



# Georgia Election Watch



For Immediate Release

## **NDI Report: Allegations of Irregularities, Intimidation and Abuses Detract from Legal and Administrative Improvements for Georgia's Parliamentary Elections**

*November 2, 2020*

**Tbilisi, Georgia** - According to an analysis issued today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute), alleged irregularities in results protocols, widespread reports of potentially intimidating behavior in or around polling stations, delays in the publication of results and persistent perceptions of pre-election abuses of power detracted from notable improvements in the legal framework and administrative procedures for Georgia's October 31, 2020 parliamentary elections.

"The citizens of Georgia are to be congratulated for turning out to vote, despite the challenges of a global pandemic," said Christine Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey and administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S., who served as a member of the NDI analysis team. "As the results of the first round are finalized and the country heads to run-off elections on November 21, government leaders and election authorities will need to take extraordinary steps to address the concerns that have been raised and ensure public confidence in the overall process and final results."

On election day, credible observer groups highlighted irregularities related to results protocols and vote secrecy, among other issues. They reported instances of physical confrontations outside of polling stations, obstruction of the work of journalists and observers, and allegations of vote buying and vote rigging, and the intimidating presence of party coordinators and activists outside most polling stations. Following election day, opposition activists held large protest rallies, many calling for recounts or even invalidation of the results and repeat elections.

The legal framework provided a sound basis for the conduct of the elections, and July 2020 constitutional and legislative reforms contributed to a more diverse field of contestants. Opposition parties and CSOs raised complaints about excessive partisanship among election commissions and expressed mistrust in the complaints and appeals process. Longstanding concerns about the campaign financing framework remained relevant.

The campaign was open and pluralistic. However, multiple incidents of violence and intimidation were reported. Allegations of abuses of state resources were widespread. There were also significant numbers of reports of voter bribery. Parties had uneven access to television, due to media polarization, and campaign messaging focused more on criticizing opponents than presenting constructive policy solutions.

Georgia has taken significant steps toward promoting greater inclusion and diversity in politics, most notably a new gender quota. Despite this progress, women, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTI+ community remain underrepresented in the new parliament.

The highly polarized election news coverage impeded voters' ability to make informed choices. There were multiple reports of violence or threats of violence targeting journalists. Due to limited participation, televised debates did not live up to their potential for informing voters. Information manipulation was widespread, particularly on online platforms such as Facebook.

“Without demonstrable improvements to the electoral process, a pattern of declining public confidence in key democratic institutions will continue,” said Ambassador Derek Mitchell, President of NDI. “What is needed is the political will to place the integrity of the process over partisan interests.”

The NDI report makes 35 recommendations to improve Georgia's electoral process. In advance of the runoff elections on November 21, it will be critical for Georgia's electoral stakeholders to focus on the following:

- Authorities should make extra efforts to swiftly and properly adjudicate submitted complaints and conduct recounts or reruns, where appropriate. They should also investigate allegations of violence or intimidation, as appropriate, prosecute them to the full extent of the law and take all measures necessary to prevent such practices in the future.
- Parties and candidates should make every effort to provide adequate evidence to substantiate claims of electoral violations, abuse of state resources, or pressure and intimidation, and follow available procedures for seeking redress.
- All stakeholders should respect and uphold the rights of nonpartisan independent observers to continue their oversight work without interference or intimidation.
- The CEC should reinforce the need for PECs to rigorously and consistently apply all prescribed procedures, including allocating responsibilities among commission members, ensuring vote secrecy, following inking procedures, and filling out protocols.
- All stakeholders should make efforts to de-escalate tensions and facilitate a peaceful environment. Party leaders and candidates should renew their campaigns' commitments to the code of conduct.
- To safeguard voters' access to balanced and reliable information, political parties and candidates should participate in a spectrum of debates and political programs to present their policies and plans to the public.
- Before the run-off elections, campaigns should make every effort to safeguard public health as they conduct outreach to voters.

The election analysis report is based on virtual interviews with key stakeholders conducted October 22 - 31; input from remote long-term analysts; the Institute's expertise and relationships developed over 25 years of programming in Georgia; and the findings of credible nonpartisan citizen monitors who were deployed throughout the country on October 31. It builds on NDI Georgia Election Watch reports issued on [August 19](#), [October 9](#) and [October 20](#), 2020.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Democratic Institute, “Georgia Election Watch Report,” August 19, 2020; “Georgia Election Watch Bulletin #1,” October 9, 2020; and “Georgia Election Watch Bulletin #2,” October 20, 2020, <https://www.ndi.org/2020-georgia-parliamentary-election>.

*NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. NDI has organized more than 250 international observation missions or assessments to more than 65 countries, including numerous assessments in Georgia since 1992. For more information about NDI and its programs, please visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).*