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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA

Special Editor: Robert Orttung

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The President in Opposition: Georgia's 2012 Parliamentary Elections

By Giorgi Kldiashvili, Tbilisi

Abstract

Georgia's 2012 parliamentary elections marked the first peaceful transition of power in Georgian history. The result was the product of a strong opposition that was able to present a viable alternative to President Mikheil Saakashvili's ruling party. The broadcast of videos depicting prison torture, confirming already widely-held beliefs, helped ensure the demise of the ruling party.

Surprise Results

The October 2012 parliamentary elections were an important test for Georgia's young democracy. All previous elections in Georgia, especially since the Rose Revolution in 2003, were also considered tests for Georgian democratic development by international society and partner governments. But the parliamentary elections of October 2012 must be seen as the most significant and unprecedented for Georgia's post-Soviet history since they led to the first constitutional and orderly transfer of political power in an independent Georgia.

Already on Election Day, October 1, President Mikheil Saakashvili accepted defeat; in a TV statement he officially announced that according to the election results the ruling political party he led—"The United National Movement—More Benefits to People" had moved into opposition.

Even though the election results were deemed invalid in 16 precincts (out of 3,766), TV broadcast clear violations of the electoral law using administrative resources (the special forces and police plundered ballots from a polling station in one of the regions), and supporters of opposition leader Irakli Alasania in Zugdidi protested against Roland Akhalaia, a hated candidate from the ruling party, in the days following the elections, the parliamentary elections of October 1, 2012 "were held in a peaceful and transparent environment," according to Georgia's Central Elections Commission. An unprecedented number of local and international observers monitored the polling process, including 62,115 local and 1,641 international observers, more than 33,000 representatives of parties and other organizations and 3,295 media representatives. The International organizations (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly) evaluated the elections positively.

Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili's political coalition "Bidzina Ivanishvili—Georgian Dream" won control of the parliament—the Georgian Dream defeated the United National Movement (UNM), which had been the ruling and most popular party since 2003,

both in the proportional (54.97% to 40.34%; 44 seats to 33 seats) and majoritarian (41 seats to 32 seats) voting, in total winning 85 seats against 65. The Coalition won in all self-governing cities, including the capital Tbilisi (Georgian Dream won in all 10 districts of the capital city).

None of the other opposition parties were able to cross the 5 percent barrier. The "Giorgi Targamadze—Christian Democratic Union"—the most numerous opposition political party in the previous parliament—received only 2.04 percent of the votes. (http://cesko.ge/files/2012/SUMMARY_PROTOCOL_2012.pdf)

The majority of pre-election opinion polls had predicted a victory for the ruling UNM party and Georgia's partners in Western capitals were mainly focused on the problem of how Georgian Dream would accept defeat and whether the political battle would devolve into street protests, as normally happened after previous elections in Georgia. Most reputable international polls, published several months before the elections, emphasized that the ruling party commanded a twenty-five-point lead. An especially widely discussed August poll from the National Democratic Institute underlined this advantage. (<http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Aug-2012-Survey.pdf>)

A Strong Opposition

In the 2012 elections, the government faced the most organized and—more importantly—well funded opposition it had seen. The dominance of the ruling UNM party in all spheres of political life was one of the main reasons for the weakness of Georgia's political opposition. Under these conditions, political activists mostly focused on street actions rather than engaging in the legislative process. Earlier, Georgia's opposition parties were also internally divided, frequently discredited and mostly based around the personalities of their leaders rather than on particular political programs and agendas. The situation changed when Ivanishvili entered politics about one year ago. He is a billionaire who ranked 153rd on Forbes' list of the world's wealthiest individuals and is the richest Georgian. He had been one of the main financial supporters (as an individual) of Saakash-

vili's government since the Rose Revolution in 2003 and was well known for his philanthropy. He managed to unite the major opposition parties (including the Republic Party of Georgia and Our Georgia—Free Democrats, represented by popular opposition leaders such as David Usufashvili, Irakli Alasania and others) and challenged President Saakashvili, pouring enormous sums into the campaign. This was one of the most serious challenges that the UNM had ever faced.

Many Georgians, who had not benefited from the Saakashvili government's intensive reform program, saw Ivanishvili as a real hope for victory. In response to Ivanishvili's active political steps, the government introduced a series of repressive measures, including amendments to campaign funding legislation. (These amendments were strenuously opposed by civil society with backing from the international community and the "This Affects you Too" campaign). The State Audit Office of Georgia selectively checked donations to political parties and issued excessive fines (ranging up to tens of millions of Georgian Lari) for violations in the case of the Georgian Dream coalition and its supporters. In some cases, they seized bank accounts and properties owned by Ivanishvili and other Georgian Dream donors. When Ivanishvili declared his political ambitions, the government revoked his Georgian citizenship and that of his wife (Ivanishvili had French citizenship). International society viewed these measures as an attempt by the authorities to tip the playing field in their favor before the voting. Ivanishvili proved to be a credible candidate and therefore encouraged Western governments to put extensive pressure on the ruling political elite in Georgia to ensure free and fair elections.

An important argument during the campaign that the UNM leveled against Ivanishvili questioned his background and intentions. Even though Ivanishvili has been living outside Russia since 2002, and was directly funding the Georgian government since the Rose Revolution (Ivanishvili's funding of various government, social, cultural and economic programs since the 2003 Rose Revolution exceeds 1 billion Georgian Lari—US\$604 million), the UNM persistently emphasized that he had made his fortune in Russia during the 1990s, and the fact that he was able to sell off his Russian assets at a competitive price when he decided to move into politics implies that he maintains connections with Moscow and the Kremlin. Therefore UNM and the Georgian government emphasized that Ivanishvili's political endeavor was an extension of Russian attempts to regain control over Georgian politics. With its extensive control over the media and PR skills, the government and the UNM tried to present themselves as positive, Western-oriented reformers and portrayed the opposi-

tion as a negative force that planned to return Georgia to the dark 1990s. In spite of the government's active efforts, the campaign to brand Ivanishvili as pro-Russian did not work well. Ivanishvili repeatedly asserted that he would continue Georgia's Western-oriented security and economic vector, but also carefully stated his intent to improve relations with Russia, at the same time recognizing the fundamental and unresolved problems in the relationship, first of all Russia's continued occupation of Georgian territories.

During the campaign, UNM strongly benefited from the fact that almost all the major media outlets broadcasting across the entire territory of Georgia were either owned or controlled by pro-government groups. The disbalance was obvious: in the capital city—Tbilisi—the population has the opportunity to switch channels and see and compare both perspectives. But in the regions and urban centers beyond the capital, the government-controlled TV channels were typically the only ones available. Pro-governmental media sources formally defined as private commercial entities consistently provided a tendentious and partisan picture of events favorable to the UNM while discrediting the opposition. Programs that did not support the government were not broadcast by the state-controlled or state-supporting media companies. This led to a massive "Must Carry and Must Offer" campaign seeking to improve access for the opposition, which was initiated by the media and civil society organizations. Under public and international pressure, the government had to step back—Georgia enacted a law offering the opposition greater media access prior to the elections and agreed to accept the Must Carry and Must Offer rule during the pre-election period.

Additionally, the UNM benefitted from its control of all branches of government, strong administrative resources (especially in the regions of Georgia), dominance in all spheres of political life, and state control over the business sector.

The Prison Scandal

Since the Rose Revolution in 2003 and the election of Saakashvili as president in 2004, Georgia has certainly come a long way as a state and made significant progress in particular fields. Reforms were initiated in most government sectors. Many state functions have been radically improved, governance became much stronger and consolidated, corruption on most of levels was significantly reduced, and police and market reforms have advanced. Economic growth was improving and the state budget has increased from 1 billion Lari to 8 billion Lari since 2003. During its eight years in power, the Georgian government has invested heavily in infra-

structure and renovation projects. But, at the same time, Georgia was at risk of becoming a one-party state with UNM controlling the executive, parliament, and judiciary. The opposition complained that all the processes of this modernization were directed and controlled by a small, increasingly isolated group of leaders, who were losing their once great popularity. The business sector was subject to state control and oppressed. Politically-connected businesses were flourishing. It became clear that democratic processes were secondary; frequently even the last priority for the ruling elite. Human rights and transparency were vanishing; the decision-making process was completely non-transparent. There were major concerns regarding the enormous administrative spending and information about it was well hidden. The population, especially in Tbilisi, was critical of the government. One of the main complaints from the society was about the violation of human right in the penitentiary system, which was completely closed to outside scrutiny.

Two weeks before the elections, on September 18, the Georgian opposition television stations Maestro and Channel 9 (owned by Ivanishvili's wife) released graphic video footage of prisoners being brutally beaten and sexually assaulted in one of Tbilisi's prisons. The facts of such abuses were known and had been the subject of protests by human rights organizations and the Public Defender's Office of Georgia; even the U.S. State Department's annual country report mentioned it. But the wide airing of the videos led to a spontaneous public reaction expressed in protests in the streets of Tbilisi and other cities of Georgia. The government, however, denied opposition allegations, pointing to its successful efforts to slash organized crime in the country and within Georgia's penitentiary system.

The release of the prison videos significantly damaged the UNM just two weeks before the elections. The videos illustrated the systemic violation of human rights by the ruling party that the opposition had been describing. Regardless of whether the abuses were directed by top government officials, it was obvious that such transgressions took place under the rule of a government that once was declared to be the beacon of democracy in the post-Soviet space and an example for many other countries.

In its initial response to the release of the videos, the government tried to connect the videos to the opposition. And really it was no coincidence that the videos appeared at the most sensitive moment for the ruling party—just before the elections at a time when most pre-election polls showed the dominance of the ruling party. But it did not matter to the population because the information about the terrible abuses in the prisons was known within society and the videos simply proved the truth of the earlier reports. It was obvious that time

was working against the government and that it had to act quickly to limit the damage. So the ruling party made significant changes in the government—the Minister of Corrections and Legal Aid and the Minister of Internal Affairs stepped down and most of those public employees, including high-level officials who were identified with or somehow connected to the abuses in the videos were arrested; the Prosecutor's Office started an investigation; and the Public Defender of Georgia was appointed as the Minister of Corrections and Legal Aid.

Also as a counter-attack, a week before the elections the government released taped phone conversations among the leaders of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition—somehow provided by Ivanishvili's bodyguard. Of course, the leaked phone conversations lacked the punch of the prison videos, but they were used to increase negative attitudes among the population toward the opposition and to cause internal friction within its ranks.

Prior to the release of the prison videos, most of the pre-elections polls suggested that the ruling party would win the upcoming elections, but that Georgian Dream would present a real challenge and be able to form a significant parliamentary opposition. As most of the same polls showed, up to 35 percent of the voters remained undecided. After the release of the prison torture videos, most people in this category shifted toward the opposition.

Why UNM Lost

The reasons for the UNM's defeat are worth reviewing because they illuminate the challenges that the new government will have to face after taking office. The most important is the socio-economic situation. Despite all the reforms of recent years, Georgia is still a poor country, with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and 150,000 Georgian citizens living below the poverty line. People also tired of the dominance of the same political elite, which was becoming increasingly marginalized. Discontent with the government control over business was quite high. A significant decrease in the democratic indices compiled by international watchdog groups and the violation of human rights and property protection also contributed. Ultimately, many Georgians voted for Ivanishvili because he successfully presented himself as the country's next leader and attracted popular support by his many years of philanthropy. Many voters probably sought to replace one charismatic leader with another.

On October 21st the winning party formed a new parliamentary majority in the new parliament building in Kutaisi—Georgia's second largest city. It has to grapple with major concerns. There will be a dual-power situation: President Saakashvili will still serve one more

year as president, with the same powers he currently possesses, while a new party will form a new government with the prime minister as the head of state. The recently rewritten constitution gives the prime minister stronger executive powers, but it only takes effect when Saakashvili's term ends, which will happen not earlier than October 2013 (if constitutional changes do not take place before then). Even though the victorious opposition party will be able to unilaterally form a government, it did not win a constitutional majority, so the former ruling party—UNM—will form a strong opposition in the parliament. Also, part of the executive branch will be controlled by the president (including governors and municipal governments), while the cabinet will control the state budget and the financing for these administrative bodies.

The new government also has the major challenge of addressing complicated problems in domestic and foreign policy while fulfilling the election promises and the program that its members made in order to win office.

Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili (former allies and now political opponents) appear to represent the official governing institutions of Georgia with all the challenges and problems these responsibilities bring. International society is expecting that they will work out a *modus vivendi* with one another during the upcoming one year period. Officially this is what the president said that he would do.

Despite all the problems described above, the 2012 October parliamentary elections institutionalized a democratic trend. Since independence in 1991, the former Soviet republics (excluding the Baltic countries) have faced up to 120 presidential and parliamentary elections and almost all of them just legitimated the continuation of the existing authorities. But the case of Georgia was completely different. For the first time in the history of Georgia, as a result of the elections, the existing ruling political party accepted a peaceful transition of power to a victorious opposition.

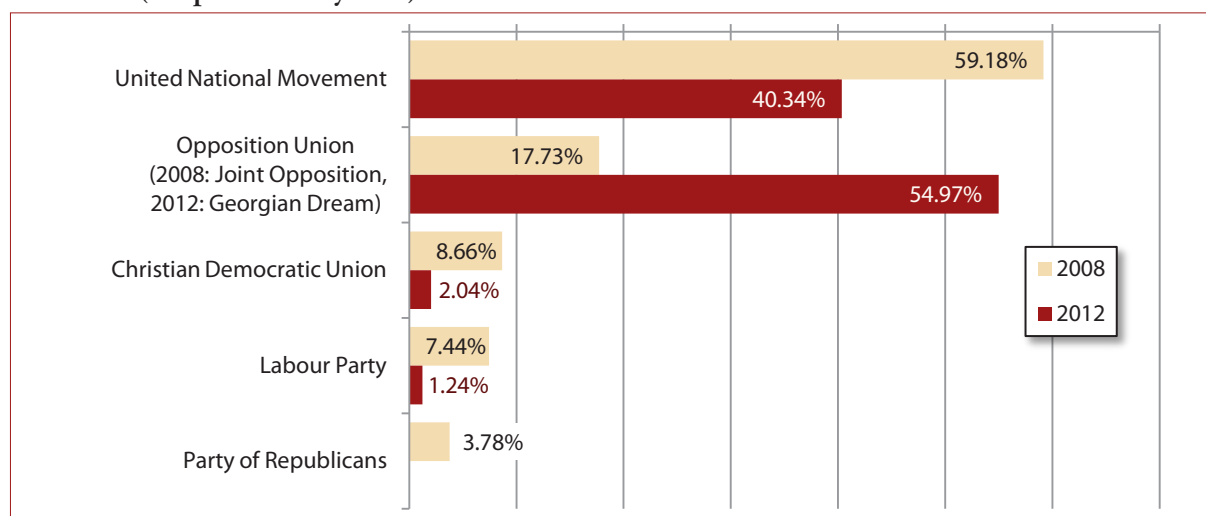
About the Author

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DOCUMENTATION

The Results of the Georgian Parliamentary Elections

Figure 1: Georgian Parliamentary Elections of 2008 and 2012: Results of the Party Vote (Proportional System)



Note: All parties with more than 1% of the vote. For 2012 results as of 19 October 2012.

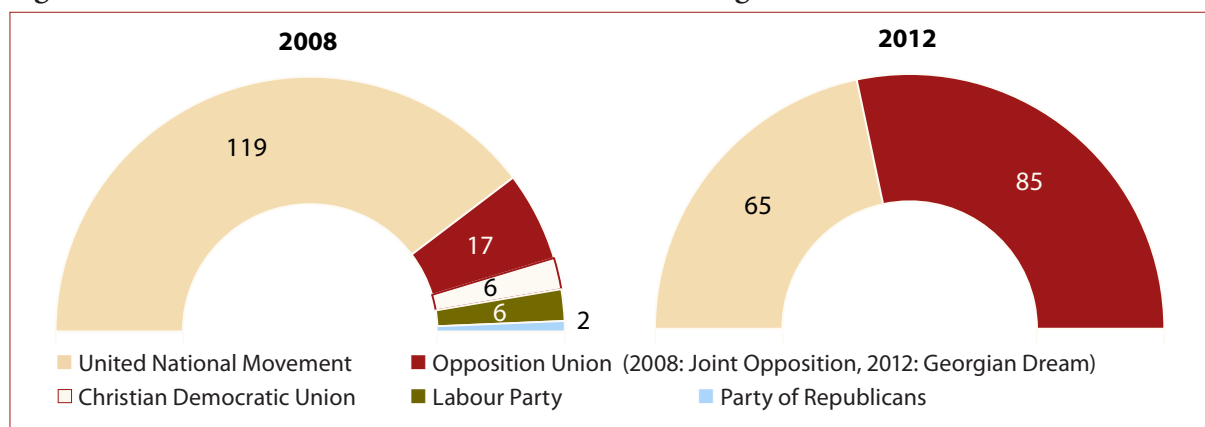
Source: Georgian Central Election Commission, http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=19&info_id=5166, http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=147&info_id=11085

Figure 2: Voters' Turnout 2008 and 2012



Source: Georgian Central Election Commission, http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=19&info_id=5166,
http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=147&info_id=11085

Figure 3: Distribution of Seats in the Parliament of Georgia 2008 and 2012



Note: Deputies from party lists (proportional vote) and from single mandate districts (majoritarian system and simple majority vote, respectively).

Source: Georgian Central Election Commission, http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=19&info_id=5166,
http://www.cec.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=147&info_id=11085

Shades of Red and Blue—Regional Characteristics of Georgia's 2012 Parliamentary Elections

By David Sichinava, Tbilisi

Abstract

The 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia marked one of the most important events in the recent history of a young democracy. The hotly contested and polarized election, which enjoyed strong interest among both international society and Georgian voters, revealed interesting voting behavior patterns. This article describes the regional division of party votes, the difference between the behavior of urban and rural areas, and the peculiarities of voting among ethnic minorities.

Elections Leading to the Peaceful Transition of Power

October 1, 2012, marked an important milestone in Georgia's short history of democracy because it provided the basis for a peaceful power transition—a rare case not only in a country where civil wars and revolutions caused regime change, but for the entire post-Soviet geographic space.

The generally unexpected victory of the opposition coalition in both the proportional and single-member districts provoked intense interest both inside the country and abroad. According to the Central Elections Commission (CEC) of Georgia, there were 61,000 registered local observers followed by an army of international election observers, including the representatives of various organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and electoral bodies of different countries (President of Georgia, 2012).

The main political event at the focus of this attention was the emergence of a strong political opposition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia and until recent did not publicize his political interests. The fragmented opposition forces, which previously found it difficult to consolidate their efforts against the ruling party, gained enough support from the population to claim victory thanks largely to the personality of their leader. Another important factor which significantly impacted the election outcomes was the publication of videotapes depicting the physical and sexual abuse of prison inmates. The scandal caused a huge wave of anti-governmental protests and greatly contributed to the triumph of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition.

Despite the fact that the voting was polarized during the 2012 parliamentary elections and only two political groups managed to win seats in the legislature, from the geographic point of view, the results vary significantly, creating distinct spatial patterns of electoral behavior.

Proportional Voting—A Regional Division

The 2012 parliamentary elections employed a mixed electoral system in which 77 out of 150 MPs were elected by party list while the remaining 73 seats were filled by competitions in single-member districts. For the proportional voting, political parties needed to overcome a 5 percent threshold in order to win representation in the parliament. However, in contrast to the 2008 parliamentary elections when four groups entered the parliament, only the Georgian Dream Coalition and the United National Movement crossed the threshold to win seats through the proportional voting. Similarly, these two political groups were the only ones to win representation in the single-member districts.

The election results reveal several important regional factors which can be considered as steady through the last four years. In order to identify the current regional patterns of voting behavior, we employed geo-statistical techniques. The heat map (see Map 1 on p. 10) shows how the votes for the United National Movement are clustered spatially. The method also takes into consideration the distance between the spatial units (in our case, voting precincts). The “hot spots” indicate clustering of a high vote share, while “cold spots” show the accumulation of low scores for the ruling party. As noted above, the high level of voting polarization caused the spatial distribution of votes between the two main contestant political groups; consequently, the cold spots on the heat map could indicate higher scores for the Georgian Dream coalition.

Generally the election results for the proportional voting have distinct regional characteristics—Tbilisi and the surrounding areas emerged as one of the main strongholds for the winner Georgian Dream Coalition. The influence of the capital city is important not only in surrounding electoral districts, but also covers the mountainous areas of Eastern Georgia. The eastern part of Imereti region, a historical region of Zemo (Upper) Imereti, is another region characterized by higher support for the coalition. In Sachkhere, the native munic-

ipality of Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream won 93% of the votes; the coalition also did well in the neighboring municipalities of Chiatura (75%), Zestaponi (61%) and Kharagauli (51%). The south-western part of Georgia, more specifically the seaside areas of Guria and Adjara, also strongly supported the Georgian Dream coalition. The heat map also indicates a significant level of clustering for UNM's strongest support in Samegrelo and mountainous areas of Western Georgia. The southern regions of Georgia, more specifically, Upper Adjara, Samtkhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli form a large belt of the United National Movement's support. This territory has an important stratum of ethnic and religious minorities, which display distinctive voting behavior through almost the entire history of Georgian elections. Regions settled by Armenian and Azeri residents generally tend to vote for the incumbent government regardless of their political affiliation. As in the 2008 elections, in Kvemo Kartli and Samtkhe-Javakheti the victory of the ruling party was undoubted. Like the ethnic minorities, the municipalities of Upper Adjara, which are mainly inhabited by Sunni Muslim ethnic Georgians, maintained a high level of support for governmental candidates and political groups during all three recent national elections.

Another important dimension of the 2012 parliamentary elections is the clear urban-rural divide in the voting behavior of Georgia's electorate (see Map 2 on p. 11). The United National Movement lost both the proportional elections and SMDs in all self-governing cities, including the ten districts of Tbilisi. Such an outcome in the urban areas reflects a steady pattern revealed during the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, when the capital and large cities were the main basis for the opposition votes for both Levan Gachechiladze and the United Opposition. According to the results of the presidential elections, the opposition candidate managed to overwhelm Saakashvili in eight out of ten voting districts in Tbilisi. In the presidential elections, the United Opposition suffered a massive rout and was able to win only two single-member districts in the capital.

When looking at the individual voting districts, it is evident that the United National Movement did much better in the rural areas—in almost all districts, the difference between the vote share of the two settlement types was 10% or greater. Tbilisi by itself contributed the lion's share in the victory of the Georgian Dream coalition. Georgian Dream gathered 37% of its votes in Tbilisi, whilst only 20% of United National Movement's votes came from the capital. Rural areas were considerably more important for the governing political party—more than half of all its votes (55%) came from the voting precincts located in villages.

Parties Rather than Personalities—Peculiarities of Voting Behavior in the Single-Member Districts

Georgia's electoral system also maintains 73 single-member districts. Unlike some other countries, the district lines follow the administrative boundaries of the municipalities; consequently, their size varies greatly from 6,000 voters (Tsageri) to 140,000 voters (Kutaisi). During the parliamentary elections of 2008, the ruling United National Movement was able to win almost all majoritarian districts (72 out of 76) except Vake, Didube, Tsageri and Kazbeghi. It was expected that the unequal distribution of voters in the SMDs and the use of administrative resources also would contribute to the success of the UNM; however, the Georgian Dream Coalition, as with the proportional voting, was able to win more single-member districts than the incumbent party. According to the final results of the elections, the Coalition collected 41 seats while the UNM received 32 mandates from the majoritarian voting (currently the CEC annulled the results in several voting precincts and ordered by-elections) (see Map 3 on p. 12).

Voting patterns in the single-member districts were quite similar to the results of proportional voting. In general, the winner of the single-member district was the representative of the same political group which managed to receive the most votes in the municipality. In only five voting districts, more specifically, Dedoplistskaro, Tetrtskaro, Khashuri, Ambrolauri and Tkibuli, did the successful MP not represent the political party that collected the majority of votes on the proportional list.

In an absolute majority of all voting districts, the difference between votes cast for proportional and majoritarian candidates of the same party was 5% or lower.

The geography of the single-member district voting was similar to the proportional voting with few exceptions—Georgian Dream Coalition candidates managed to win in the districts of Tbilisi and the self-governing cities of Guria, lower Adjara, Upper Imereti and Shida Kartli, while the representatives of the United National Movement did well in Samegrelo, the mountainous areas of Western Georgia, Upper Adjara and in southern Georgia.

Generally, the voting patterns in the single-member districts were similar to the results of the party list voting and we can conclude that, due to the high level of voting polarization, preferences for the majoritarian candidate were mainly based on a voter's party affiliation—generally, the voters tended to pick the representative of the same political group as they voted for on the party list and vice versa.

Higher Participation than Usual

According to the official results announced by the CEC, turnout for the 2012 parliamentary elections was 61%, one of the highest points of the last two decades. Like the voting, the turnout also bore distinct spatial characteristics. In several voting districts of Tbilisi as well as in Sachkhere, Kharagauli and Ambrolauri, turnout was more than 70%, a clear indicator of the level of interest among the population and the mobilization of party supporters. The municipalities settled mainly by ethnic minorities, such as Tsalka, Marneuli, Bolnisi and Gardabani, had the lowest turnout in the country. From the regional point of view, Samegrelo, Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti had the lowest turnout rates while Upper Imereti, Guria and Tbilisi were among the leaders. In comparison to the previous elections, electoral turnout fell in the regions settled by ethnic minorities while it increased in the central areas of the capital. The areas of Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo, as well as large cities had the lowest figures, as they did in previous elections.

The vote share for Saakashvili during the presidential elections correlated significantly with voting turn-

out, producing a positive indicator of 0.63 ($p < 0.05$); the correlation coefficient between the vote share for the United National Movement and voting turnout was similarly positive at 0.52 ($p < 0.05$) for the 2008 parliamentary elections. However, in the 2012 parliamentary elections, there was only a weak correlation between the vote share and turnout for both political parties. However it is worth mentioning that the coefficient was negative for the United National Movement, in contrast to the previous elections.

Conclusion

The 2012 parliamentary elections marked an important point in Georgia's recent history as it was the first time during the last twenty years that the country managed to change its government through the electoral process. The election results had clear spatial characteristics and revealed regional differences in party preferences. The electoral behavior of ethnic minorities and the rural-urban dichotomy were the most evident patterns during previous presidential and parliamentary elections and did not lose their significance in 2012.

About the Author

David Sichinava is a PhD candidate in the department of Human Geography, faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tbilisi State University. He also works for the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) as GIS and database analyst.

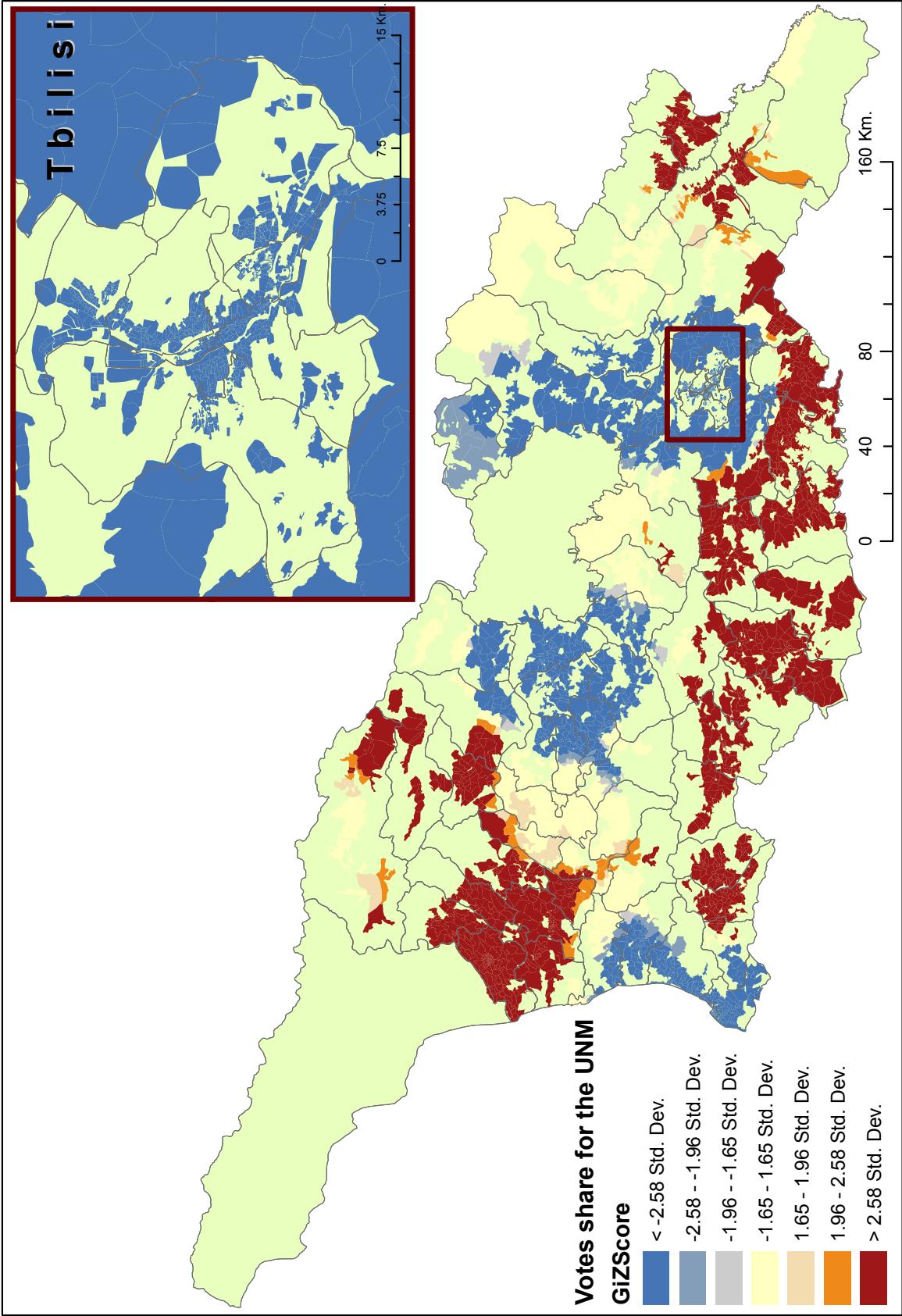
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MAP

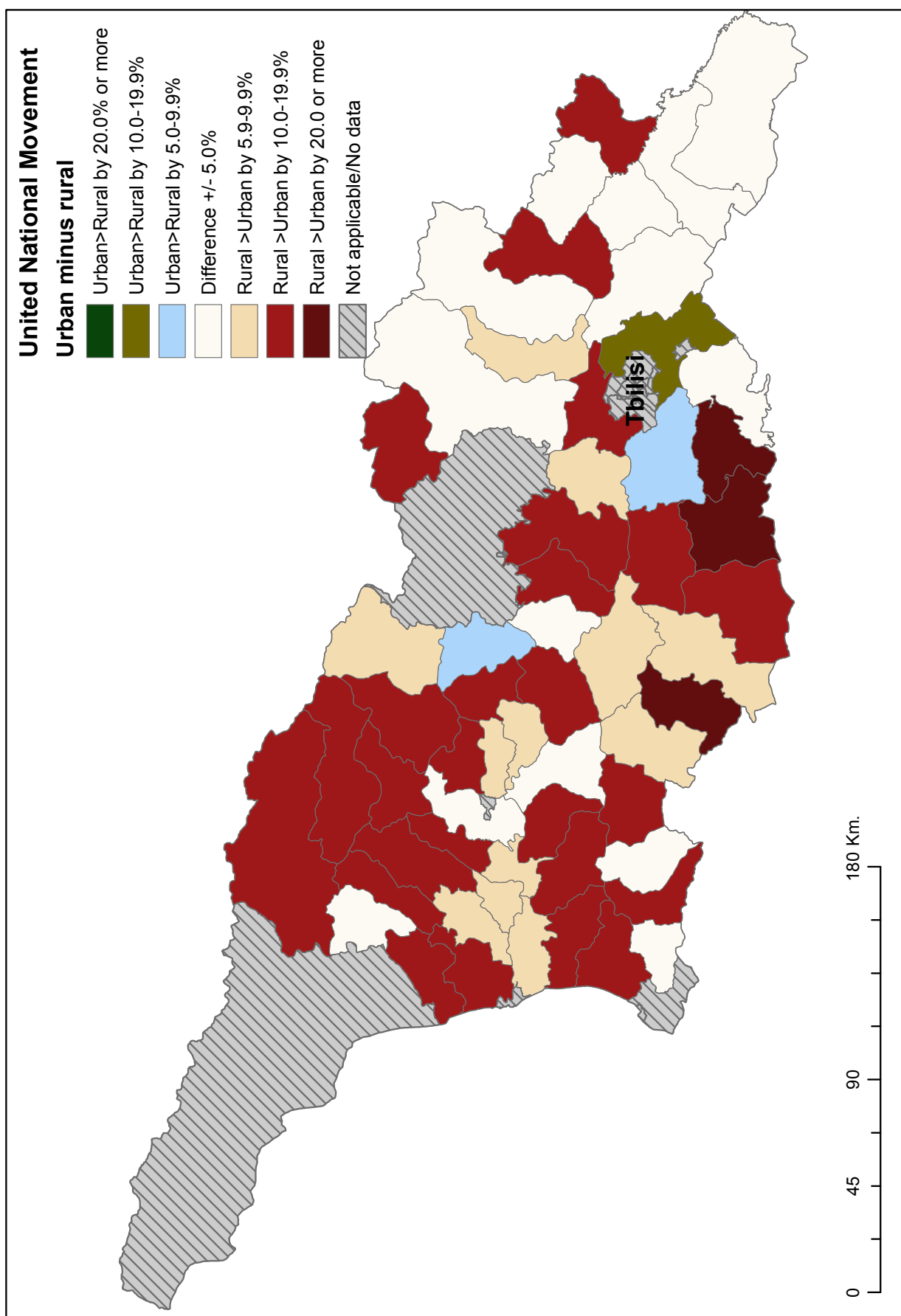
Results of Geo-Statistical Analysis of Voting Behavior

Map 1: Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, 2012: Hotspot Analysis (Preliminary Results, October 6)



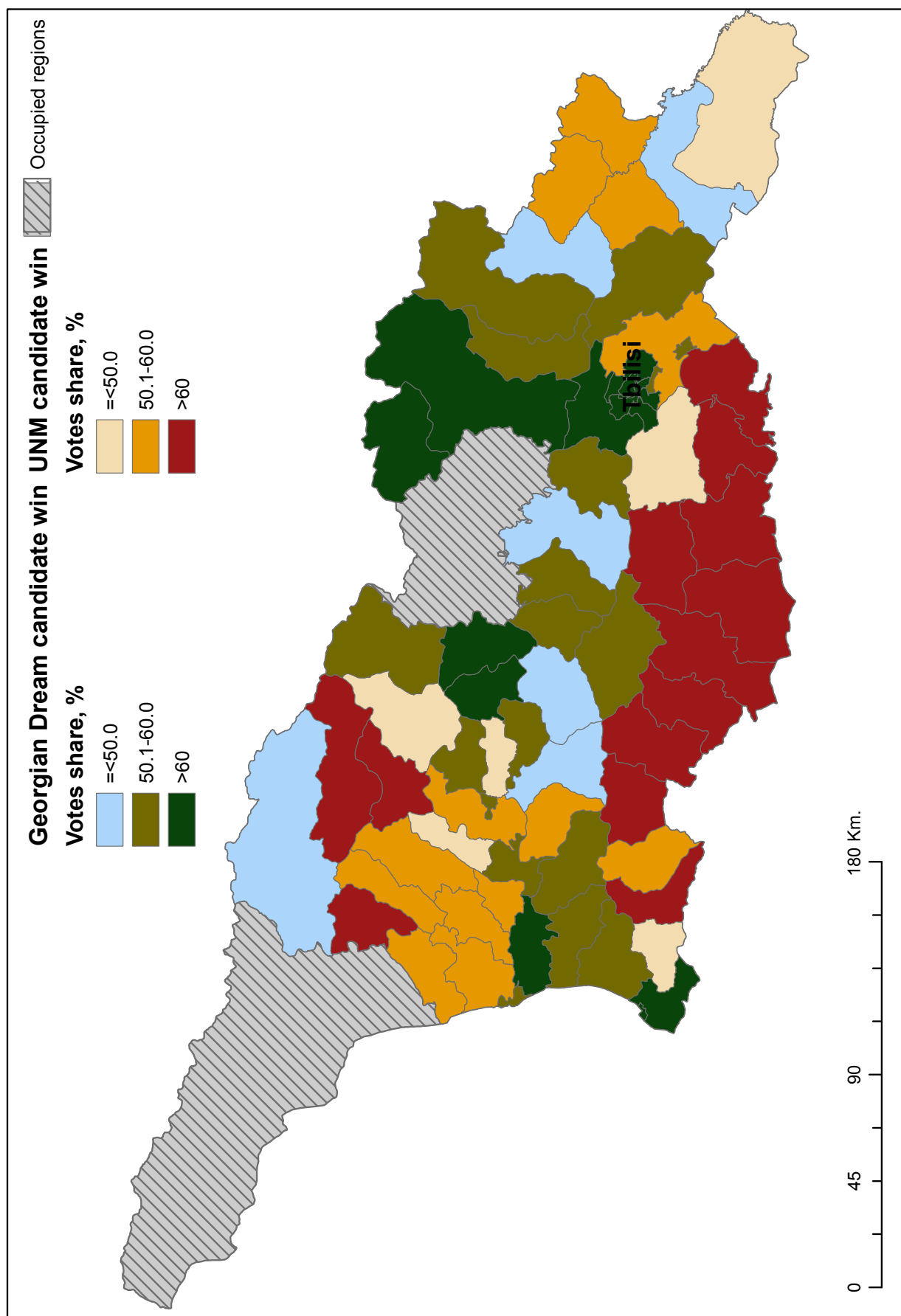
Map: David Sichinava

Map 2: Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, 2012: Urban–rural divide (Preliminary Results, October 6)



Map: David Sichinava

Map 3: Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, 2012: SMD Winners (Preliminary Results, October 6)



Map: David Sichinava

Can Georgia Become A Multiparty Democracy?

By Cory Welt, Washington

Abstract

Georgia's October 2012 parliamentary elections were historic. They marked the first time in Georgia's independent history that a ruling party acknowledged electoral defeat and handed over power. The question now is whether the victorious Georgian Dream coalition will end up being democrats in practice. The Georgian Dream is a decentralized and diverse grouping of parties, which will take office with a slim majority in what will be a parliamentary system of governance after constitutional reforms take effect in October 2013. The leadership of the outgoing party of power, the United National Movement, appears to be committed to playing a substantive role as the parliamentary minority. While much could still go awry, the intra-coalition dynamics of the Georgian Dream, the UNM's transformation into an opposition force, and mutual political tolerance after the election bode well for the consolidation of Georgian democracy.

Historic Elections, Then What?

Georgia's October 2012 parliamentary elections were historic. They marked the first time in Georgia's independent history that the country's ruling party acknowledged electoral defeat and handed over power. Georgia has thus embarked on a path previously blazed in post-Soviet Eurasia by the Baltic states, Moldova, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.

But will the end result of this democratic election be democracy? To assess whether democracy has been consolidated, political scientist Samuel Huntington famously proposed a "two-turnover test," whereby power *twice* must change hands via democratic elections.¹

In post-Soviet Eurasia, the "two-turnover test" of democracy is a good idea. Among Georgia's neighbors, democratic turnovers have often led to authoritarian governments. Belarus' president Alexander Lukashenko won a democratic election in 1994 and went on to establish the "last dictatorship in Europe." Moldova's Communists won democratic elections in 1998 to rule in semi-authoritarian fashion until they gave up power at the ballot box in 2009–2010. In Ukraine, the Orange Revolution of 2004 ground to a halt in 2010 when the revolution's loser, Viktor Yanukovich, was elected president and imprisoned his political opponents.

In Georgia, some fear that the democratically elected victors might also end up governing through undemocratic means. Skepticism revolves around the figure of incoming Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire reportedly worth half of Georgia's GDP and a man used to getting what he wants. Like most tycoons who made their fortune in Russia's rough-and-tumble 1990s, Ivanishvili was successful in a murky business environment. Some observers, following the electoral rhetoric of

the outgoing government, have speculated about possible links to crooked businessmen and organized crime.² Since Ivanishvili entered politics, his instincts toward at least one critical element of democracy—media freedom—have not inspired much confidence.³

Such concerns have been ameliorated, however, by Georgia's pending shift away from a strong presidential form of governance—traditionally bad for democracy in post-Soviet Eurasia—to a parliamentary system established as part of a 2010 constitutional reform. After a transition period that will extend through the October 2013 presidential election, Georgia's parliament will be responsible for directly electing the prime minister, who will be the top executive official in the country. The directly elected president will remain commander-in-chief and serve as kingmaker between the parliamentary majority and government, in the event a rift arises between them.

A parliamentary system does not guarantee democracy. Submissive parties of authoritarian-leaning leaders can achieve victory in parliamentary elections just as their leaders may be elected to strong presidential posts. Given a substantial enough victory—or even just control of the courts—such parties could continue to govern as they would under a strong presidency and even make constitutional changes that formally return the country to more authoritarian rule.

Favorable Signs for Democracy

In Georgia's case, the critical difference is that this election has not just swung the pendulum from one hegemonic ruling party to another. The intra-coalition dynamics of the victorious Georgian Dream, the strong showing of the ex-ruling party, the United National

1 Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993 [1991]): 266–67.

2 <http://georgiaonline.ge/interviews/1348955811.php>

3 <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24822>; http://www.foreign-policy.com/articles/2012/10/02/the_new_titan_of_tbilisi

Movement, and their mutual post-election tolerance may be just what Georgia needs to consolidate its democracy.

First, the Georgian Dream coalition is not a monolithic bloc. It comprises six main parties, who occupy 81 of the 85 parliamentary seats (out of 150) that the coalition has won, plus a handful of individuals representing smaller parties. These six parties are an ideologically diverse lot that coalesced around Ivanishvili on the basis of their shared anti-government sentiment and the tycoon's draw as a center of opposition gravity. The eponymous Georgian Dream party, headed by Ivanishvili, has at its helm a mix of academics, professors, journalists, cultural and sports figures, and ex-government workers. The two strongest junior partners of the Georgian Dream, the Free Democrats and the Republican Party, are parties with established reformist and pro-democracy profiles. Another, the Industrialists, represent business interests who formerly supported the government of Eduard Shevardnadze. The last two, the Conservatives and National Forum, are more nationalist-minded parties.

The coalition's diversity has persisted since the election. The differences between the parties and their leaderships are well known. The Republicans, led by new parliamentary chairman David Usupashvili, and the Free Democrats, led by ex-UN ambassador and incoming defense minister Irakly Alasania, have formed their own separate factions in parliament. The Georgian Dream may find it difficult to govern as a bloc over time, but its diversity could also help keep the new authorities on a democratic path. The Free Democrats, Republicans, and possibly others in the coalition can be expected to resist any potential attempts by Ivanishvili to govern in more authoritarian fashion.

This would not matter that much if the locus of executive power remained the presidency, but in Georgia's new parliamentary system, the Georgian Dream's coalition partners have more leverage over their patron. The defection of just one or two parties can upend the government. Of the coalition's 85 seats, just 46 (54%) belong to Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream party, while 20 belong in total to the Free Democrats and Republicans.⁴ If the Georgian Dream loses just 11 allied deputies, its control of the government would be at risk: after next year's constitutional reforms, a simple majority of deputies (76) will be able to pronounce no-confidence in the government. This will not automatically lead to the latter's resignation, since it is the president that will have the authority to dissolve the government. Even if the president refuses, however, a 60 percent majority can

override his decision. And over the next year a no-confidence vote is even simpler to obtain, as the president may remove the prime minister at any time. Ivanishvili will thus not be able to alienate his coalition partners without putting his own authority at risk.

Second, the determination of the UNM to remain a serious political force can also help prod Georgia forward on a democratic path. Well before final election results came in, President Mikheil Saakashvili not only conceded defeat but declared that the UNM—with its 43 percent of parliamentary seats—was prepared to enter parliament as a real opposition. He and other top party leaders—outgoing prime minister and new party secretary-general Vano Merabishvili and National Security Council chairman Giga Bokeria—have repeatedly stressed the “fundamental differences” that persist between UNM policies and those of the incoming government. Bastions of UNM authority have shored up their security: the Tbilisi City Council established its own security service while the president transferred authority of agencies in charge of secure communications and maintenance of official residences to the Special State Protection Service, subordinated to the presidency. If the UNM survives, it has a chance to become the most well resourced institutionalized opposition force Georgia ever had.

Finally, the incoming and outgoing authorities have agreed to respect each other's political legitimacy. After meeting with a mild international uproar, Ivanishvili walked backed from his early “suggestion” that it would be best if Saakashvili were to resign. While coalition leaders have said that serious crimes committed by former government officials will be prosecuted, they have openly rejected talk of retribution. After a post-election meeting with Saakashvili, Ivanishvili insisted that “we will treat our opponents not how they deserve, but how our country...deserves.”⁵ In his first speech as parliamentary chairman, Usupashvili declared that “those times when winners had the right to do everything and losers were left to their fate should now be over.”⁶ For his part, Saakashvili included a specific message to the UNM in his opening address to the new parliament: “I wish the [parliamentary] minority to agree with government when the government is right and to be constructive, but also to be restless and irreconcilable when you disagree, but on the condition that you will never be in opposition to your own country.”⁷

⁴ http://www.geowel.org/index.php?article_id=81&clang=0; <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25375>

⁵ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25333>; <http://dfwatch.net/saakashvili-meets-election-winner-ivanishvili-76182>.

⁶ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25376>

⁷ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25373>

Challenges Ahead

Much can still go awry. The Georgian Dream may yet go after UNM members with a vengeance. The temptation to persuade (or bribe) opposition legislators to defect may also prove strong. Indeed, the UNM may still disintegrate or suffer defections to the new ruling party. Senior party officials—the ex-ministers of defense, internal affairs, and justice—left their posts (and the country) while still in office. In the Tbilisi City Council, where the UNM controls nearly 80 percent of fifty seats, five UNM representatives have already defected to the Georgian Dream. And like the Georgian Dream, the UNM has divided into three parliamentary factions,

formally to secure certain procedural advantages, while five of its deputies have refused to join any faction. If the UNM loses just 15 seats to the Georgian Dream, the latter will end up with a two-thirds majority, able to change the constitution at its whim.

Nonetheless, almost a month after Georgia's first democratic electoral transition, the indicators for a consolidation of Georgian democracy are pointing in the right direction. Georgia is at the halfway point of Huntington's "two-turnover test," but the odds that it will complete this test in the years to come are now much better than they were several weeks ago.

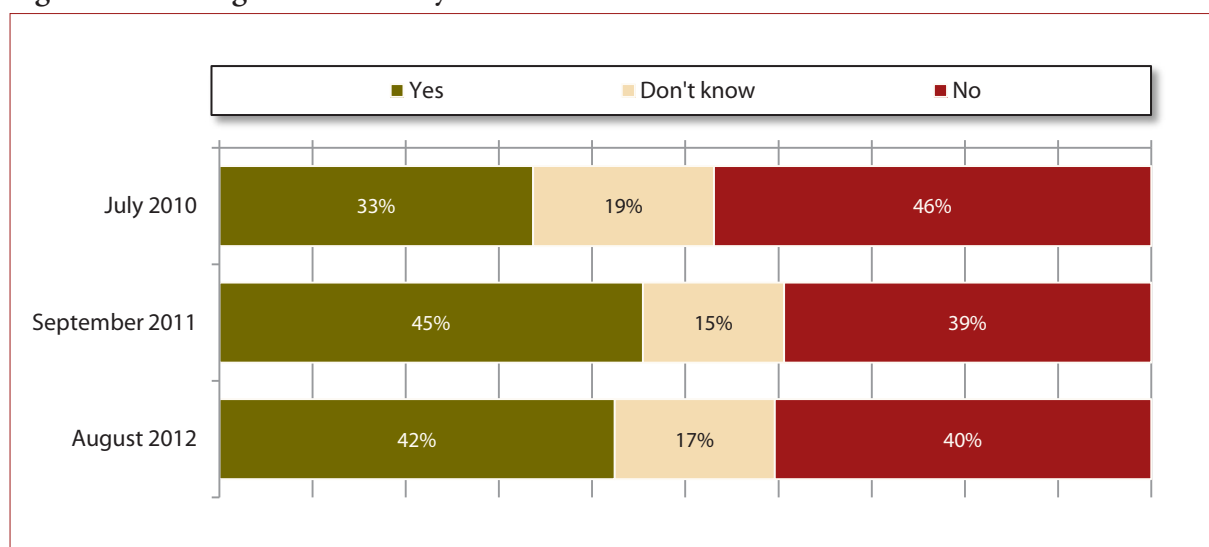
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OPINION POLL

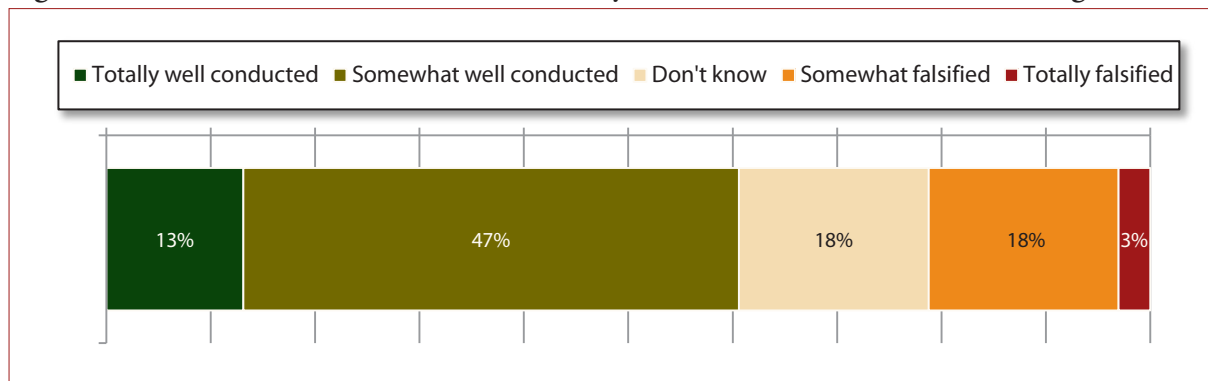
Georgian Public Opinion on the Quality of the Parliamentary Elections (August 2012)

Figure 1: Is Georgia A Democracy Now?



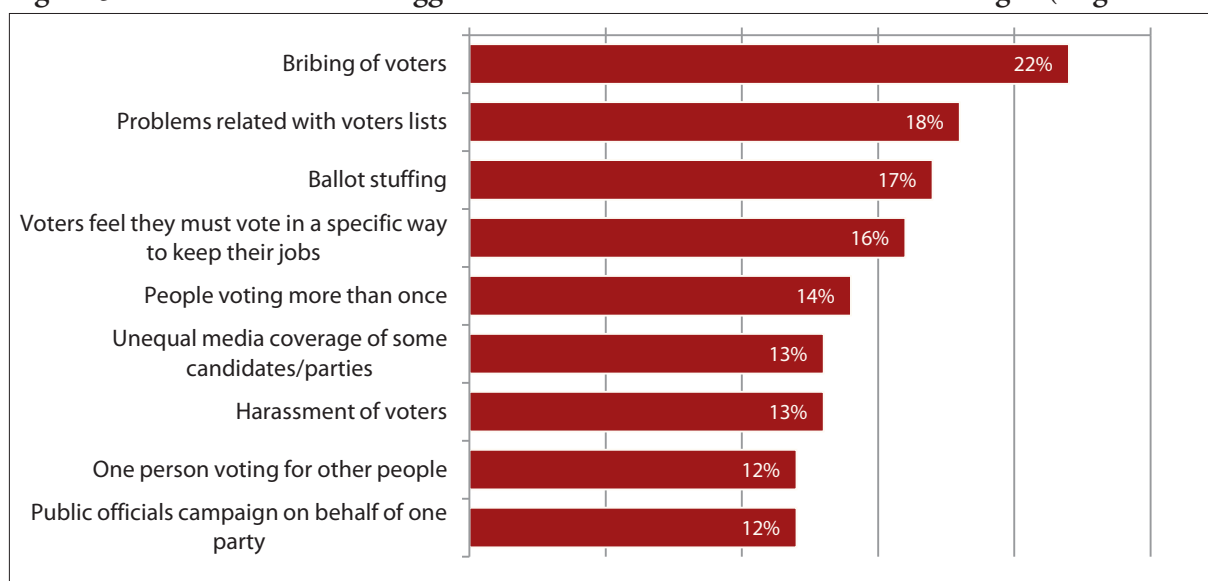
Source: Luis Navarro, Ian T. Woodward: *Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of an August 2012 survey carried out by the Caucasus Resources Research Center, NDI (National Democratic Institute), available online at <http://www.ndi.org/node/19283>*

Figure 2: How Do You Think the Parliamentary Elections Will Be Conducted? (August 2012)



Source: Luis Navarro, Ian T. Woodward: *Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of an August 2012 survey carried out by the Caucasus Resources Research Center, NDI (National Democratic Institute)*, available online at <http://www.ndi.org/node/19283>

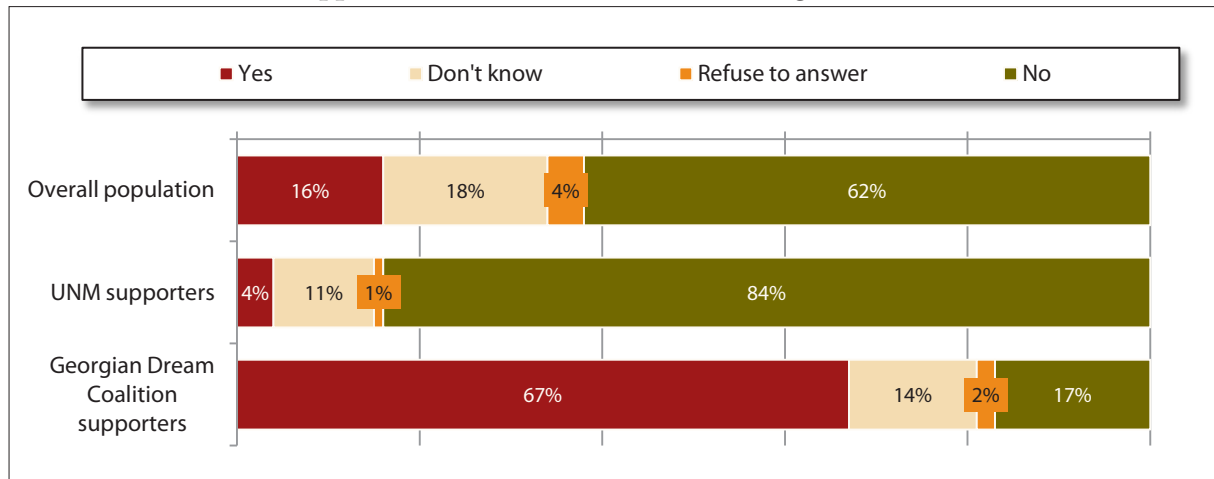
Figure 3: What Are the Three Biggest Barriers to Free And Fair Elections in Georgia? (August 2012)



Note: Most common answers.

Source: Luis Navarro, Ian T. Woodward: *Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of an August 2012 survey carried out by the Caucasus Resources Research Center, NDI (National Democratic Institute)*, available online at <http://www.ndi.org/node/19283>

Figure 4: Bidzina Ivanishvili Has Said He Will Call for Street Protests If Elections Are Falsified. Would You Support His Call for Such Protests? (August 2012)



Source: Luis Navarro, Ian T. Woodward: *Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of an August 2012 survey carried out by the Caucasus Resources Research Center, NDI (National Democratic Institute)*, available online at <http://www.ndi.org/node/19283>

International Implications of Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

By Niklas Nilsson, Washington

Abstract

Georgia's parliamentary elections have clear international implications. A peaceful transfer of power between opposing political parties will improve Georgia's chances of joining Western institutions. Similarly, while Georgian Dream leader Bidzina Ivanishvili has indicated a preference for improved ties with Russia, he is unlikely to change Georgia's main orientation toward the EU and NATO.

Linking Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy

The victory of the opposition coalition Georgian Dream—Democratic Georgia (GD) in Georgia's October 1 parliamentary elections seemingly caught both of the main contesting parties by surprise. The elections mark the beginning of three political transitions: that of GD from an opposition movement into the largest parliamentary faction and government; that of the United National Movement (UNM) from a dominant ruling elite into an opposition party; and that of Georgia from a country where transfers of political power takes place through revolutions to one where ruling parties can actually lose elections. Indeed, the outcome could signify the first step in Georgia's first peaceful and constitutional transfer of political power since independence. If Georgia proves capable of transferring political power

through elections, that will be a milestone in the country's political development.

However, the significance of these elections extends far beyond Georgia's domestic politics. The country's decidedly Western-leaning foreign and security policy under President Mikheil Saakashvili has built on a narrative about Georgia that firmly locates the country's future as an integral part of Europe and as a member of European and transatlantic security structures. The Georgian government has sought to underline its readiness for NATO membership by embarking on a range of technical reforms of its armed forces, as well as participation in UN and NATO missions, and has more recently begun negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU.

Yet, the question of Georgia's domestic mode of governance has frequently been at the forefront of discus-

sions regarding the country's readiness for membership in the Western security community and the fact that the country introduced a superpresidential system of governance and a virtual monopolization of political power under one party after the Rose revolution has provided a serious obstacle to Georgia's Western endeavor.

This linkage has implied that a deep interconnection has been established between Georgia's foreign and security objectives and its ability to evolve into a pluralistic political system. This interconnection stems from the demands usually placed by Georgia's international partners on prospective members in Western institutions, but perhaps even more so from the foreign policy narrative the Georgian government has consistently communicated in Washington, Brussels and elsewhere.

Georgia's foreign policy narrative presents the country not only as a frontrunner reformer, but also as a "beacon of liberty"—the rare occasion of a democracy among otherwise authoritarian post-soviet states, constituting a positive example in this region and beyond. This assertion serves to underline Georgia's value to its Western partners, extending far beyond political developments in Georgia itself. Georgia's national security concept, adopted by parliament in December 2011, provides a good overview of these arguments and the close correlation between domestic governance and security in the government's foreign policy thinking.

Hence, Georgia's foreign policy strategy has to a large extent focused on establishing an international perception of Georgia both as a leading reformer and as a democracy. The Georgian government has actively promoted such perceptions, as well as the proposition that the UNM is the only political alternative capable of safeguarding the progress made.

This narrative has been criticized as a means for Georgia to market its foreign policy objectives rather than reflecting a philosophy implemented in domestic governance. However, Georgia's ambitious foreign policy goals, as well as its rhetorical adherence to democratic principles in addresses to foreign allies, has also served the positive purpose of raising the expectations on Georgia's democratic performance and invited closer international scrutiny of Georgia's domestic politics.

As the Georgian government's commitment to democracy has increasingly come under question, democracy in Georgia has featured prominently in discussions on the country's potential inclusion into Western institutions, most prominently NATO. In effect, to the extent that the Georgian government has introduced reforms aimed at creating conditions for more inclusive elections or a more pluralistic political system, such as changes to the electoral code and the 2010 constitutional amendments, these have frequently been attributed to

the critique leveled by international partners rather than by domestic opposition and civil society.

The Role of the UNM

Another aspect of the government's narrative about Georgia's success is that the UNM constitutes the only political power capable of securing a continuation of the process of reforming Georgia as a state, as well as guaranteeing its continued Western orientation. During the election campaign, accusations have frequently been leveled against GD leader Bidzina Ivanishvili and the opposition of not only secretly supporting Moscow's interests in Georgia, but also of attempting to bring the country back to its past of corruption, criminality and conflict.

In addition to Ivanishvili's and GD's struggle to present themselves to the Georgian public as a credible alternative to the UNM, which apparently turned out to be successful, the parallel struggle for international credibility between the competing parties has also been a clear feature of the election process. Ivanishvili's significant personal wealth has allowed GD to match the Georgian government's long-standing international lobbying efforts, especially in Washington DC. Thus, GD has promoted its competing narrative about developments in Georgia and made an important point of attacking Saakashvili and the UNM on exactly their democratic shortcomings to a U.S. political audience.

Against this backdrop, the parliamentary elections and their aftermath are potentially of paramount importance to Georgia's future standing with its Western partners as well as its opportunities for further integration with European and transatlantic institutions.

The fact that the elections obtained a largely positive evaluation in preliminary observer statements, and that the opposition actually won by a significant margin, will likely alleviate many concerns voiced about an increasingly authoritarian Georgia. By the same token, the fact that Saakashvili conceded defeat and appears ready to cooperate in transferring power to a GD-appointed government is clearly a positive signal to those fearing a protracted confrontation between the UNM and GD over the election results.

Georgia's International Image

Hence, the election outcome in itself has contributed positively to Georgia's international image. The execution and outcome of the elections have potentially provided for a significant step forward in Georgia's relations to the West. Several foreign dignitaries visiting Georgia ahead of the elections, not least Secretary Clinton and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas O. Melia, have attached enormous importance to the conduct of the elections and explicitly connected them to

Georgia's future integration into Western security structures. They have also been careful to express their neutrality regarding the parties running for parliament, in contrast to the critique frequently leveled at U.S. Georgia policy in the years following the Rose Revolution, of overt support for President Saakashvili and the UNM.

In this light, the elections themselves have produced a clear improvement of Georgia's international image and democratic credentials which if maintained will provide Georgia with a significantly strengthened argument for continued integration with European and transatlantic institutions. However, whether this impression will last now depends on the capability of Georgia's political forces to demonstrate sufficient political maturity to bolster this image.

It is indeed early to tell whether the above will translate into real progress regarding Georgia's foreign policy objectives.

A first major question is whether Georgia's main political forces will prove capable of constructive interaction following the fierce animosity expressed during the election campaign. While the GD has secured a majority in parliament and Ivanishvili expects to be appointed prime minister, Saakashvili remains president until the presidential elections next October, and until then retains the extensive powers imbued in the presidency by the Georgian constitution. Until a new constitution enters into force following the presidential elections next year, which transfers many of these competencies to the prime minister and strengthens parliament as a political institution, the president appoints the prime minister and can fire the key ministers of Interior and Defense.¹ This constitutional setup will require Ivanishvili and Saakashvili to cooperate on domestic, as well as foreign, policy over the coming year.

There are many pitfalls to such cooperation, where a pessimistic scenario would envision a Ukraine-style stalemate between president and prime minister. However, the fact that the current institutional arrangement could force the two dominant politicians and parties in Georgia to cooperate and compromise could also imply a healthy development in Georgian politics. While decision-making in Georgia will be a cumbersome process especially in the year to come, it should be borne in mind that remedies to the systemic fallacies of Georgia's democracy to date, including the weakness of key political institutions and the lack of a consolidated party system, are far more likely to evolve through a lengthy

process of political contestation and compromise than through top-down reforms by any one party in power.

In this perspective, the long-term implications of these elections for Georgia's standing in the West will depend on the ability of Georgia's main political actors to act constructively within the existing political system. There are certainly pitfalls along the way and Georgia's international partners have an immensely important role to play in mediating between Georgia's main political players in the year(s) to come, avoiding situations that could potentially lead to renewed confrontation and making sure that all players remain committed to the political process.

Ivanishvili's Foreign Policy Plans

A second question concerns Ivanishvili's foreign policy priorities. In statements given during the election campaign, Ivanishvili generally adheres to the course taken by the UNM government and advocates continued integration into NATO and the EU, while also arguing for improved relations with Russia. However, few details have been presented as to how these combined objectives are to be fulfilled. The question of NATO membership has been a major problem in Georgia–Russia relations and it is difficult to see how Ivanishvili would, as he has said, convince Russia that Georgian membership will not constitute a threat. However, Georgia's NATO membership has remained a distant objective since the 2008 war and is hence not presently an immediate Russian concern.

Improving relations with Russia will likely imply a more difficult balancing act. Initial statements from Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs make no secret that Moscow is happy with the election result. However, Ivanishvili will be vulnerable domestically to any accusation, which the UNM will likely not hesitate to put forward, of making concessions to Russia in the name of improved relations. While initial foreign policy gains in this relationship could potentially involve relaxed visa requirements or a partial lifting of the embargo Russia imposes on Georgian exports since 2006, any concessions Ivanishvili's government would be willing to make in exchange would likely vindicate those who believe that he is secretly fronting for Moscow. In this perspective, compromises over the most sensitive issue between the two states, the continued Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russia's recognition of these entities as independent states, are highly unlikely under any Georgian government.

Ivanishvili has also hinted that he plans to scale down the previous government's rhetoric regarding Georgia's importance on a global level and plans to focus on Geor-

1 The president can also dissolve parliament, but not in the six months following a parliamentary election or the six months before a presidential election. Hence, the following year could provide a brief window for doing so in April, depending on the date of the presidential election.

gia's role as a regional player with constructive relations to all its neighbors. While this objective can perhaps be viewed as more realistic than Saakashvili's grand declarations of Georgia's geopolitical importance, it obscures the fact that Georgia's continued integration with NATO and the EU will unavoidably be conceived in geopolitical terms, not least by its northern neighbor.

Hence, it seems unlikely that Georgia's current foreign policy would undergo any major alterations under the leadership of GD and Ivanishvili.

Finally, it should be noted that the level of democracy in Georgia is far from the only obstacle the country has so far encountered in its attempt to become an accepted member of the Western community. Enthusi-

asm among NATO members toward Georgia as a prospective member is luke-warm at best and the issue will continue to be considered in a much larger geopolitical perspective where their relations to Russia are weighed in. The EU offers technical prospects for increased integration in the form of facilitated visa procedures and a DCFTA, but membership for Georgia is not in the cards even in a long term perspective. The carrots on offer are hence not very strong and Georgia's continued Western orientation to a significant extent depends on the continued perception among Georgia's political elite and public that the West is the only acceptable foreign policy choice.

About the Author

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CHRONICLE

From 24 September to 22 October 2012

24 September 2012	Azerbaijani, Georgian and Turkish troops held exercises near Ankara aimed at improving the security of energy pipelines in the region
25 September 2012	Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visits Georgia and attends the opening of a reconstructed airport near Georgia's second largest city of Kutaisi
26 September 2012	Azerbaijan's prosecutor-general investigates allegations that lawmaker Gular Ahmedova had requested 1.3 million US dollars from an academic to secure him a seat in parliament as shown in a video posted on YouTube
27 September 2012	Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian and European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Füle sign two financing agreements in Yerevan totalling 43 million Euros and focused on institution-building, including sectors such as customs administration, quality infrastructure, food safety and e-governance
30 September 2012	The Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church calls for a high voter turnout during the parliamentary elections in Georgia
1 October 2012	Parliamentary elections are held in Georgia with the Georgian Dream opposition coalition leading in the exit polls
2 October 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili concedes the defeat of the ruling party United National Movement (UNM) during the parliamentary elections in Georgia and adds that UNM is now going into opposition
2 October 2012	The US congratulates Georgia on "successful" parliamentary elections, saying that the polls represent "another milestone" in the country's development towards democracy
2 October 2012	The Central Election Commission (CEC) releases early results of the parliamentary elections in Georgia with 54.89% for Georgian Dream and 42.42% for UNM
2 October 2012	The Armenian Parliament votes in favour of stripping opposition lawmaker Vartan Oskanian of his immunity to start a probe into money-laundering against him
3 October 2012	The flow of Azerbaijani natural gas via the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum pipeline is halted after an explosion hits the line near the Turkish village of Kars

5 October 2012	The Azerbaijani police clashes with protesters in Baku who had gathered in front of the Azerbaijani Education Ministry to protest the banning of Islamic head scarves for women in schools
5 October 2012	Georgian Dream (GD) leader Bidzina Ivanishvili meets with NATO liaison officer William Lahue in Tbilisi and reiterates GD's commitment to Georgia's NATO integration
6 October 2012	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian accuses Azerbaijan of preparing for war in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh in an interview with the Reuters news agency
8 October 2012	Former Armenian foreign minister and prominent opposition lawmaker Vartan Oskanian is summoned by Armenia's National Security Council and charged with misappropriating 1.4 million US dollars donated by a US philanthropist to his foundation in Yerevan
9 October 2012	Twenty-two Azerbaijani citizens are sentenced to prison terms of 10 to 15 years for planning terrorist attacks against the US and Israeli embassies in Baku
10 October 2012	Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks with Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili on the phone to congratulate Ivanishvili on his election victory and reiterate Turkey's readiness to provide full support to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration
11 October 2012	The twenty first round of the Geneva international talks is held amid the on-going government hand-over process in Georgia with two representatives of the Georgian Dream coalition included in the Georgian delegation
11 October 2012	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev criticizes a consortium led by British Petroleum (BP) for "numerous mistakes" that have led to a production slump at the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field
12 October 2012	The eighteenth Georgian soldier dies in Afghanistan since the country's troops have joined the NATO-led operations in November 2009
15 October 2012	The EU says that it is ready to provide advice to the incoming government in Georgia and maintain momentum in the negotiations on an Association Agreement and visa liberalization talks at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg
15 October 2012	Azerbaijani Energy Minister Natiq Aliyev says that there should be a tighter oversight over the work of an international consortium led by BP at the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli field due to "abnormal" production volumes
16 October 2012	The Georgian presidential press office says that Mikheil Saakashvili has restored the Georgian citizenship of prime ministerial nominee Bidzina Ivanishvili
16 October 2012	Prime ministerial nominee Bidzina Ivanishvili says that Georgia will take part in the 22 nd Winter Olympics in the Russian city of Sochi in 2014
18 October 2012	Georgian Dream leader Bidzina Ivanishvili declares that his first foreign trip in his capacity as Georgia's Prime Minister will be to Brussels instead of his originally intended visit to the US after a meeting with visiting EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle
18 October 2012	NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai says that parliamentary elections had been a litmus test for Georgia and a "very important part of this test has been passed"
20 October 2012	The police in Baku arrest at least 30 people during an unauthorized rally in the capital organized by opposition and independent youth groups calling for the dissolution of the Azerbaijani Parliament after a video was shown of a ruling-party lawmaker asking a bribe in exchange for securing a seat in parliament
20 October 2012	The Georgian Public Broadcaster suspends the contract on operations of the Russian-language TV channel Kanal PIK
21 October 2012	Georgia's new Parliament holds its first session in the city of Kutaisi and elects David Usupashvili from the Georgian Dream coalition as the new parliamentary speaker
21 October 2012	Six factions are formed in the newly elected Parliament in Georgia with three from the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority and three from the United National Movement party
22 October 2012	Acting Georgian Defence Minister Dimitri Shashkin announces that he has decided to leave the country

Compiled by Lili Di Pupo

For the full chronicle since 2009 see www.laender-analysen.de/cad

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Lili Di Puppo, Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Nana Papiashvili, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines

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