

Georgia: Incumbent Georgian Dream Claims Victory in Disputed Parliamentary Elections

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Georgia, a country in the Black Sea region that borders Russia and Turkey, held parliamentary elections on October 26, 2024. Georgia's governing party, Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GD), claimed victory. GD came to power in 2012 as a center-left party and has since governed on the basis of a more nationalist-conservative ideology. Georgia's [President](#) Salome Zourabichvili and main [opposition parties](#), which campaigned on a pro-European platform, maintained the elections were highly flawed and said they would not recognize the results. [U.S.](#) and [European Union](#) (EU) leaders called on the Georgian government to address concerns about the election and about recent laws they said restricted democratic freedoms.

U.S. policy expressly [grounds](#) the U.S.-Georgia relationship in shared values and commitment to the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. Some observers [questioned](#) whether the elections marked a decisive [shift](#) away from Georgia's long-standing efforts to join NATO and the EU and [toward](#) a neutral or Russia-leaning foreign policy orientation, despite Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia and occupation of about 20% of its territory. Members of Congress may assess the impact of Georgia's parliamentary elections and their aftermath on U.S. interests and Russian influence in Georgia and the Black Sea region and may consider whether and how Congress might respond.

Disputed Election Results and Aftermath

According to preliminary [official results](#), GD received 54% of the vote while four opposition parties that exceeded a 5% threshold for entering parliament received a combined 38%. Media reports [stated](#) GD thus would receive 89 seats in Georgia's 150-seat parliament. According to official results, GD defeated the combined opposition throughout Georgia, except in Tbilisi (Georgia's capital), the nearby city of Rustavi, and overseas.

Election observers and pollsters raised doubts about the election's integrity. International observers [cited](#) a "significantly high number" of cases of "intimidation" of voters and "indications of pressure," "potentially compromised ...vote secrecy," and "allegations of vote buying," among other concerns. Domestic monitors [detailed](#) instances of suspected violations, including [allegations](#) of extensive multiple voting. After the election, two international firms commissioned by opposition-leaning media to conduct

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exit polls issued statements stating the results were, respectively, “statistically impossible” and indicative of “local-level manipulation of the vote.”

Domestic monitors lodged complaints about the election process in hundreds (in one case, thousands) of precincts. The Prosecutor’s Office announced investigations into a few dozen cases of alleged violations. Prime Minister (and former GD chairman) Irakli Kobakhidze said “the elections were completely fair, free, and competitive” and noted that “everyone can check everything.”

International Context and Reactions

Georgia’s elections took place after months of increasingly strained relations with the United States and the EU. GD officials—including party founder and honorary chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili, a wealthy businessman—campaigns in part on the basis of claims U.S. officials referred to as “false.” Such claims included allegations that an anonymous “party of war” in Europe and the United States was directing the actions of Georgian opposition parties and civil society, goading Georgia into opening a catastrophic “second front” against Russia while the latter fights Ukraine, and imposing its values on Georgian society. On this basis, GD justified the passage of controversial laws on the “transparency of foreign influence” and “protection of family values and minors” that observers say resemble Russian laws.

Russian officials, in turn, expressed satisfaction with GD’s victory, criticized Georgia’s opposition and President Zourabichvili for allegedly seeking to foment disorder, and accused the United States and EU of election interference. President Zourabichvili said Georgians had become “victims of what can only be described as a Russian special operation—a new form of hybrid warfare waged against our people and our country.” The Georgian election coincided with presidential elections in Moldova, another post-Soviet country in the Black Sea region, where incumbent pro-European President Maia Sandu claimed victory amid what Moldovan and U.S. officials alleged was substantial Russian interference.

After the elections, President Biden issued a statement on Georgia’s “democratic backsliding.” He called on “the Georgian government to transparently investigate all election irregularities, to repeal laws ... that limit freedoms of assembly and expression, and to begin an immediate, inclusive dialogue with all political forces in Georgia about restoring election integrity.” Earlier in 2024, the Biden Administration announced it was “pausing” \$95 million in assistance to Georgia and imposing visa restrictions and some economic sanctions on Georgian officials. After the election, the State Department said other foreign assistance to Georgia “remains under review” and it would “not rule out further consequences.”

EU officials issued similar calls and stated that “Georgia’s [EU] accession process ... remains on hold as long as Georgia continues to move away from the EU, our values and our principles.” In December 2023, the EU granted Georgia candidate status, but in June 2024, after passage of Georgia’s “transparency of foreign influence law,” the EU announced a “de facto” halt to Georgia’s accession process. GD officials maintain they support EU accession and that Georgia’s EU integration efforts remain on track.

Congressional Interests and Considerations

Building on a history of substantial U.S. development aid to Georgia and U.S.-Georgia security cooperation, the United States deepened its strategic partnership with Georgia after Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia and initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014. In 2022, the U.S. Department of State said “Georgia’s strategic importance lies in its example as a young democracy committed to greater integration into the Euro-Atlantic family, its location at a key international crossroads, and its ability and willingness to contribute to mutual security objectives.”

Members of Congress may assess the impact of Georgia’s elections on Georgia’s domestic and foreign policy trajectory, weigh its potential consequences for U.S. regional interests, and consider whether and how Congress might respond in shaping U.S. policy toward Georgia and countering Russian influence in

the region. After the election, some Members [issued statements of concern](#) and [noted](#) the election's potential negative impact on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic trajectory. Earlier in 2024, some Members of Congress introduced legislation (H.R. 8566, S. 4425) reaffirming support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, expressing concerns about democratic backsliding, reevaluating foreign assistance to Georgia, and considering the potential for targeted sanctions.

For background on Georgia, see CRS Report R45307, *Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy*.

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