



Georgia Election Watch



August 19, 2020

Georgia will hold parliamentary elections on October 31, 2020. The National Democratic Institute offers this analysis of the pre-election environment based on in-depth interviews conducted July 28 - August 4, 2020 with representatives of the Georgian government, political parties, the electoral administration, civil society, the media, domestic and international observer organizations, and the diplomatic community; ongoing interaction with the full range of electoral stakeholders; and the Institute's expertise and relationships developed over 25 years of programming in Georgia. This report highlights the electoral framework and administration; the campaign environment; the role of media and disinformation; gender and inclusion; and the impact of covid-19. The Institute has assigned experts to conduct long-term, in-depth analysis of the key themes highlighted in this report and will continue to monitor the overall election process through its conclusion. NDI may issue further analysis and recommendations through the election period and will issue a comprehensive assessment of the overall electoral process shortly after the elections.

Political Context

Georgia approaches the October 2020 parliamentary elections in the face of a global pandemic and after significant recent changes to the electoral framework. The virus is already impacting campaign strategies and polling station protocols, and will potentially affect voter behavior as well. Georgian parliaments have traditionally been dominated by a single party and the political environment has been characterized by polarization. Constitutional amendments and legislative reforms in July 2020 have prompted the formation of new parties and coalitions, and are expected to yield a more diverse legislature, including possibly the need to form a coalition government. Through citizen-responsive campaigns and efforts at cross-party collaboration on candidacies and campaign ethics, political leaders can lay the foundations now for a more effective legislature, whatever its composition, after October 31.

Almost 30 years into independence, Georgia has proven its technical capacity to conduct credible elections. Citizen expectations for a democratic process are thus high. Yet persistent issues related to electoral integrity have remained unaddressed, detracting from public confidence in election outcomes. These factors in turn make the country more vulnerable to external interference. Only demonstrable improvements in the

processes surrounding the October parliamentary elections would be sufficient to disrupt this corrosive pattern. By strengthening its democratic system overall, Georgian leaders can best meet citizens' expectations while simultaneously protecting national security and propelling transatlantic integration.

Electoral Framework and Administration

In June and July, the Georgian Parliament approved a broad-ranging package of constitutional amendments and election code reforms. The process for achieving this compromise was protracted and contentious, but in the end it included the participation of opposition parties and civil society organizations (CSOs). Chief among these changes is the phased transition to a fully proportional system by 2024, moving in 2020 to 120 proportional and 30 majoritarian seats from the current 77 proportional and 73 majoritarian ratio; a reduction in 2020 in the threshold for winning parliamentary seats from 5 to 1 percent; a requirement of gaining at least 40.6 percent of the vote for a party to form a government on its own; and the introduction of a phased gender quota requiring in 2020 that one in four candidates on party lists be a woman.

Pro-government, opposition and civil society interlocutors alike expressed the opinion that these reforms will contribute to a legislature that is more diverse and politically balanced, while opposition parties and CSOs, in particular, stressed that they will reduce the likelihood of one-party dominance.

Additional changes seek to curb fraud through more extensive restrictions around the use of state resources for partisan purposes; more explicit conflict-of-interest criteria for election commissioners; a new party financing formula to make state funding more available; the introduction of sanctions for illegal financing; tightened requirements around paid campaign advertisements in the media, along with wider access to free media time; shortened deadlines for addressing electoral disputes; and new restrictions on campaigning on election day and in the vicinity of polling stations. NDI's interlocutors across the political spectrum favorably assessed the new legislative framework, which is a commendable achievement.

CSOs and opposition parties noted a number of specific complaints and concerns, however. They said the composition of election commissions remains weighted disproportionately toward the ruling party; prohibitions on the use of state administrative resources do not go far enough and are inadequately enforced; restrictions on campaigning by civil servants do not extend to campaigning on social media; voter intimidation and bribery will likely remain campaign tactics; and procedures for addressing electoral disputes are inadequate. Opposition parties raised ongoing concerns about politicized justice, including selective investigations and politically motivated prosecutions, and impunity for violence and intimidation toward opposition campaigns. CSOs and opposition parties expressed additional alarm over the government's ability under current law to impose a state of emergency without seeking parliamentary approval, fearing this authority is subject to abuse. Opposition political parties and CSOs also noted that ambiguous social rules surrounding covid-19 and the possibility of a viral resurgence in coming weeks, in addition to its public health toll on the population, could adversely impact campaigning and hinder voter turnout. There was general agreement, however, that robust enforcement of the letter and spirit of existing laws would be as important as any additional regulatory or legislative reforms.

NDI public opinion research shows that Georgians positively assessed the performance of the Central Election Commission (CEC) in the 2017 local and 2018 presidential elections. For the 2020 parliamentary elections, the CEC has adjusted procedures to fit the new electoral framework and laid out ambitious plans for training commissioners, educating voters, and safeguarding cybersecurity. The CEC reported that it has detailed covid-19 mitigation plans to safeguard voters, polling officials, and others in polling stations for the

upcoming elections. The CEC told NDI that mustering the will of the electoral contestants to join in pledges and practices to eschew vote buying, intimidation, and hate speech could contribute significantly to a free and fair electoral environment. “Hate speech” is defined here as abusive or threatening language targeted at specific groups identified by attributes such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or physical or mental disability. It does not refer to merely critical or negative messaging.

The Inter-Agency Commission on Free and Fair Elections (IACFF) has struggled in recent elections to gain the trust of opposition parties and participating CSOs and will need to take concerted steps to demonstrate its good faith and impartiality. Representatives of the State Auditing Office (SAO) expressed satisfaction with legislative changes narrowing the focus of their mandate and enhancing their capacity to monitor campaign finances. Opposition parties remain concerned, however, that past inequities in their access to loans and donations will continue. A representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated to NDI that enforcement of the legal framework would prevent impunity and that the Ministry would conduct training at all levels within law enforcement agencies to ensure prompt and impartial responses to violations. Coordination among these agencies concerning public safety and health will be important for the credibility of the October elections.

Government leaders expressed to NDI their firm commitment to conduct a credible election and a willingness to make additional changes, as needed, to achieve that goal. These statements are commendable and should be followed up with concrete actions to address concerns of Georgian monitors and international observers and enhance overall confidence in the electoral process.

In recent elections, some public figures have sought to discredit citizen monitoring groups. CSOs interpreted these attempts as a tactic to preemptively deflect criticism of the electoral process, and expressed concern the practice could be revived for the upcoming elections. Given the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, credible, nonpartisan citizen monitoring of the October 2020 parliamentary elections will be both more difficult and more important than ever before. Every effort should therefore be made to support and amplify the efforts of groups such as the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), Transparency International-Georgia (TI-Georgia), Public Movement Multinational Georgia (PMMG), and the Media Development Foundation (MDF).

Recommendations

Authorities from the Central Election Commission, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, IAFCC, SAO, and other government entities with electoral responsibilities should rigorously enforce all legislation and regulations respecting the elections in a timely and impartial manner.

The government, CEC, political parties and CSOs should undertake every effort to ensure voters are informed about their rights and responsibilities under the new electoral framework.

The CEC should clarify the qualifications and selection procedures for professional district and precinct election commissioners, including standards for impartiality, prioritizing those who have previous experience, and ensure thorough training and accountability for proper performance.

The CEC and SAO should consider providing further clarification to the distinctions between state, campaign and charitable activities, including rules surrounding permitted use of social media by civil servants.

Government leaders should clearly communicate to all civil servants and the public that employment of administrative resources for campaign purposes will not be tolerated. Compliance should be monitored strictly and violations should be immediately prosecuted and publicized to prevent perceptions of a culture of impunity.

The IACFF should establish a constructive working environment in which concerns raised by CSOs and political parties are addressed in a timely, professional and impartial manner.

Authorities should ensure that voters and electoral contestants are provided with sufficient avenues for resolution of election-related complaints and that legitimate concerns are not routinely dismissed on technicalities.

Credible citizen election monitors should be allowed to do their work, in compliance with the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, without interference or intimidation.

The government, including public health and safety agencies, and the CEC should coordinate, with input, support and monitoring by CSOs, to develop and make public plans to ensure public health safety for participation in electoral processes through the campaign period, voter list verification, voting itself - whether in polling stations, via mobile voting or voting abroad - tabulation of results, and dispute resolution.

Parliament, government, and all state agencies should provide the funding and other support required to effectively implement public health plans in the electoral context, ensuring that all measures taken are strictly proportional to the public health risks presented and are implemented impartially toward all electoral contestants and their supporters, and present no undue restrictions to campaigning, voting, or election observation.

Parties and Campaign Environment

With a lower electoral threshold and a highly polarized environment, the campaign is expected to be heated. New and smaller political parties will have an opportunity to secure seats in the legislature and receive state funding if they receive 1 percent of the valid votes cast. As of August 10, 68 parties had applied to the CEC to stand for elections in October; 41 had been registered, while the CEC continues to process additional applications. However, uneven financial resources and access to media suggest that much of the campaign will be dominated by the governing Georgian Dream party (GD) and a handful of long-standing opposition parties.

[NDI public opinion research](#) shows that most Georgians still see this as a binary choice between the ruling Georgian Dream party and the former ruling party, the United National Movement (UNM), despite the wide spectrum of existing and emerging parties. NDI focus groups from February 2020 suggest that people outside of Tbilisi, in particular, have little awareness of the newer and small parties. Nevertheless, high public dissatisfaction with the main parliamentary parties (only 26 percent of NDI poll respondents thought in December 2019 that their MPs are representing citizen interests and approximately 40 percent had no party preference), means new groups have a meaningful shot at winning over undecided voters. In 2020, although not in subsequent elections, parties will have the option of forming electoral coalitions. It remains unclear whether parties will take advantage of this option. Several parties reported that the 1 percent threshold disincentivizes the formation of electoral blocs.

Despite reaching agreement on recent electoral reforms, and promises to run positive campaigns, there remains a deep mistrust between the ruling party and opposition groups. Each party expressed concerns that others would resort to negative campaigning, character attacks, and fear-based messaging. Uniformly, opposition parties expressed skepticism about the government's willingness to follow through on implementation of the reforms, especially when doing so may require acting against the ruling party's interests. With campaigns not yet officially underway, parties offered few documented or concrete examples of violations.

However, several citizen observation organizations have begun their observation, and in its [first two interim reports](#), for example, ISFED highlighted 27 cases of potential vote buying, including incidents of majoritarian MPs participating in the distribution of medication, groceries, or other products to citizens. The ongoing economic and health crisis, which often necessitates state assistance to those who have been affected, can make it difficult to distinguish between legitimate government aid to citizens and attempts by a ruling party to curry favor with voters ahead of elections.

Georgian elections have long been personality-driven affairs, fueled by personal vitriol and scandal. Issue-based campaigns and debate have rarely taken center stage, although parties generally agree that economic issues, such as jobs, inflation, and poverty, are primary voter concerns. These issues have dominated public opinion polls for years. During NDI's discussions, parties uniformly claimed that these would also be the core issues of their campaigns this year. As of late July, however, details of policy platforms were not widely available and clear distinctions among parties' approaches were difficult to discern. Aware of the public's support for its handling of the health crisis, Georgian Dream is likely to leverage this positive momentum to its advantage. Whether parties will focus on positive, citizen- and issue-driven platforms will become more apparent once the campaign period formally launches on September 1.

Parties are beginning to release the names of their majoritarian candidates and their party lists. The process is likely to continue into early September, when final lists of candidates are due. The ruling party has released a list of its 30 majoritarian candidates. Several major opposition parties, including UNM, European Georgia (EG), Labor, Free Democrats, and New Georgia, among others, succeeded in nominating joint candidates for six of the eight majoritarian seats in Tbilisi. However, UNM chose to nominate its own candidates for 22 seats in the regions. EG subsequently released a list of 14 candidates for regional seats. As of the writing of this report, opposition parties are still in discussions and potentially coordinating on candidates in the remaining larger municipalities. Many parties noted that the enlargement of electoral districts is changing how they select majoritarian candidates and run campaigns. Candidates will need to appeal to a larger, more diverse constituency. The additional resources necessary to cover a larger area is a challenge for smaller parties.

The specific impact of covid-19 on the campaign environment remains uncertain. Many acknowledged the restrictions on large public gatherings, however, and lamented their inability to reach their voter base and

build support through rallies and marches. Given the relatively controlled nature of covid-19 in Georgia, many parties hoped they could still organize in-person meetings, although potentially on a smaller scale. They focused on outdoor gatherings over the summer; door-to-door campaign activities were still being planned by several parties as the campaign season approached. The extent to which parties will transition to digital campaigning remains unclear. Social media was acknowledged as a valuable platform, but did not appear to be the main focus for most established parties. Some emphasized that the health restrictions made access to media all the more important. Others decided to rely on their networks of activists and volunteers to distribute hard copy newspapers or other forms of written publications.

Recommendations

Political parties and candidates should develop policy platforms focused on solutions to issues that concern citizens. Campaigns should refrain from speech that inhibits pre- or post-election cross-party cooperation or seeks to denigrate public confidence in the process.

GD and government leaders should undertake visible, concerted efforts to ensure a clear separation between the party and the state and prohibit the use of state resources for campaign purposes.

Parties should take advantage of any opportunities to participate in moderated public debates.

Jointly or individually, parties should make and comply with public pledges to conduct ethical campaigns, including renouncing the use of hate speech, disinformation, fraud, vote buying, intimidation or violence. They should adopt internal accountability measures and sanctions for noncompliance.

Parties should forswear conducting or benefiting from disinformation campaigns that seek to deliberately mislead or confuse voters or suppress their participation in the elections.

Parties and candidates should ensure their supporters do not interfere in the campaign events of their opponents nor interfere with the activities of Georgian or international election observers.

Gender and Inclusion

[Genuine democratic elections](#) require a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms to be exercised without discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability, or other status. In Georgia, while some commendable progress has been made, inclusion in electoral processes of underrepresented groups, including women,

ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, as well as members of the LGBTQI community, remains limited.

After several years of advocacy led by the Gender Task Force on Women's Political Participation, a Georgian advocacy group comprised of NGOs, individual activists, and international organizations, efforts to include more women in leadership roles took a significant step forward with the passage of a new gender quota for proportional election lists. In 2020 and 2024, parties will need to include at least one woman for every four men on their lists of proportional candidates, with the aim that at least 20 percent of parliamentary seats will be held by women. The law also offers an additional 30 percent in state funding to political parties that achieve a ratio of one in three. The minimum required quotas increase to one in three for 2028 and 2032. The law also requires a one in two ratio for local elections starting in 2021.

CSOs, in particular, expressed appreciation for this reform. Most parties support the mandatory quota, and all are expected to abide by the rule, whether they favor it or not. Several may take advantage of the additional financial opportunities that would come with exceeding the minimum requirement.

Unfortunately, this support for women candidates on proportional lists has not, thus far, extended to candidates for majoritarian seats. Although a [June 2020 UNDP study](#) found that 60 percent of Georgians think the involvement of more women in politics would benefit the country, NDI was told that for majoritarian seats, parties need to prioritize "winnability" over gender, implying that women candidates are viewed as risks. GD, a major proponent of the quota law, has only included one woman on its list of 30 majoritarian candidates. Opposition parties appear to be doing better, with EG nominating 4 women out of the 16 it has released thus far. Other parties have not yet released their lists, but several new parties, including For Justice and Movement for People, already have prominent women at their forefront who are likely to run as majoritarian candidates.

However, experience has shown that candidacy does not necessarily translate into leadership roles or influence. The phrase "quota women" has been used as a derogatory term, suggesting that women elected under this system are not earning their positions through their qualifications. During meetings with NDI, women politicians said they often face trolling and cyberbullying, including misogynistic insults and threats. A recent [Inter-Parliamentary Union study](#) on violence against women parliamentarians worldwide, including from Georgia, found that troubling levels of psychological violence, the most widespread form, were affecting 85.2 per cent of survey respondents from all countries and regions. Of the psychological violence reported, 46.9 per cent of those surveyed said they had received threats of death, rape and beatings during their parliamentary term.

Other groups are even less well represented in political life and elections. While accommodations have been made for people with disabilities (PWD), including tactile ballots for the blind and the ability for people in wheelchairs to apply in advance to vote in a more accessible precinct, challenges remain. CSOs representing PWD said their members feel like objects of charity, rather than citizens with leadership capabilities to contribute in their own right. They rarely see people from their communities reflected in decision making positions. They also reported continued accessibility issues, which hinders their full participation in electoral processes. For example, many polling places, even if they have ramps, are still difficult to access and navigate for people in wheelchairs.

The coronavirus crisis presents additional challenges for some of these groups. The CEC is working with the health ministry to develop a plan for safe voting, but special consideration is likely needed for PWD. For example, when using mobile ballot boxes, current requirements necessitate a team converging in a voter's home, accompanied by multiple partisan observers, potentially violating social distancing for an already

vulnerable population. In the coming months, it will be important to consider mitigating measures, not just for the general population but for vulnerable groups as well.

NDI heard that politicians are gradually changing how they speak about LGBTQI issues. On May 17, 2020, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, for example, several politicians made public statements in support of equality and LGBTQI people. Nonetheless, LGBTQI people are more likely to be used in disinformation narratives or as a wedge issue than to be included as prominent candidates or treated equally as a valued electoral constituency. Homophobic speech and views are still prevalent among the public. According to the [Caucasus Barometer](#), 43 percent of respondents do not believe it is important to protect the rights of sexual minorities. The organization Tbilisi Pride is advocating for parties to sign inter-party memoranda and pledges on LGBTQI issues as part of their election campaigns.

Ethnic and religious minorities, which make up approximately 13 percent of the Georgian population, also face vilification. Anti-Muslim and xenophobic rhetoric is common. Language barriers serve to further isolate these communities and reinforce their disengagement from Georgian politics. As of August 5, both GD and EG have put forward two ethnic minority candidates to represent communities in ethnic minority majority areas of Marneuli and Akhalkalaki. However, CSOs representing ethnic minority populations pointed out that negative stigmas portraying minority groups as security threats, whose allegiances to neighboring countries are allegedly stronger than their connections to Georgia, remain common and reinforce divisions.

While the CEC regularly develops materials and conducts voter education efforts in minority languages, Georgia's government, political parties and media have done little to invest in these communities. For example, while the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) translates information on its digital platforms, internet penetration in minority regions remains low, reducing reach. GPB as well as private broadcasters have not prioritized transmissions in minority languages. As a result, members of ethnic minority communities continue to rely on non-Georgian sources for their news, further widening the divide between their communities and other Georgian citizens.

Recommendations

Political parties should recruit, train, and support a greater number of women and minorities to contest winnable seats, further develop party infrastructure to support women and minorities, and integrate issues of specific concern to these communities into party platforms.

Political parties should consider democratizing their internal candidate selection procedures to ensure broad involvement from a diverse representation of party membership, including in the regions.

Parties should acknowledge and identify internal obstacles to women's participation within parties. Parties should consider changing internal behaviors and practices, including working hours, decision-making processes, and financial support for candidate campaigns, in order to attract women candidates.

Parties should develop inclusive issue-based campaign programs that address concerns of underrepresented groups, including women, LGBTQI communities, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities, and integrate them into their internal operations, including as candidates. In their campaign communications, parties and candidates should consider issuing statements in support of equality and anti-discrimination.

Covid-19 mitigation strategies to ensure safety of voters and candidates across the country should also consider the unique needs of underrepresented groups and vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities.

In an effort to increase electoral and political awareness among national minority communities, political parties and elected officials should consider conducting outreach campaigns directed at national minorities throughout the year, including in minority languages.

Funds should be devoted to increasing minority language media broadcasts to better inform and involve ethnic minority communities in the political processes of Georgia.

Media Environment and Information Space

Freedom of speech is largely respected in Georgia and citizens have access to a diversity of points of view. However, challenges in the traditional and social media spheres, if left unaddressed, could deprive Georgian voters of the reliable, authentic information they need to make responsible choices at the ballot box and feel confident in the integrity of the overall process.

According to a December 2019 [NDI survey](#), 69 percent of Georgians say television is their primary source of information. At the same time, they view the major TV channels as politically biased and as platforms for disinformation - false or misleading information that is spread deliberately to deceive. Those outlets seeking to present a multi-partisan perspective, meanwhile, have difficulty attracting government and ruling party leaders to their programs. Television channels seen as sympathetic to the opposition or critical of the government have faced multiple legal challenges, creating perceptions of politically motivated judicial interference in free expression. In addition, regional media stations struggle to remain viable. A July 2020 law giving the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) authority to appoint “special managers” to telecommunications companies accused of violating the law on electronic communications has raised concerns about potential violations of editorial independence for partisan purposes.

While TV remains the primary source from which Georgians get their information, a growing number of citizens turn to online sources, particularly Facebook, for their news. According to NDI’s December 2019 research, nearly a quarter of Georgians were turning to the internet for their news, up from seven percent in 2015. The pivot to digital interactions due to covid-19 appears to have accelerated this trend. Yet social media

is rife with information manipulation from both domestic and international sources. For example, groundbreaking research by Georgian CSOs, [including ISFED](#), has exposed networks of coordinated websites, Facebook pages and YouTube accounts operating under false pretenses to disseminate and artificially amplify political messages with the intent of manipulating opinions and creating information disorder. Much of the content in question was either pro-governmental or critical of opposition parties and public figures. Some of it was anti-American, anti-democratic and/or pro-Russian. Some of it originated on Russian-based news sites. In response, commendably, Facebook has deleted more than a thousand “fake” accounts since December 2019. The majority of these were tied to GD, although some were linked to UNM. NDI’s interlocutors, however, suggested that these accounts represent only the tip of a larger iceberg of coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) and other information manipulation. In response to a July [public appeal](#) from 50 Georgian CSOs, including ISFED, GYLA, TI-Georgia, MDF, and the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), Facebook agreed to provide for increased transparency about account ownership and advertising purchases. These steps are at once welcome and insufficient to the need.

The distinctions between externally-produced and homegrown disinformation can be blurry. Anti-Western, anti-democratic and divisive narratives may overlap, and the origin of some outlets and content can be difficult to discern. Local news outlets often struggle to produce their own content, so many share stories from sources such as Sputnik, a Russian state-controlled propaganda outlet.

Interlocutors across the board raised serious concerns about the impact on the elections of disinformation campaigns and hate speech to sow confusion and poison the electoral environment for political purposes of both domestic and foreign malign actors. “Hate speech” is defined here as abusive or threatening language targeted at specific groups identified by attributes such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, or physical or mental disability. It does not refer to merely critical or negative messaging.

The Media Development Foundation (MDF), an impartial Georgian CSO, [reports](#) that some Georgian government programs that purport to counter external threats and anti-Western propaganda have instead devoted their energies to criticizing Georgian media outlets, particularly those affiliated with opposition parties. These programs include the GNCC’s online platform, Media Critic, and the strategic communications efforts of some ministries, including Internal Affairs and Defense.

A June 2020 [NDI public opinion survey](#) found that effective government performance in managing the public health aspects of covid-19 translated into high public confidence in government communications on that topic, providing a valuable tool for combatting pandemic-related disinformation. Similarly, effective performance by government leaders, election administrators and other stakeholders in conducting a credible election would serve as a bulwark against information attacks intended to discredit the process.

Recommendations

Media outlets and journalists should be allowed to perform their legitimate functions and exercise their rights, in keeping with journalistic ethics, without government interference, harassment, or arbitrary, undue or overly burdensome restrictions. Authorities should scrupulously avoid threats or steps that could be seen as politically motivated interference in media independence, including prosecutions of media owners or imposition of “special managers” at telecommunications companies.

Media outlets and journalists should renounce dissemination of disinformation, and to avoid spreading misinformation that would unintentionally mislead voters, carefully check stories before publication for factual accuracy and authenticity of sources.

The international community should consider enhanced support to local media outlets, to ensure voters have access to in-depth coverage of majoritarian campaigns and candidates, and should continue support for Georgian CSOs conducting media and social media monitoring.

Facebook, YouTube and other online platforms should cooperate closely with Georgian CSOs to mitigate information manipulation. Facebook should urgently address issues raised by Georgian CSOs related to identification, removal, and notification of social media consumers about coordinated inauthentic behavior; prohibiting micro-targeting; and improving fact-checking labels.

In its efforts to combat disinformation, the Government and its agencies, including the GNCC, should prioritize safeguarding voters' access to authentic, reliable information and building citizens' resilience, rather than concentrating efforts on addressing relatively minor partisan activities by some media outlets.

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Authors: President Derek Mitchell; Georgia Country Director Alan Gillam; Interim Georgia Country Director Teona Kupunia; Director for Programs in Eurasia Laura Jewett; Director for Election Programs Patrick Merloe; and Director for Programs in the Caucasus and Central Asia Melissa Muscio.