

# 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

*Author: Andrei Pavel*  
*Peer review: George Scutaru*

**Author:** Andrei Pavel, Non resident Expert, New Strategy Center

**Peer review:** George Scutaru, CEO, New Strategy Center

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## 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

Located at the eastern edge of the Black Sea, Georgia was in 2008 the first kinetic target of Russian aggressive resurgence in the 21st century - a country whose geopolitical significance is often overlooked, yet undeniable. Georgia serves as a gate from the Black Sea region into South Caucasus, one of the few remaining gray zones on the European map, subjected to the influence of several regional and global actors. The 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia was only the first violent expression of the geopolitical struggles for the region. This short war denied Tbilisi's attempt to escape Moscow's sphere of influence and locked Georgia into an unresolved frozen conflict with no immediate solution in sight<sup>1</sup>.



Map of Georgia showing the border with Russia, as well as the disputed Abkhazian and South Ossetian territories. (Source: United Nations Cartographic Section)

The consequences of this historical trauma are being felt to this day: the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia, set for 26 October 2024, are once again framed as a choice between East and West, under the shadow of increased authoritarianism and the pressing question of reunification. The dimensions are manifold. Locally, these elections will decide whether the ruling Georgian Dream party, in power since 2012, will retain its increasingly authoritarian and illiberal reign amid rising dissatisfaction among a radically pro-

<sup>1</sup> Sergiu Mitrescu and Andrei Pavel, *Frozen Conflicts in the Heat of War: The Changing Tide in the Black Sea Region*, New Strategy Center, September 20, 2023, 16-19, <https://newstrategycenter.ro/project/frozen-conflicts-in-the-heat-of-war-the-changing-tide-in-the-black-sea-region-2/>.

European population<sup>2</sup>. Regionally, the elections influence Georgia's precarious relationship with Russia and its contested territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while also affecting the entire geopolitical calculus of alignment in the South Caucasus. More widely, they are pivotal for Georgia's bid to deepen ties with the European Union and NATO.

Key opposition parties, including the United National Movement (UNM), Strong Georgia, and the Coalition for Change, have united under the Georgian Charter<sup>3</sup>, seeking to reverse perceived authoritarian shifts under Georgian Dream. These opposition forces aim to realign Georgia's foreign policy towards deeper EU and NATO integration while repealing laws such as the foreign agent legislation, which critics argue hinders democratic development. However, their unresolved differences make the task of forging a coalition strong enough to oust the Georgian Dream rather challenging.

The outcome of these elections will not only reshape Georgia's domestic politics but also affect its role in the wider geopolitical landscape, where Western and Russian interests continue to collide.

## 1. Electoral System

The Georgian electoral system, as reformed in recent years, consists of a 150-member Parliament elected for a four-year term. Starting with the 2024 elections, Georgia will adopt a fully proportional representation system, necessitating a minimum of 5% of the vote for parties to gain parliamentary seats. The Central Election Commission (CEC) will utilize a specific seat distribution method to allocate these seats based on party votes.<sup>4</sup>

Also starting with 2024, the President will no longer be chosen through popular vote, but will be elected for a five-year term by a parliamentary college of electors. This is of great importance, as it effectively turns Georgia into a parliamentary republic where the president has reduced powers. This would, in the eventuality of Georgian Dream retaining power, remove the pro-European president Salome Zourabichvili, a significant obstacle for their authoritarian tendencies.

The recent amendments altering the composition and operation of the CEC raised serious concerns about political neutrality. For instance, the Speaker of Parliament will now nominate the CEC chair and members, potentially increasing political influence over the commission. Moreover, concerns about potential government influence on elections has also been the result of a decree requiring precinct election commission chairs to draw lots for distributing

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<sup>2</sup> "IRI Survey: 86% of Respondents Support Joining the European Union, 79% – Joining NATO," *Georgia Today*, November 16, 2023, <https://georgiatoday.ge/iri-survey-86-of-respondents-support-joining-the-european-union-79-joining-nato/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Opposition Parties Sign Georgian Charter", *Civil Georgia*, June 3, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/611114>.

<sup>4</sup> "Key Points of Newly Adopted Constitution", *Civil Georgia*, September 26, 2017 <http://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30474>.

duties one week before the election, rather than on election day. Critics argue that it could allow the Georgian State Security Service to identify and influence key commission members in advance.<sup>5</sup> It is also notable that mandatory gender quotas have been abolished<sup>6</sup>, and that Georgian emigrants will continue facing considerable challenges, as their access to voting is limited, which can hinder their participation in national elections.

## 2. Main Political Forces

### Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia

Georgian Dream (GD) is currently the dominant political force in Georgia, holding power since 2012. Founded by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, GD came to power by defeating the United National Movement (UNM) in the parliamentary elections, marking the first peaceful transfer of power since Georgia's independence. GD's domestic policy is centered on welfare expansion. It introduced the State Universal Healthcare Program and emphasized economic growth through infrastructure and agricultural development.<sup>7</sup>



*Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze delivers a keynote speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Hungary in late April 2024. (Source: gov.ge)*

In terms of foreign policy, Georgian Dream nominally maintains in official documents the pro-European stance it initially pursued. The party's government signed the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, reinforcing Georgia's European trajectory. However, under Ivanishvili's unofficial influence, GD has been criticized for an increasingly illiberal stance,

<sup>5</sup> "CEC's New Rule for Precinct Commissions Fuels Fears of Election Influencing", *Civil Georgia*, August 20, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/621172>.

<sup>6</sup> "Ombudsman's Office: ODIHR/OSCE has negatively assessed the abolition of gender quotas in Georgia", *JAMnews*, July 1, 2024, <https://jam-news.net/abolition-of-gender-quotas-in-georgia/>.

<sup>7</sup> "About the party", Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, accessed October 18, 2024, <http://gd.ge/about-party.html>.

particularly for consolidating power and targeting opposition figures<sup>8</sup>. This has led to tensions with both domestic political rivals and international observers. Relations with the European Union have gradually deteriorated, to a point where Georgia's EU accession process is practically blocked. Unlike Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia was not invited to begin accession negotiations, due to the adoption of domestically controversial laws and an authoritarian attitude towards the opposition. In addition, the growing influence of Russia and China have strengthened the perception in Brussels and Washington that Georgia, with the current Government, is no longer a reliable partner open to dialogue.

In recent years, GD has faced significant opposition protests, especially concerning electoral reforms and its handling of democratic institutions. It has been accused of backsliding on democratic values, with particular controversy surrounding the detention of opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili and the crackdown on protests. Most remarkably, the GD successfully passed a Russia-style "foreign agent" law that has sparked weeks of mass street protests<sup>9</sup>. International reactions escalated in US sanctions against certain individuals.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, GD retains significant support, especially in rural areas, where its social policies have had more direct impacts. The GD-dominated Parliament also witnessed the only attempt to impeach a president, in October 2023, against current President Salome Zourabichvili. Zourabichvili is known for her strong pro-European stance, advocating for Georgia's integration into the European Union and NATO. In spite of her political isolation, the impeachment vote failed.

Georgian Dream (GD) has also faced scrutiny over its connections to Russia, particularly through its donors. A key pattern among these donors is their heavy dependence on the Russian market, especially those involved in the winemaking industry, and close ties to Bidzina Ivanishvili, GD's founder. Many donors hold dual Georgian-Russian citizenship or have Russian business partners, revealing the extent of their market reliance.<sup>11</sup>

Under GD leadership, China has also increased its presence in Georgian infrastructure projects, in competition with the European Union and the US. One key example is the Anaklia deep sea port project on Georgia's Black Sea coast, a port crucial for the transport corridor connecting Europe and Central Asia via Middle Corridor. In the same time, Anaklia port is

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<sup>8</sup> Alec Gitelman, "Georgia: Tracing the rise of illiberalism in Tbilisi", *Eurasianet*, May 15, 2024, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-tracing-the-rise-of-illiberalism-in-tbilisi>; Kornely Kakachia and Bidzina Lebanidze, "Georgia's Slide to Authoritarianism", March 14, 2023, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/03/georgias-slide-to-authoritarianism?lang=en&center=europe>.

<sup>9</sup> Rayhan Demytrie and Emily Atkinson, "Georgia approves controversial 'foreign agent' law, sparking more protests", *BBC*, May 14, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-69007465>.

<sup>10</sup> "US State Department Implements First Tranche of Sanctions against Georgian Individuals", *Civil Georgia*, June 6, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/611904>.

<sup>11</sup> "Russian Ties of Georgian Dream Donors: Market Dependency and State-Favored Financial Benefits", *Civic idea*, October 17, 2024, <https://x.com/IdeaCivic/status/1846874636304232816>.

important for China's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>12</sup> The Anaklia port is viewed as a strategic asset, and its modernization has implications for regional trade routes and Western's interests in the Black Sea region.<sup>13</sup>

## Unity – National Movement

The United National Movement (UNM), now part of the broader informal Unity coalition together with Strategy Aghmashenebeli, and European Georgia, was Georgia's ruling party from 2003 until 2012, led by the charismatic but controversial Mikheil Saakashvili, who served as President from 2004 to 2013. During its time in power, UNM was known for pro-Western reforms, aggressive anti-corruption efforts, and rapid modernization. However, it also faced criticism for authoritarian practices and human rights abuses, which contributed to its defeat by Georgian Dream.

Today, UNM remains the largest opposition party in Georgia, focusing on a platform of anti-corruption, judicial reform, and accelerated Euro-Atlantic integration. The Unity coalition sees Georgia's future firmly within NATO and the EU and has been a vocal critic of Georgian Dream's governance, accusing it of democratic backsliding and corruption. They propose scrapping the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence," which may be seen as an effort to enhance democratic governance and distance Georgia from Russian-style legal frameworks. Unity also supports closer ties with the US, advocating for negotiating free trade and visa liberalization agreements with the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

Mikheil Saakashvili, the informal leader of the UNM, remains a central figure, though he has been imprisoned on charges related to abuse of power, which his supporters claim are politically motivated. His detention has garnered significant international attention, with the European Parliament calling for his release.<sup>15</sup> Despite internal challenges and factionalism within the opposition, UNM continues to be the primary political force advocating for pro-Western reforms and resisting what it views as Georgian Dream's authoritarian tendencies.

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<sup>12</sup> Bradley Jardine, "With Port Project, Georgia Seeks Place on China's Belt and Road", *Eurasianet*, February 1, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/with-port-project-georgia-seeks-place-on-chinas-belt-and-road>.

<sup>13</sup> Aksana Akhmedova, Ketevan Gelashvili, "Impact of Chinese Investment in Anaklia: Strategic Implications for Georgia and Europe", *chinaobservers*, July 10, 2024, <https://chinaobservers.eu/impact-of-chinese-investment-in-anaklia-strategic-implications-for-georgia-and-europe/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Unity - National Movement" presented 5 election priorities", *Interpressnews*, September 4, 2024, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/133197-unity-national-movement-presented-5-election-priorities/>.

<sup>15</sup> European Parliament, "Parliament Urges Georgia to Pardon and Release Ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili", February 15, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230210IPR74803/parliament-urges-georgia-to-pardon-and-release-ex-president-mikheil-saakashvili>.



*People hold banners and wave flags during a rally in the city of Zugdidi demanding the release of ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili. (Source: POLITICO)*

### **Strong Georgia**

Strong Georgia is an opposition coalition that includes various new and established political actors. This coalition primarily consists of former members of Georgian Dream and officials who have split from the ruling party due to disagreements over policy and leadership. The coalition includes multiple parties: Lelo, For the People, Freedom Square, and Citizens.

The leading force within this coalition is Lelo for Georgia, led by Mamuka Khazaradze, a former banker and businessman. Their political program emphasises economic reforms, judicial independence, and transparency, positioning itself as a centrist alternative to both Georgian Dream and the more radical opposition forces. While Lelo has pro-Western leanings, it also seeks to maintain pragmatic relations with regional powers, showcased by their positioning towards Russia.<sup>16</sup> Notably, Mamuka Khazaradze insisted that "We have to save the country from Russian occupation, from Russian influence. We have 9 reforms on how to quickly unite and join the European Union - it concerns the introduction of visas, regulation of flights, banning the sale of our lands to Russians."<sup>17</sup> They also pledge to create

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<sup>16</sup> "Ilya's plan", Strong Georgia, August 20, 2024, accessed October 19, 2022, [https://dzlieri9.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ilias-gza\\_tirazhi-500-inglisurad-1.pdf](https://dzlieri9.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ilias-gza_tirazhi-500-inglisurad-1.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> "Iliia's Way" - "Strong Georgia" submitted its election plan", *Radio Free Europe*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33108590.html>.



a special ministry to push for Georgia's EU accession and enhance trade relations with the EU, while also expanding student exchange programs with European countries.<sup>18</sup>

In recent elections, Strong Georgia has garnered moderate support but struggles to break through the dominance of Georgian Dream and the UNM, currently controlling only 4 Parliamentary seats.

### **Coalition for Change**

The Coalition for Change is another political grouping that emerged from the fragmented opposition in Georgia. Key parties in this coalition include the Republican Party of Georgia, Girchi – For More Freedom, and Droa.

What differentiates this coalition is its progressive policies, particularly in terms of civil liberties, judicial reform, and anti-corruption measures. Many of its members are newer political movements, formed after the 2020 elections, and they portray themselves as a fresh political reserve.

The foreign policy goals of the Coalition for Change are outlined in their "4-4-4 Plan", which prominently features European integration, promising to begin EU accession negotiations within four days of taking office. The abolition of "Russian laws" that have emerged in recent years are another goal, aligning their governance reforms with Georgia's pro-European aspirations.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, they also support opening commercial avenues to European, American, and Chinese markets. Nika Gvaramia, the leader of the For Change Coalition, underlined this necessity while addressing Georgian farmers: "Do not be misled into thinking that your labour is futile or that Russia is your only solution. The European Union, the United States, and China offer enormous markets, which will be available to you once we take office. The future is yours".<sup>20</sup>

While this coalition has yet to achieve major electoral success, it is seen as an important part of the pro-Western opposition. It seeks to unify various progressive forces to create a more cohesive challenge to the ruling Georgian Dream party.

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<sup>18</sup> "Ilia's Way" - "Strong Georgia" submitted its election plan", Radio Free Europe, September 5, 2024, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33108590.html>.

<sup>19</sup> "Gvaramia presented the main directions of the "Coalition for Change" program", *publika.ge*, October 17, 2024, <https://publika.ge/gvaramiam-koalicia-cvlibistvis-programis-mtavari-mimartulebebi-waradgina/>.

<sup>20</sup> "For Change Coalition leader promises support for business growth and investment", *1TV*, October 1, 2024, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/for-change-coalition-leader-promises-support-for-business-growth-and-investment/>.

## For Georgia

For Georgia is a relatively new political party, led by former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.<sup>21</sup> Gakharia broke away from Georgian Dream in 2021, citing disagreements over the party's direction and its handling of democratic governance.<sup>22</sup>

Gakharia's break from Georgian Dream was significant, as he had been a key figure in the ruling party's leadership.<sup>23</sup> His party strongly emphasizes the importance of maintaining a pro-European foreign policy, continuing Georgia's trajectory towards EU and NATO integration. According to the party's manifesto, the goal of European integration is strongly connected with Georgia's prime national objective - reunification with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>24</sup>

Despite its relative newness, For Georgia has gained some traction in recent elections, particularly appealing to moderate voters disillusioned with both the ruling Georgian Dream and the more radical opposition groups. The party seeks to strike a balance between modernization and maintaining Georgia's cultural and national identity.<sup>25</sup>



Giorgi Gakharia, leader of the For Georgia party. (Source: Gakharia's official Facebook page)

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<sup>21</sup> "Former PM Giorgi Gakharia to Chair For Georgia Party", *Trend News Agency*, May 30 2021, <https://en.trend.az/scaucasus/georgia/3431648.html>.

<sup>22</sup> "Former PM Gakharia Inaugurates New Political Party", *Civil Georgia*, May 21, 2021, <https://civil.ge/archives/423613>.

<sup>23</sup> "Former PM Gakharia Inaugurates New Political Party", *Civil Georgia*, May 21, 2021, <https://civil.ge/archives/423613>.

<sup>24</sup> For Georgia, "Manifesto for a Dignified Life", [forgeo.ge](http://forgeo.ge), 24-28, <http://forgeo.ge/upload/manifests/1/384bcd2ac87bb29915ef53f71c10e1d0.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> For Georgia, "Manifesto for a Dignified Life", [forgeo.ge](http://forgeo.ge), 12-16, 29, <http://forgeo.ge/upload/manifests/1/384bcd2ac87bb29915ef53f71c10e1d0.pdf>.

### 3. Scenarios

According to the polls, multiple scenarios can be expected, having in mind the complex dynamics between the distinct political forces in Georgia. Georgian Dream has been losing considerable support, gathering a score of 32-37% in most opinion polls since April 2024. This is a significant loss of support, considering they prevailed in the last elections with almost 50% of the votes. Meanwhile, the rest of the electorate is split between the main coalitions. Polls show Unity - National Movement anywhere between 12 and 20%, solidly in the second position. Both Strong Georgia and Coalition for Change usually poll between 9 and 12%, with the exception of one recent poll showing Coalition for Change as high as 18%. Other parties are unlikely to surpass the 5% electoral threshold. Gakharia's For Georgia has been slowly gaining notoriety, rising from 5% in April to scores between 10 and 12% in September.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that no opposition coalitions are willing to cooperate with the ruling Georgian Dream. It is highly unlikely that Georgian Dream (GD) will be able to form a coalition with any opposition parties after the 2024 elections. Six key opposition parties—including United National Movement (UNM), Girchi - More Freedom, and Lelo—have signed a declaration of unity, pledging not to cooperate with GD.<sup>27</sup> However, there are many barriers preventing the coalitions from forming a united opposition. For instance, Lelo and Gakharia did not want to work with the United National Movement, accusing it of authoritarian rule before 2012.<sup>28</sup> In such a context, we can distinguish three scenarios:

#### a. Georgian Dream Victory

Even though the ruling Georgian Dream has been losing considerable support, they are still very likely to receive most of the votes. GD controls significant state resources, which allows it to manage a well-organized campaign. Additionally, GD's consistent participation under a unified banner and its ability to mobilize its core rural base could help it stay afloat. Its longevity in power also gives it institutional advantages. A victory big enough to allow GD to

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<sup>26</sup> "If elections were held tomorrow, who would you vote for? | British company SAVANTA public survey", *mtavari.tv*, October 11, 2024, <https://mtavari.tv/news/166979-khval-rom-archevnebi-tardebodes-vis-mistsemidit>; "How the parties rank - Edison Research September 17-29", *formulanews.ge*, October 4, 2024, <https://formulanews.ge/News/117949> ; "How the parties rank - Edison Research survey September 10-22", *formulanews.ge*, September 27, 2024, <https://formulanews.ge/News/117593> ; <https://formulanews.ge/News/117210> ; "How the parties rank - study by Edison Research", *formulanews.ge*, September 13, 2024, [https://formulanews.ge/News/116904?fbclid=IwY2xjawFRUnVleHRuA2FibQIxMQABHdK1xvPgRbODIvQVkkPu2UT4Jk37lv5QohY6LcP7rndONJLPgKQXEHzW4A\\_aem\\_J9wMFWr6rfCsjONeseAYsQ](https://formulanews.ge/News/116904?fbclid=IwY2xjawFRUnVleHRuA2FibQIxMQABHdK1xvPgRbODIvQVkkPu2UT4Jk37lv5QohY6LcP7rndONJLPgKQXEHzW4A_aem_J9wMFWr6rfCsjONeseAYsQ) ; <https://formulanews.ge/News/114833> ; "The sum of three centers brings the best result for the opposition — European Georgia makes the research public", *on.ge*, July 8, 2024, [საუკეთესო შედეგი ოპოზიციისათვის სამი ცენტრის ჯამს მოაქვს — ევროპული საქართველო კვლევას ასაჯაროებს](https://on.ge/news/153386-issa-sotsiologiuri-kvlevis-shedegebi-sruli-versia) ; "ISSA Sociological Research Results Full version", *mtavari.tv*, April 13, 2024, <https://mtavari.tv/news/153386-issa-sotsiologiuri-kvlevis-shedegebi-sruli-versia>.

<sup>27</sup> "Six Georgian opposition parties sign declaration of unity ahead of elections", *AGENDA.GE*, June 25, 2024, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2024/39667#gsc.tab=0>.

<sup>28</sup> Beka Chedia, "Fractious Opposition Puts Georgia's Future in the Balance", *CEPA*, September 16, 2024 <https://cepa.org/article/fractious-opposition-puts-georgias-future-in-the-balance/>.

form a governing coalition will have severe repercussions on the country's domestic politics, as well as its foreign policy trajectory, as it would seriously hinder Euro-atlantic integration.

Remarkably, Georgian Dream announced in August that, in the eventuality of winning a constitutional majority (at least 113 out of the 150 total seats), it will ban the "collective National Movement" (a term it has come up with, referring to all parties associated with the main opposition party, Saakashvili's United National Movement).<sup>29</sup> Such a movement would solidify something resembling a one-party regime in Georgia, as Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has made it clear that the move will target most main opposition parties, including Ahali and Lelo.<sup>30</sup>

Foreign policy-wise, one can expect Georgia's EU bid, which is already in a political limbo<sup>31</sup>, to be unlikely to progress under another GD administration. This would also translate into continued ties between the Russian and Georgian political elites, strengthening Russia's hand in the Caucasus. Russian political influence will be coupled with Chinese economic influence, whose ongoing projects in the region will likely be continued.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, GD is making curious promises of national reunification<sup>33</sup>, making the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia a national priority if they win the elections. The rhetorical strategy involves blaming the beginning of the conflict on Saakashvili's government; Ivanishvili even said that "we will definitely find it in us" to apologize to South Ossetia for the 2008 conflict, which he attributed to external forces and Georgia's previous administration, during a speech in the city of Gori in mid-September. However, there are no signs of any preparations for reintegration in the breakaway regions, disproving any theory of a tacit understanding between Georgian Dream and Moscow on the topic.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Gavin, "Georgia goes 'North Korea' with bombshell plan to ban main opposition parties", POLITICO, August 23, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-opposition-ban-georgian-dream-party-election-eu-enlargement-irakli-kobakhidze/>.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Atasuntsev, "Is Georgia Headed for Another Revolution?", *Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center*, September 25, 2024 <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-urasia/politika/2024/09/georgia-elections-opposition?lang=en>.

<sup>31</sup> Faustine Vincent, "Georgia's EU accession process frozen in wake of 'foreign influence' law", *Le Monde*, July 12, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/12/georgia-s-eu-accession-process-frozen-in-wake-of-foreign-influence-law\\_6682413\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/12/georgia-s-eu-accession-process-frozen-in-wake-of-foreign-influence-law_6682413_4.html) ; Arta Desku, "EU Urged to Freeze Funding to Georgia & Suspend Visa-Free Travel Agreement", *Schengen News*, October 9, 2024, <https://schengen.news/eu-urged-to-freeze-funding-to-georgia-suspend-visa-free-travel-agreement/>.

<sup>32</sup> Robert E. Hamilton and Nvard Chalikyan, "Georgian and US Elections: Defining the Next Chapter for the South Caucasus", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, October 7, 2024, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/10/georgian-and-us-elections-defining-the-next-chapter-for-the-south-caucasus/>.

<sup>33</sup> Nino Narimanishvili and David Pipia, "How 'Georgian Dream' is leveraging territorial integrity in its election campaign", *JAMnews*, October 18, 2024, <https://jam-news.net/how-georgian-dream-is-leveraging-territorial-integrity-in-its-election-campaign/>.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Atasuntsev, "Is Georgia Headed for Another Revolution?", *Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center*, September 25, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-urasia/politika/2024/09/georgia-elections-opposition?lang=en>.

## **b. Opposition victory - coalition government**

In this scenario, opposition parties, such as the United National Movement (UNM), Strong Georgia, and Coalition for Change, manage to successfully form a pro-Western alliance. Considering most polls, the four opposition coalitions together would get more than 50% of the votes after redistribution. Given the public desire for change and increasing dissatisfaction with Georgian Dream's (GD) governance, such a coalition could challenge the ruling party effectively.

Major obstacles include internal differences among opposition groups. For instance, For Georgia has declined to cooperate with either GD or UNM, and past political rivalries, particularly involving Mikheil Saakashvili of UNM, which complicates efforts to form a unified front.<sup>35</sup> Despite shared goals of Euro-Atlantic integration and democratic reforms, the opposition's ability to govern cohesively would depend on overcoming these personal and ideological divides. Even if the feat succeeds, the long-term health of any such coalition is anything but granted.

However, if a functioning coalition is indeed established, this could potentially revitalize Georgia's Euro-Atlantic trajectory, through the reversal of GD illiberal and antidemocratic laws. The real challenge would be balancing such acts with Georgia's relationship with Moscow. It is likely that Russia will reassess its relationship with Georgia after the removal of GD from power, a situation that satisfies Moscow.

## **c. Hung parliament**

Both the opposition and the ruling Georgian Dream party may fail to form a governing coalition. While GD will lack enough seats and its opponents will refuse to negotiate a coalition with them, the opposition is riddled with rivalries and political differences. Without a dominant party, governance would be extremely difficult, leading to political paralysis. If neither Georgian Dream nor the opposition can form a stable majority, a political crisis could emerge, potentially leading to a call for new elections. This may lead to a similar situation to the 2020-2021 political crisis, where EU mediation played a crucial role between the ruling GD and the boycotting opposition parties. Such a situation will increase Russia's maneuvering space, which will profit from the political instability to grow its influence.

To conclude, the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia are critical for determining the country's political future, both domestically and geopolitically. The election serves as a key moment where Georgia must decide between continuing under the increasingly authoritarian rule of Georgian Dream or return to its pro-European and pro-NATO trajectory, under a new opposition coalition.

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<sup>35</sup> "Who is Georgia Voting for in 2024? Electoral Subjects – Strengths and Challenges", *GIP*, October 9, 2024, <https://gip.ge/publication-post/who-is-georgia-voting-for-in-2024-electoral-subjects-strengths-and-challenges/>.

The outcome of these elections will shape Georgia's approach to democratic reforms, regional stability, and its positioning in the broader geopolitical contest between the West and Russia. Moreover, the elections will likely influence Georgia's bid for deeper integration with Western institutions and its precarious relations with its breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ultimately, the elections mark a pivotal point for Georgia, with the potential to redefine its place on the global stage and its long-term trajectory as a key player in the South Caucasus.

At the same time, Georgia's future government will have to manage its relations with Russia, but also with the US and the EU at a time that will be marked by the end of the war in Ukraine. A victorious Russia in Ukraine will be much more aggressive in its relations with Georgia, the direct border with Russia being a major pressure factor for Georgian security. A defeated Russia in Ukraine will force it to turn its attention to domestic issues, which will give Georgia the possibility to have greater freedom of movement internationally, taking advantage of Russia's weakness.

