	44%	49%	36%	+13%	9,086	11,002	8,073	+2,929
	05.Isani	42%	45%	33%	+12%	23,110	28,778	20,880	+7,898
	06.Samgori	42%	45%	34%	+11%	29,782	36,999	27,607	+9,391
	07.Chugureti	45%	44%	33%	+11%	14,188	17,941	13,519	+4,422
	08.Didube	44%	42%	30%	+12%	17,169	17,290	12,366	+4,924
	10.Gldani	39%	41%	32%	+8%	27,876	34,993	27,785	+7,208
Kakheti	11.Sagarejo	50%	66%	49%	+16%	11,442	16,313	12,244	+4,069
	12.Gurjaani	52%	62%	49%	+13%	16,935	20,094	15,806	+4,288
	13.Sighnaghi	53%	63%	37%	+25%	9,503	11,319	6,717	+4,602
	16.Kvareli	47%	57%	23%	+34%	8,459	9,851	3,966	+5,884
	18.Akhmeta	43%	56%	26%	+30%	7,017	8,778	4,087	+4,691
Kvenmo Kartli	22.Marneuli	48%	80%	40%	+40%	21,451	34,328	17,263	+17,065
	23.Bolnisi	68%	81%	55%	+26%	18,173	20,788	14,158	+6,631
	28.Dusheti	53%	59%	44%	+15%	7,338	8,889	6,636	+2,253
	32.Gori	52%	57%	42%	+14%	32,945	37,474	27,966	+9,508
	35.Khashuri	46%	52%	38%	+14%	12,572	14,800	10,810	+3,990
Samtskhe - Javakheti	40.Akhalkalaki	65%	88%	59%	+29%	12,270	18,187	12,132	+6,055
Imereti	54.Samtredia	54%	62%	36%	+26%	13,651	15,432	8,987	+6,445
	58.Tskaltubo	44%	58%	45%	+13%	12,205	16,624	12,853	+3,771
	59.Kutaisi	41%	47%	35%	+12%	29,219	38,095	28,363	+9,733
Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti	67.Zugdidi	47%	51%	42%	+9%	25,110	27,789	23,113	+4,676
	68.Tsalenjikha	47%	48%	24%	+24%	6,700	7,200	3,599	+3,601
	70.Poti	50%	52%	32%	+20%	10,909	11,290	7,011	+4,279
Adjara	79.Batumi	42%	50%	39%	+11%	32,305	45,593	35,762	+9,830
Total	Total	46%	51%	36%	+15%	478,563	591,247	418,724	+172,523

Note: Statistical variance in these 27 Districts has been tested at a 95 percent confidence interval, revealing that the variance observed is highly improbably or impossible.

Figure: HarrisX. "HarrisX Releases Final Georgia 2024 Exit Poll Analysis." HarrisX, October 31, 2024. Accessed May 9, 2025.

13.2.

The “Russian Tale”: Turnout Too Good to Be True

Here’s a simple example: Imagine two villages. In the first, 60 people out of 100 vote, and 30 vote for the ruling party. In the second, 95 out of 100 voters, and nearly all 95, vote for the ruling party. If this happened once, it might be a coincidence. But when it happens again and again in certain regions, it looks like the results were manipulated to show unusually high support.

Further supporting this picture of widespread fraud is a statistical analysis conducted by Roman Udot and Levan Kvirkvelia, which employed advanced forensic methods to detect unnatural voting patterns across the country.¹¹¹ Their research showed that as turnout increased, the vote share for Georgian Dream increased disproportionately - a classic red flag associated with coerced voting, ballot stuffing, or vote buying.

Statistical analysis reveals a clear divide between urban and non-urban voting patterns in Georgia’s 2024 elections. In major cities such as Tbilisi, Rustavi, and Batumi, the voting results followed expected patterns typical of fair elections.¹¹² However, in other regions, particularly Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Dmanisi, signs of manipulation were widespread.¹¹³ These areas exhibited up to 15 different red flags, including unusually high turnout, implausibly high vote shares for Georgian Dream, and voting patterns inconsistent with those of free and fair elections. This type of pattern, known in election forensics as the “Russian tale,”¹¹⁴ suggests a suspicious correlation between turnout and support for the GD. Udot’s analysis confirmed these irregularities: while urban results aligned with the S-S Hypothesis (a model for normal voting behavior), results from many rural and outlying districts deviated sharply, indicating potential ballot-stuffing and vote misrecording, both of which benefited the GD.

13.3.

Gender Turnout Discrepancies

Imagine a small town where 100 men and 100 women are registered to vote. After the election, officials reported that 95 men and 55 women cast ballots, already a notable gender gap. But then, the records show that 105 men voted, more than were registered in the first place.

This alarming statistical irregularity emerged from ISFED's analysis of gender-disaggregated voter turnout.¹¹⁵ According to CEC-published data, in a significant number of precincts, male and female turnout rates deviated from normal distribution patterns to a degree considered implausible by statistical standards.

In 62 precincts, male voter turnout reportedly ranged from 80% to 100%, while female turnout was capped at 57%, an unexplained gender gap exceeding 20 percentage points. More alarmingly, **in at least six precincts, the number of male voters was recorded as exceeding 100% of the registered male electorate, mathematically impossible even if all special list voters were male.**¹¹⁶ In total, ISFED identified 275 polling stations with a gender turnout gap exceeding 20%, and in 243 of these, male turnout significantly surpassed female turnout. In these 275 stations, Georgian Dream received 66% of the vote.¹¹⁷

The CEC later acknowledged irregularities in 11 polling stations but attributed them to technical errors from precinct commissions without providing corrected data.¹¹⁸

These alarming findings from ISFED sparked further investigation by the election forensics expert Roman Udot, who dug deeper into the so-called "Gender Deviation" anomaly. Using statistical methods similar to those employed in the Kiesling-Shpilkin model, commonly used to detect election fraud, Udot analyzed the gender-disaggregated turnout data published by the CEC.

His analysis suggests that the gender gap in turnout was not random. In fact, it showed a strong correlation with unusually high vote shares for Georgian Dream, particularly in regions already known for irregularities. Udot estimated that up to 300,000 votes may have been artificially added in GD's favor through this pattern.¹¹⁹

After correcting for the distortion, GD's real support drops to 45%, or even 38% if the excess votes are redistributed to the affected parties. Without this inflated vote share, Georgian Dream would lose its parliamentary majority.¹²⁰ Once the gender-based manipulation is removed, the voting data returns to normal: suspicious turnout patterns disappear, party results become proportionate, and the outcome matches exit polls.

CHAPTER 14

GEORGIA FOLLOWS THE ILLIBERAL SCRIPT: DÉJÀ VU ON EUROPE'S EDGE

When the Electoral Playbook Isn't National, but Regional

For international observers tracking democratic erosion in Central and Eastern Europe, the political trajectory of Georgia evokes a familiar and troubling pattern. The illiberal playbook - first articulated by Fareed Zakaria in *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy* (1997)¹²¹ and later operationalized by Hungary's Viktor Orbán¹²² and Slovakia's Robert Fico¹²³ - is now being systematically implemented by Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party. The familiar tactics of state capture, media co-optation, civil society stigmatization, and the politicization of identity and culture have been repurposed for the Georgian context, transforming Tbilisi into the region's latest battleground for democratic backsliding. While the methods are not new, their deployment in Georgia - a country once seen as a democratic beacon in a geopolitically fraught neighborhood - underscores the growing ambition and adaptability of illiberal strategies. The ultimate objective mirrors that of other illiberal regimes: not to foster competitive politics, but to recast elections as tools for legitimizing power, emptying them of substantive policy debate, and reframing them as existential contests over national survival.

14.1.

Securing Votes Through Fear

The illiberal strategy often centers on transforming elections from policy debates into existential referendums. We've seen Orbán masterfully frame elections as battles against supposed fundamental dangers like George Soros,¹²⁴ LGBTQ+ “ideology,”¹²⁵ and bureaucratic Brussels,¹²⁶ positioning himself as Hungary's sole protector. Similarly, Fico's camp successfully branded a pro-European presidential opponent a “warmonger” manipulated by foreign powers, tapping into deep-seated anxieties to secure victory for their ally.¹²⁷

Georgian Dream used this tool with increasing sophistication. Mirroring Orbán and Fico, GD campaigns relentlessly portray domestic opposition and civil society not just as political rivals, but as agents of chaos and foreign subversion.¹²⁸ The party's narrative, amplified by loyal media, centers on the specter of war, accusing critics of trying to drag Georgia into conflict with Russia at the behest of a shadowy “Global War Party”, a Georgian-specific conspiracy echoing broader anti-Western tropes.¹²⁹ NGOs and activists critical of the government are labeled tools of “Western ideological colonization,” aiming to destroy Georgian identity.¹³⁰ Just as voters in Hungary and Slovakia were presented with choices framed around survival and sovereignty, Georgians faced an election narrative dominated by fear: peace under GD versus war and foreign control under its opponents. This strategy effectively sidelines substantive debate and seeks victory by activating primal fears rather than appealing to rational interests.

14.2.

Controlling the Justice: The Judiciary as an Electoral Shield

A key lesson from the illiberal playbook¹³¹ is the necessity of neutralizing judicial independence. The experiences in Hungary, where Orbán systematically packed courts and created loyal administrative bodies, and Slovakia, where Fico has targeted anti-corruption prosecutors, demonstrate how a captured judiciary can shield the ruling elite and validate questionable electoral practices.

While the process may have been more incremental in Georgia, the outcome resonates strongly. An influential “clan” of judges, perceived as loyal to Georgian Dream, dominates the judicial system.¹³² Despite constitutional reforms ostensibly aimed at strengthening independence, crucial court decisions, including those with political or electoral ramifications, often align predictably with the ruling party's interests. This perceived bias discourages effective legal challenges to electoral irregularities, protects influential figures linked to the government, and undermines the rule of law as a check on power, mirroring the functional capture seen elsewhere in the region. The courts risk becoming instruments not of justice, but of managed political outcomes.

14.3.

Media Capture in Georgian Style

Control over the information landscape is non-negotiable for illiberal regimes seeking electoral dominance. Hungary's KESMA foundation provides a stark example of near-total narrative control through consolidated ownership and state funding.¹³³ Slovakia under Fico demonstrates the use of political pressure, attacks on journalists labeled “enemies,”¹³⁴ and attempts to reshape public broadcasting.¹³⁵

Starting May 31, 2025, Georgia's media as well as NGOs will face a serious threat as the new branded Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) comes into force. It will require individuals and entities to register as “foreign agents” if they are acting “at the authority, request, order, or control of a foreign principal” to engage in a broad set of covered activities, including “political activities,” in the interests or on behalf of the foreign principal. Such persons are required to submit detailed reports of their activities and finances and provide two copies of any public statement to the authorities. Additionally, such persons must also mark their public statements as produced by a “foreign agent,” a stigmatizing term that indicates those registered are not acting independently.¹³⁶

Unlike its U.S. namesake, which is narrowly applied and rarely enforced, Georgia's version is designed to stigmatize and control independent voices across a much broader spectrum. Outlets and individuals that refuse to register face fines of up to 10,000 GEL (\$3,600) or up to five years in prison, while amendments to the Broadcasting Law will ban foreign funding entirely, cutting off a crucial lifeline for many investigative platforms.¹³⁷ Combined with politically driven audits, surveillance, and a public broadcaster increasingly echoing government narratives, the media environment will grow ever more hostile to independent voices.

14.4.

National Identity as a Political Weapon

Identity politics is a cornerstone of the illiberal electoral strategy. Orbán's framing of Hungary as a Christian bastion under siege,¹³⁸ and Fico's appeals to "traditional Slovak values" against supposed Western corruption, are familiar tactics designed to divide the electorate and consolidate a loyal base.¹³⁹

Georgian Dream has increasingly shifted towards this strategy, particularly as its pro-Western credentials face scrutiny. The party champions itself as the defender of Georgian Orthodoxy and traditional norms against "pseudo-liberal" foreign influences. LGBTQ+ rights are framed as alien impositions, while NGOs promoting liberal values are depicted as threats to national identity. In 2024 and 2025, the government adopted legislation banning the "popularization" of non-heteronormative identities in educational¹⁴⁰ and public settings and eliminating the terms "gender" and "gender identity" from all Georgian legislation,¹⁴¹ a move widely condemned by human rights groups as a direct attack on LGBTQ+ communities. With this, Georgia joins Hungary and Slovakia in institutionalizing anti-LGBTQ+ policies under the banner of cultural preservation. This rhetoric, often amplified by proxies and aligned media, seeks to polarize society along cultural lines, mobilizing conservative voters and painting opponents as culturally treasonous.

14.5.

Europe as the "Other": Sovereignty Rhetoric Against Democratic Standards

A defining feature of this regional illiberalism is the strategic repositioning of the European Union. Instead of an aspirational partner, Brussels is often depicted as an overbearing, hostile force infringing on national sovereignty - a narrative particularly useful for deflecting criticism of democratic backsliding during election periods. Orbán's constant battles with Brussels serve as a template, framing EU rule-of-law concerns as politically motivated attacks on Hungary's independence.¹⁴² Fico employs similar rhetoric, dismissing EU criticisms as liberal interference.¹⁴³

This shift has been particularly shocking for Georgian citizens, given the country's long-standing public support for EU integration. Georgian Dream now frequently dismisses EU recommendations on democracy and human rights as unacceptable foreign meddling. The concept of "sovereignty" is invoked to justify laws, like the "Russian Law" legislation, that directly contradict European standards. Criticism from EU officials or bodies regarding electoral conduct or democratic norms is framed as an attack by the "Global War Party" or proof of Western bias.

CHAPTER 15

WHAT COMES AFTER STOLEN ELECTIONS?

The credibility of Georgia's 2024 elections has been gravely compromised, with implications that extend well beyond the country's borders. The European Union, the OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe, and other democratic partners must recalibrate their approach to reflect this reality. Without meaningful steps, further deepening of political and financial engagement with the current Georgian authorities risks legitimizing a process that has failed to meet core democratic standards.

It is imperative that no international actor uncritically endorses the results of the October 2024 elections. Explicit acknowledgment of the serious irregularities, including systemic intimidation, compromised vote secrecy, and politically skewed election administration, must form the basis of all official positions. A failure to do so would not only undermine the credibility of democracy promotion efforts in Georgia but also set a damaging precedent for the region.

International actors should build direct support for institutions and actors that contribute to transparency and accountability. Independent NGOs, journalists, legal aid organizations, and academic institutions should be prioritized as key partners in democratic resilience. Their work is crucial for documenting violations, informing the public, and maintaining pressure for reform. This support becomes even more urgent in light of the enactment of the Law on Grants and the impending enforcement of the so-called Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which dramatically escalates pressure on civil society and independent media. These laws further restrict the ability of watchdog organizations to operate freely and hold public institutions accountable. International stakeholders must anticipate this shift and respond with enhanced protection mechanisms, sustained funding, and strategic political backing for vulnerable organizations.

Finally, sustained high-level political engagement will be essential. This entails consistent messaging from EU institutions and national governments, the strategic use of diplomatic tools, and, when appropriate, the consideration of targeted measures to address breaches of democratic principles. Passive observation is no longer sufficient. A pragmatic, principle-based approach is needed, one that recognizes the current situation's political gravity and responds with clarity and resolve.

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