

## The fourth term of Georgian Dream: a questionable victory

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According to results published by the Central Election Commission (CEC), Georgian Dream (GD), which has been in power since 2012, won the parliamentary election in Georgia on 26 October, securing nearly 53.9% of the vote. In addition to this party, four pro-Western groups entered parliament: the Coalition for Change, centred around the Ahali party (11%), the Unity coalition, based on the United National Movement (10.2%), the Strong Georgia coalition (8.8%), and the For Georgia party (7.8%). The official results, along with the distribution of parliamentary seats, are set to be announced in the coming days.

None of these opposition forces have recognised the results, claiming extensive electoral fraud. The Coalition for Change has already announced it will not take its seats in parliament, and the other groups are declaring protests against the 'stolen' election. The results have also been disputed by President Salome Zourabichvili, who was elected in 2018 with Georgian Dream's support but has long sided with the opposition. She accused Russia of interfering in the election, stating that Georgia has fallen victim to a "Russian special operation in a hybrid war", and called for a protest on 28 October, appealing to the EU to support Georgian democracy.

A joint observation mission comprising ODIHR/OSCE, the OSCE Parliamentary Assemblies, the Council of Europe, NATO and the European Parliament issued a subdued statement acknowledging the competitiveness and efficient organisation of the election. It did, however, highlight a high level of polarisation and significant financial disparities between Georgian Dream and the opposition parties. The mission also noted the extensive use of administrative resources, concerns over the confidentiality of voting, and doubts concerning the reliability of the electronic system for collecting and counting votes.

European Council President Charles Michel called on the Central Election Commission and relevant authorities to clear up all cases of electoral violations. He said that the Georgian election would be discussed at the next European Council meeting. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the violations and joined calls for a thorough investigation into the reported irregularities, adding that "International observers have not declared the result to be free and fair". The election was recognised by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who congratulated Georgian Dream on its victory even before the first official results were announced by the CEC. Orbán is expected to make an unannounced visit to Georgia on 28–29 October. Russian representatives also spoke highly of the election process.

The Georgian president, opposition, the European Union and the United States voiced serious concerns about the election results and process, including attacks on opposition representatives and voter intimidation. These indicate that the crisis affecting Georgia's

democracy, and its pro-European course has reached a critical phase. The key factors that will have a major impact on further developments in the country will be street protests and the way the government responds to them.

### Commentary

- **The results align with pre-election polls which predicted that Georgian Dream would win the election and garner the most votes. The ruling party's victory therefore came as no surprise. What does raise questions is the scale of its success.** Earlier surveys commissioned by the pro-government Imedi TV suggested Georgian Dream would receive around 60% of the vote, whereas those commissioned by independent and opposition broadcasters forecasted a maximum of 35%. According to exit polls, Georgian Dream was expected to secure between 41% (Edison Research) and 56% (Gorbi, a survey commissioned by Georgian Dream). These results probably differed from the figures reported by the Central Election Commission because independent and opposition-affiliated polling centres underestimated the party and had difficulties measuring the impact of administrative leverage and various forms of pressure on citizens. Georgian Dream representatives have largely dismissed these concerns, sticking to their narrative of an expected and clear electoral victory.
- **Three main factors have led to the ruling party's victory – despite challenges to its legitimacy – and the opposition's defeat.** Firstly, Georgian Dream's effective propaganda framed pro-Western forces as agents of a 'global war party' intending to draw Georgia into a confrontation with Russia. Secondly, the opposition is fragmented and has no prominent leaders. Thirdly, the opposition's political manifesto failed to reach a broader electorate, including voters from smaller towns and more conservative communities.
- **The opposition's potential courses of action are likely to take two forms, possibly unfolding in parallel.** The first would be a formal blockade of the parliament's work, as the parliament cannot function legally with fewer than 100 deputies (out of a nominal total of 150 seats). This is a threshold Georgian Dream will not reach on its own. The second scenario involves street protests, though these have had limited impact on the government so far. For example, thousands of people took to the streets in spring to protest against the law "on the transparency of foreign influence", and yet the government moved forward with the legislation. Therefore, similar demonstrations are unlikely to prove effective in the near future.
- **The opposition parties have not yet presented a coherent action plan,** the sole exception being Zourabichvili, whose term ends 45 days after the election. The next president will be chosen through an indirect election. In a strongly worded statement, Zourabichvili accused Russia of interfering in the electoral process and urged supporters of Georgia's pro-European path to take to the streets. She hinted that she is aware that she might be arrested once her term concludes, as she will no longer be protected by immunity.
- **Georgia faces the threat of a deep state crisis.** Georgian Dream, which enjoys genuine support from a significant portion of the population and controls the security apparatus, is unlikely to relinquish power and seems prepared to suppress potential protests. Zourabichvili is emerging as a leading opposition figure. Even before the election, she

initiated the so-called Georgian Charter, which envisioned a return to the European integration path if the pro-Western opposition won. Before the election, the government had also warned that major opposition parties might be banned and accused them of being “agents of foreign powers”.

- **The stance of Western countries and institutions is now crucial.** The EU has in fact withheld recognition of the election results, awaiting clarification of the reported issues. The European Union’s policy towards Tbilisi will largely depend on the actions taken by the Georgian government. However, it is already clear that the EU27 may find it difficult to reach a unified position, given the Hungarian Prime Minister’s unconditional support for Georgian Dream, contrasted with strong criticism from several other EU countries towards the Georgian leadership.
- **This election is also very important for Russia, which has de facto backed Georgian Dream.** The ruling party’s victory, coupled with the deepening crisis in Georgia’s relations with the West, strengthens Moscow’s position in the region, though the extent to which Russia interfered with the election process is still unclear. It is in Russia’s interest to discredit pro-Western forces, weaken Western influence in Georgia, and fully subordinate the government in Tbilisi. Therefore, Russia is likely to stoke the crisis using hybrid warfare tactics and may even consider open intervention in the future.