

Georgia

Last update:	18 oktober 2022
Population:	3,708,610 (World Bank 2021)
Prime minister:	Irakli Garibasjvili
President:	Salome Zurabishvili
Governemental type:	Semi-presidential republic
Ruling coalition:	Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia coalition
Last election:	October 2021 (Local elections)
Next election:	2024 (parliamentary elections)
Sister parties:	Social-Democrats for Development of Georgia (SDD)

In 2018, Prime Minister Georgi Kvirikashvili resigned from his post after waves of protests in the country and was succeeded by Mamuka Bakhtadze. He was the fourth Prime Minister of the ruling pro-European Georgian Dream (GD) party since it came to power in 2012. Since the presidential elections of 2013, GD has been in charge of both the presidency and the government and has held a majority in parliament. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the coalition between GD and Democratic Georgia gained total victory for the second time. GD's eight-year rule was extended once more, after the October 2020 elections. However, the outcome was denounced by the opposition parties, which accused them of rigging the elections and abusing their power. As a result, the opposition refused to enter parliament.

According to several international observers, Georgian elections become more transparent and usually mark a regular transition of power. The 2020 general elections had a few shortcomings according to international observers, but were generally competitive and respected the rights of Georgian citizens. Nonetheless, the opposition continued to boycott the parliament as protesters took to the streets. In February of 2021 opposition leader Nika Melia was convicted of organising "mass violence" at a 2019 protest, which escalated the already existing political conflict. To de-escalate the situation, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stepped down and was succeeded by Irakli Garibashvili. However, Nika Melia was violently arrested the following day. An EU-brokered deal that was signed between GD and opposition parties paved the way for political stability, after which Melia was released. However, the political crisis which took hold of the country has not immediately been resolved. To date, the Georgian political landscape is marked by polarisation.

Support of a pro-European policy and integration into the West remain popular among parliamentarians and civic society. This perspective finds an overall consensus, as over 80% of Georgians are in favour of EU membership. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Georgia submitted its membership application in March 2022, ahead of the original planning. The European Commission decided that Georgia is eligible to become an EU member, but deferred granting Georgia the candidate status. Another top goal of most of Georgia's political parties is NATO membership, although this is complicated due to Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Furthermore, the country's problems and voter's concerns revolve around unemployment, human rights and territorial integrity. The latter originates from a conflict with the breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia and a violent dispute between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia in 2008.

Political Situation

Russia-Georgia relations

Relations between Georgia and Russia are characterised by tensions between the two countries, which have regularly erupted into violence. The 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which lasted 12 days, is the most prominent example. A priority spelt out by then-president Mikhail Saakashvili after his election in 2004, was to try and bring back the renegade regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia under Georgian authority. After, Saakashvili quickly established authority in Adjara, he shifted attention towards both separatist regions. This increased tensions with Russia. These tensions were already present with the pro-Western change of power in Georgia as part of the 2003 Rose Revolution. Russia, has spoken out against Georgian NATO and EU accession in the future. In August 2008 tensions between Russia and Georgia started escalating. An incident of a Russian spy plane shot down over Georgian territory

resulted in a brief full-scale war. At the end of this war in which Russia was an aggressor, Kremlin-supported puppet regimes claimed territorial control over parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and were consequently recognised by the Kremlin. However, according to international law, both regions remain part of Georgian sovereign territory.

The initial international response gravely condemned Russia for its actions and demanded withdrawal from Georgia. Specifically, the US started lobbying intensively for a sped-up Georgian accession to the NATO; something that European countries were somewhat divided in, even if equally condemning Russia. As time went by and investigations were launched, however, more and more reprimands started to appear towards the Georgian side as well as the Russian side. In October/November 2008 an independent international investigation group was created to look into the August events, headed by Heidi Tagliavini, a Swiss diplomat who served as UN Secretary General's special representative to Georgia from 2002 to 2006. The report eventually put the blame on both sides.

After the war, both Georgia and Russia attempted to normalise relationships between both countries. The Georgian-Russian deal allowed Russia to proceed with its World Trade Organization application. In 2012, Georgia introduced visa-free entrance for Russian passport holders. From the Russian side, a 7-year embargo on Georgian wine, one of the country's primary export products, was lifted in 2013. In October 2014, Russia eased visa procedures for Georgian citizens. However, the normalisation of relations between both countries failed to bring an end to the dispute over the breakaway regions, and support among the Georgian population for dialogue with Russia depleted over time.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 raised concerns in Georgia. The war raises the question of whether Russia will further neglect Georgia's territorial integrity. It resulted in Georgia's accelerated application for EU membership, the process for which had already begun before the war. At an earlier stage, Georgia had already condemned the Russian annexation of Crimea as illegitimate. Georgia has also condemned Russia's incursion into Ukraine and continues to support Kyiv politically and diplomatically. Yet Georgia has not participated applying sanctions against Russia. As a result, Georgia is not on the Kremlin's list of unfriendly countries. After Putin announced a partial mobilisation of military reserves in September 2022, long queues formed at the Georgian border. As one of the few neighbouring countries to which Russians can travel visa-free, Georgia has already hosted thousands of Russians fleeing conscription.

Domestic politics

Georgia is seen as one of the frontrunners in the region when it comes to democracy and human rights. The country scores relatively well on relevant international indexes, such as Freedom House, which describes it as 'partly free'. It further has a lively and vocal civil society, an active opposition and political plurality, which often results in harsh political confrontations and a high level of polarisation. Since 2012, the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition is in power with, currently, a constitutional majority in parliament. While doing relatively well in the areas of democratisation and human rights, there are still some concerns. One area of concern is media freedom in Georgia with an unprecedented number of physical assaults on journalists in 2021. Moreover, there is still a lack of accountability for abuse among law enforcement. Georgia also has a disproportionately strict drug policy and a long history of discrimination against the LGBTI community.

Opposition party United National Movement (UNM) has claimed that its prominent members are subjected to politically motivated investigations and trials, with its founder Mikhail Saakashvili unable to formally lead the party having lost his Georgian citizenship in 2015, after gaining the Ukrainian citizenship, and unable to return to Georgia as he is wanted by Georgian authorities. In a similar manner, in February of 2021 the UNM's leader Nika Melia was convicted of organizing "mass violence" during a 2019 opposition protest. The party claims the following arrest was purely politically motivated. Even though Melia was granted amnesty for the 2019 protests, the struggle between the UNM and GD continues on this issue.

There are also some concerns surrounding the role of GD founder and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili: there are allegations that he still wields quite some power behind the scenes while not having any formal (political) position. Ivanishvili's wealth has given him a distinct position of power in Georgian politics - his personal wealth is the same as one-third of Georgia's GDP. Informal actors having a big influence on political choices continues to be a challenge for Georgia. Additionally, critics say the judicial branch does not work independently from the government and the parliament, whose interests often affect the judges' decisions. Georgia is eager to continue improving its ties with the West by joining the EU and NATO. It has signed and ratified the EU Association Agreement (which includes the long-expected visa-free travel possibilities to most EU member states) and has strived for NATO membership since the Rose Revolution.

Georgia's EU bid

Georgia has aspired EU candidacy status since the Russian invasion of its northern provinces Abkhazia and Northern Ossetia. Its pathway to become candidate in 2024 had been accelerated due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, subsequently handing in its EU bids alongside Moldova and Ukraine in March 2022. In June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova acquired a positive EU endorsement, however Georgia remained empty-handed. The European Commission established Georgia's eligibility to become a member of the EU in the future. However, the commission also said that Georgia still has to fulfil key conditions on political polarization, media freedom, judicial reform, and "de-oligarchization", before granting a positive recommendation towards EU candidacy. The Commission will review the case of Georgia again at the end of 2022 to "assess how Georgia meets the number of conditions before granting its candidate status."

The "de-oligarchization" of Georgian society will be presumably be the key condition for Georgia to acquire EU candidacy. The current government, led by the Georgian Dream party is under major influence of oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili – whose capital equates one-third of Georgia's GDP. Earlier in June, the European Parliament passed a nonbinding resolution that called for sanctions on Ivanishvili for his "destructive role" in Georgian politics. Furthermore, the Georgian Dream-led administration has cracked down on media freedom, civil society and judicial independence. This all has been a major shake-up of Georgia being a frontrunning candidate for EU aspirations in Eastern Europe. The deferral of the European Commission led tens of thousands of Georgians to rally on June 20 in the capital Tbilisi.

National minorities in Georgia

Georgia is a multilingual and multi-ethnic country. National minorities enjoy full (political) rights under the constitution and make up of 13% of Georgia's population according to a 2014 census. The two largest national minority groups in the country are the Azeri (6%) and the Armenians (5%). Although Azeri and Armenians minority groups hold Georgian passports, the often consider themselves to be citizens of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Besides these groups, a variety of smaller groups live within the state borders. Nonetheless, studies commissioned by Carnegie showed in September 2020 that minorities consider themselves to be loyal towards the Georgian state. Only 16% considered their ethnicity more important than their Georgian citizenship. Because minorities do not often speak Georgian, their level of political participation is relatively low. Language barriers between speakers of Georgian and minority languages are considered to reinforce alienation of ethnic minorities. However, especially in the run-up to the latest presidential election, more information in Armenian, Azeri, Ossetian and Russian was provided.

There are no ethnic political parties, although several parties have included members of national minorities in lists and as majoritarian candidates, nominating them in districts where minorities form a substantial part of the population. To enhance integration of minorities in Georgia, the government established the Civil Integration and Tolerance Council. To further improve the integration of ethnic minorities in civic-nation building in Georgia, practical steps need to be taken to create a strategy which oversees equal and complete involvement of minorities in Georgian politics and society.

Gender participation and women's rights

While there are no legal obstacles for women, Georgian politics remain dominated by men. Previously, Nino Burjanadze was the woman to hold the highest political function, but she left the then-ruling UNM shortly before the parliamentary elections of 2008. However, in recent years there have been some improvements regards to gender inclusion in Georgian politics. Salome Zourabichvili was elected as Georgia's first female president in December 2018. In 2020 there have also been several electoral changes that guarantee participation of women in politics. Political parties require at least a quarter of their elected representatives to be female. This had led to at least 30 women out of a total of 150 MPs being elected.

On a local level, politics remains more male-dominated. Parties hold the opinion that they would like to nominate more female candidates, but the problem is rather that there are not enough women who want to take part. A career in politics is often seen as something 'unfeminine' in Georgian society, mainly because the political scene is often described as "rough-edged" and influenced by a "macho culture". Moreover, many women quit university when they marry or get pregnant and exchange their education for the family. Georgia has made much progress when it comes to adopting anti-discrimination legislation. However, gender stereotypes remain deeply rooted and a significant gap continues to exist with regards to economic participation and opportunities.

LGBTI rights

Georgia's LGBTI community face discrimination and challenges that non-LGBTI people do not have to face. Abuse and physical violence towards LGBTI people remains common as well. However, the country has been doing its best to get its human rights record somewhat in line with Western countries. In 2014 a big step was taken, when the discrimination against LGBTI people

became prohibited by law. Committing a crime based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity aggravates the prosecution. Same-sex marriage remains prohibited though, and in 2018 was even constitutionally banned. Previously, the constitution described marriage in a gender neutral way. That changed when President Zourabichvili was elected President in 2018. Several human rights organizations called on Georgia to legalize same-sex marriage.

As Georgia became more influenced by highly traditional Orthodox Christian values after the fall of communism, public opinion towards LGBTI people remained negative. A Pew Research Centre poll in 2016 still found that 93% of Georgians believed homosexuality should not be accepted by society. Yet, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) polls showed that the percentage of Georgians who think that LGBTI rights were important is increasing. In 2019 this accounted to 27%, with 38% among the age group of 18-35. This has much to do with football players like Guram Kashia expressing support for LGBTI rights, as well as Nino Bolkvadz running as the first openly gay politician in the 2017 local elections.

Elections

Electoral system

Georgia is a democratic republic headed by President Salome Zourabichvili. She was elected in December 2018 for a term of six years. The Georgian electoral system includes a single-chamber parliament with 150 seats. The parliament is elected for a term of four years through parliamentary elections. Georgia initiated constitutional changes to the electoral law in 2017, which included a one-time term of six years for the presidential position during the transitional period. The 2020 parliamentary elections were the first to take place after the electoral changes.

As said, the 2020 parliamentary elections were the first after recent electoral changes. The Members of Parliament (MPs) are still chosen in two stages, but the ratio and thresholds are different. 120 of the 150 MPs are elected through proportional representation, in which they have to reach an electoral threshold of 3%. In previous years, this used to be 5%. The 5% threshold was planned to remain intact for the parliamentary elections of 2024. The remaining 30 MPs are chosen through single-member constituencies in a second round. This means that parties choose candidates who will run on a district level to be elected. The participants have to obtain at least 50% of the votes in order to become part of parliament. If this threshold is not reached, the winner and the runner up will participate in another round to determine who gets the seat. The MPs are elected for a four-year term. Due to this new electoral system, the Georgian parliament became more diverse with an increased number of mainly smaller parties. Presidential candidates must obtain at least 50% of the votes and if this threshold is not met, a second round takes place in which the number one and two run against each other. The candidate with the most votes received will become the president.

Parliamentary Elections

On 31 October 2020, the first round of the Georgian parliamentary elections took place. Quickly after the voting was completed, it became clear that the biggest party, Georgian Dream (GD), had obtained the vast majority of seats again. This meant that GD would continue their eight-year rule, because it would not have been possible for the opposition to obtain a majority during the upcoming constituency round. However, the opposition parties did not accept the outcome and even rejected to enter parliament. They called for civilian protests, leading to mass-demonstrations in front of the parliament building. After the second round was completed on 21 November, GD had a total of 90 seats. The largest opposition bloc Strength is in Unity-United Opposition obtained 36 seats, European Georgia got five seats and Lelo for Georgia, Strategy Aghmashenebli and Girchi each received four. The smallest parties are Citizens with two seats and the Georgian Labour Party with one seat. Georgian parliament has a total of 150 seats, of which 120 are allocated through proportional representation and the remaining 30 via single member constituencies.

Election results 2020

Party	% votes proportional lists	Total seats
-------	----------------------------	-------------

Georgian Dream	48.22%	90
UNM-led Strength is in Unity-United Opposition	27.18%	36
European Georgia	3.79%	5
Lelo for Georgia	3.15%	4
Strategy Aghmashenebli	3.15%	4
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	3.14%	4
Girchi	2.89%	4
Citizens	1.33%	2
Georgian Labour Party	1%	1

The 2020 elections were the first since a constitutional change lowered the electoral threshold from 5% to 3%. This led to more smaller parties being able to actually enter parliament, making the political landscape more diverse. In June of 2019, United Unity Movement, European Georgia, the Labour Party and New Georgia formed a pre-electoral alliance. However, due to conflict within the coalition Aleko Elishvili left and formed his own faction Citizens, because he thought that the members were too pro-Russian and were only acting out of self-interest. Still, regardless of the problems within the movement, more than 30 small parties united under the name Strength is in Unity-United Opposition.

In future parliamentary elections, the parliament will transfer to fully proportional representation. It was also planned to keep the 5% intact, although a majority of the Georgian parliamentary parties support a 2% threshold for the 2024 parliamentary elections to encourage more political pluralism. Decreasing the threshold is also part of the Charles Michel agreement, which is important for Georgia's democratisation and European integration processes. From the 2024 parliamentary elections onwards, it is also forbidden to form an electoral bloc to meet the threshold requirement. Votes of parties that fail to cross the threshold will be entirely awarded to the winner.

Election observers

International observers from the OSCE have said that the 2020 parliamentary elections were competitive and that the political rights were overall respected. However, they did also mention that there had been some shortcomings, which led to a lower public confidence in the electoral process. The lines between Georgian Dream as a ruling party and the state were blurred during campaign time and there had been pressure on voters. Furthermore, the National Democratic Institute pointed out that there were cases of voter intimidation in and around multiple ballot stations and alleged pre-elections abuse of power. The European Union stated that it expects and hopes that all political parties would set aside their differences and enter parliament. In addition, United States (US) Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Georgia during election time, while thousands of people were protesting against the results of the first round. He did not make a statement regarding the outcomes, but he did say that the US would continue to support the country in building strong institutions and ensuring free and fair elections.

Presidential Elections

From 2024 onwards, the President of Georgia is elected through open ballot without prior debate on the Parliament floor. The presidency term will be for five years, with the transitional period (2018-2024) after several electoral changes were made being an exception with six years. The 2018 presidential elections were the last one to be held through direct ballot, in which the mandate was transferred to the college of electors (300 members). This college included MPs, local and regional government representatives. A president can only serve two terms and is eligible from the age of 40. The president must also have lived in Georgia for at least 15 years, although the previous requirement of living in Georgia for the last 3 years before the elections was removed after the electoral changes in the constitution.

On 28 October 2018, national presidential elections were held in Georgia to choose a successor for outgoing president Giorgi Margvelashvili. This round of elections ended neck and neck for the two top candidates for the position of president: Salome

Zurabishvili, an independent candidate backed by Georgian Dream, and Grigol Vashadze, running on behalf of the Strength in Unity movement, an opposition alliance led by the United National Movement (UNM). Davit Bakradze (European Georgia) and Shalva Natelashvili (Labour Party) came in third and fourth respectively. The other 21 candidates garnered less than 3% of the votes each. Since no candidate garnered the majority of votes needed to secure immediate victory, a second-round was held between Zurabishvili and Vashadze on 2 December 2018. It was the first time in Georgia's history a second round was needed in a presidential election

The second round was held on 28 November 2018. With 59.52 per cent of the votes Georgian Dream supported candidate,

Salome Zurabishvili, won the presidential elections in a runoff against the United National Movement opposition candidate, Grigol Vashadze. The Central Election Commission confirmed the result and said that the turnout was 56 per cent, which is 9 per cent higher than in the first round. Zurabishvili became the first female president of Georgia. She is also the first president with a migration background, having been born in France.

Candidate	Candidate	Votes % first round	Votes % second round
Salome Zurabishvili	Independent – backed by Georgian Dream	38.63 %	59.52%
Grigol Vashadze	Strength in Unity Movement	37.74 %	40.48%
Davit Bakradze	European Georgia	10.97 %	-
Shalva Natelashvili	Labour Party	3.75 %	-

Election observers

International watchdogs who closely monitored the elections on the ground in Georgia have been predominantly positive about the way they were conducted. The OSCE has stated that overall, the elections were calm and voters had a free and genuine choice, though some violations of electoral laws have taken place. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has stated that it agrees with these conclusions. Other watchdogs, like the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Transparency International (TI) have all noted that violations did take place, but that they have not significantly altered the elections or their outcome. All of these organisations noted the practice of several political parties trying to influence, or even bribe, voters, and have filed complaints against these misconducts.

Social Democratic Parties

Social-Democrats for Development of Georgia (SDD)

Party Leader: Ghia Jorjoliani

Number of seats: 0

The Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia (SDD) is a political party initially established by a group of students and their professor in February 2010. It is considered to be centre-left and pro-European. Since 2013, it holds the status of a consultative party within the Socialist International. It wishes to strengthen social democratic ideas in Georgia across the political spectrum. The party itself does not have any seats in the current parliament, but it has seven members in parliament as part of one of the majority

factions: Georgian Dream – Social Democrats.

Georgian Labour Party (SLP)

Party Leader: Shalva Natelashvili

Number of seats: 1

<https://www.labour.ge/en/>

The Georgian Labour Party (SLP) was founded in 1995 by Shalva Natelashvili. It is a centre-left faction that stands for social democracy, populism and pro-Europeanism. The SLP had not been in parliament since 2012, but managed to get 1 seats during the 2020 elections.

Other Parties

Georgian Dream (GD)

Party Leader: Giorgi Gakharia

Number of seats: 84

<http://41.ge/>

The Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GDDG) party was established on 19 April 2012 through efforts of the billionaire businessman and politician Bidzina Ivanishvili. The party is the key party in a coalition called Georgian Dream which holds 90 seats of the 150 seats available in parliament. Currently Giorgi Kvirikashvili is the leader of the party. GD was accused by opposition parties of rigging the 2020 parliamentary elections in order to stay the largest faction, which they rejected.

The party evolved from the public movement Georgian Dream, launched by Ivanishvili as a platform for his political activities in December 2011, soon after he announced that he would be entering politics. Since Ivanishvili was stripped of his Georgian passport – officially because of having other passports as well – lawyer Manana Kobakhidze was elected as an interim, nominal chairman of Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia. In 2012 GDDG won the parliamentary elections, and Ivanishvili became the Prime Minister. However, he only stayed PM for one year, as initially promised, to get the changes going and then 'retire' from politics. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that he still has a huge amount of influence on the party and on Georgian politics.

UNM-led Strength is in Unity–United Opposition

Party Leader: Mikheil Saakashvili, Grigol Vashadze

Number of seats: 36

Strength is in Unity is a political coalition established in July 2018. A total of ten parties are part of this opposition alliance: United National Movement, Serve Georgia, National Democratic Party, State for the People, European Democrats, Republican Party of Georgia, Christian Conservative Party, Civil Alliance for Freedom, Georgia Among Leaders and For an New Georgia. The coalition is considered to be centre-right, liberal, pro-European and standing for populism and civic nationalism. In the 2020 parliamentary elections they obtained 8 seats.

European Georgia

Party Leader: Davit Bakradze

Number of seats: 5

<https://www.europeangeorgia.ge>

European Georgia was established in January 2017, predominantly by former members of the United National Movement (UNM), who broke away from the faction. The party obtained 5 seats during the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Lelo for Georgia (Lelo)

Party Leader: Mamuka Khazaradze
Number of seats: 4
<https://lelo2020.ge>

Lelo for Georgia was established in December 2019, by Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, two businessmen. The party is considered to be centrist, liberal and pro-European. They first ran in the parliamentary elections of 2020, with the goal to end the eight-year rule of the establishment lead by Georgian Dream. They have 4 seats in parliament.

Strategy Aghmashenebeli (NG)

Party Leader: Giorgi Vashadze
Number of seats: 4
<https://ng.ge/>

Strategy Aghmashenebeli was founded in June of 2016 by Giorgi Vashadze, who had left the United National Movement (UNM). During the 2016 parliamentary elections, the party ran as part of the coalition State for a People. However, due to the electoral threshold being 5%, and the alliance only obtaining 3.5%, they could not enter parliament.

The faction ran without a coalition during the 2020 parliamentary elections and since the electoral threshold was lowered to 1%, they were able to obtain 4 seats.

Strategy Aghmashenebeli is considered to be liberal, progressive and pro-European.

Girchi

Party Leader: Iago Khvichia
Number of seats: 4
<https://girchi.com/>

Girchi was founded in 2015, by Zurab Japaridze, Pavle Kublashvili, Goga Khachidze and Giorgi Meladze, who all left the United National Movement (UNM). The party is right-wing, stands for classical liberalism, pro-Europeanism and anarcho-capitalism and targets youngsters who want to become politically active. It rejects standard party structures and is the first online Georgian faction.

During the 2020 parliamentary elections, the party obtained 4 seats.

Citizens

Party Leader: Aleko Elisashvili
Number of seats: 2

Citizens is a young political party established by Aleko Elisashvili, who used to be an urban activist, denouncing the country's establishment. During the 2020 parliamentary elections the faction ran for the first time and obtained 2 seats.

Biographies

Salome Zurabishvili

President

Salome Zurabishvili, born on 18 March 1952 in a Georgian migrant family in Paris, was elected as the first female President of Georgia with 59.52 per cent of the votes in November 2018. Zurabishvili grew up in France and spent most of her career in the

French diplomatic service before joining Georgian politics. She moved to Georgia as the French ambassador, but in 2004, she was named Minister of Foreign Affairs in Georgia under former President Mikheil Saakashvili.

She later fell out with the president, and in 2006 Zurabishvili established a new party, 'Georgia's Way'. But the party was not able to compete with the existing parties and in 2007 it became part of the United Opposition alliance. In 2010 she announced her withdrawal from the leadership of Georgia's way after disappointing results in the parliamentary elections and she quit politics altogether.

In 2013 Zurabishvili already tried to take part in the Presidential elections, but her participation was rejected by the Central Election Commission due to her dual citizenship.

In 2016 Zurabishvili was elected member of the parliament as an independent candidate, but her participation was supported by the ruling Georgian Dream. Her voting record and public statements were in line with Georgian Dream. In 2018 she announced her run for president again, as an independent candidate, backed by Georgian Dream, which had decided to not field its own candidate so as not to dominate all power positions in the country.

Salome Zurabishvili is not only the first female President but also the first President with a migration background.

Irakli Garibasjvili

Prime Minister

Irakli Garibasjvili (born June 28, 1982) has previously served as prime minister of Georgia from November 2013 to December 2015. He resigned without an official reason, but it was assumed that his low approval ratings impacted the move. His Georgian Dream party at enjoyed relatively low levels of support at the time as well. Garibasjvili is one of Bidzina Ivanishvili close allies. He has also served as minister of internal affairs and as the chairman of the Georgian Dream.

From September 2019 till February 2021 Garibasjvili was serving as the minister of defence. On 22 February 2021 he was reinstated as prime minister of Georgia, after his predecessor Giorgi Gakharia resigned. Gakharia hoped to de-escalate the political situation the country was in after the conviction of opposition leader Nika Melia, which he did not approve of. One of the first things Garibasjvili did was to order the immediate arrest of Melia.

Mikheil Saakashvili

Leader (in exile) of the United National Movement party (UNM)

Mikheil Saakashvili was born on 21 December 1967 and is the (informal) current leader in exile of the United National Movement (UNM) party in Georgia. He is in exile because he is officially wanted in Georgia on charges related to a violent dispersal of protesters in 2007, under his presidency. He graduated from the Institute of International Relations in Ukraine in the department of International Law. Following this, he received a Master of Laws from Columbia law school in the US. He was specifically interested in Human rights and has worked as a human rights officer for the interim State Council of Georgia for a short time. He is mainly known for his fight against corruption and for more transparency.

In 2000 he was appointed Minister of Justice. In this role, he initiated major reforms to the criminal justice and prison system which were applauded by international observers and human rights activists. Nevertheless, in 2001 he decided to resign from his position, accusing the government of being corrupt. In that same year, he founded the UNM party. After the peaceful Rose Revolution of 2003, which he led, the UNM won the elections in 2004 and Saakashvili become the President of Georgia. During his presidency, his main aim was to reduce corruption, gain EU and NATO membership for Georgia and to keep the relationship with Russia good. However, the relations with Russia deteriorated drastically after a brief war over the breakaway region of South Ossetia in August 2008.

Saakashvili ruled until 2012 when his party was defeated in the parliamentary elections and he was no longer able to form a government. He left the country in 2013 and during the period following his defeat, he supported Ukraine's movement to improve Ukrainian integration in the European Union. As Ukraine was going through major reforms following its 2014 Euromaidan revolution, it brought on different specialists that could help the country start its modernisation. In relation to this, Saakashvili was appointed as

the governor of Odessa, a region in Ukraine, in 2015. Due to this, he became a Ukrainian citizen and lost his Georgian citizenship, which meant that he is not allowed to be the formal leader of the UNM. He accuses the Georgian government of preventing him from running in the parliamentary elections of 2016 by taking away his Georgian citizenship. Eventually, he resigned from his job as a governor in Odessa in 2016, accusing the Ukrainian government of corruption. Since then he has also lost his Ukrainian citizenship, making him a stateless person. In February 2018 he was detained by the Ukrainian border police, which claimed he was entering the country illegally. The police deported him to Poland by plane and a court in Kiev rejected Georgia's extradition request. A Georgian court has sentenced him in his absence to three years in prison because of an apparent misuse of presidential powers while he was serving his term. As of March 2018, he remains in the Netherlands, where he has a right of residence due to his Dutch wife.

Bidzina Ivanishvili

Leader of Georgian Dream party

Ivanishvili is a public and political figure, businessman and philanthropist who was Prime Minister of Georgia from 25 October 2012 to 20 November 2013. Ivanishvili founded the Georgian Dream party on 21 April 2012. In 2019, Ivanishvili returned to politics and was elected as the chairman of the party. Ivanishvili often used his power to secure the position of the Georgian Dream party. Like in June 2017, when the Dream Party's presidential candidate seemed to be headed for defeat, the government announced that a charity Mr Ivanishvili directs would cancel the debts of 600,000 citizens, an act valued at roughly \$560 million. Political opponents called it one of the biggest vote-buying exercises in history.

Grigol Vashadze

Presidential candidate UNM for Georgian presidential election

Grigol Vashadze, born on 19 July 1985 in Tbilisi, was the Presidential candidate of United National Movement (UNM) in the 2018 Presidential elections.

From 1990 till 2018 Vashadze was mostly living in Moscow and New York, but he returned to Georgia in 2005.

Vashadze held various diplomatic positions. He was a staff member of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2008 till 2012 under Mikheil Saakashvili.

Vashadze is with UNM leading an alliance consisting of ten conservative/liberal opposition parties.

Davit Bakradze

Leader Movement for Liberty-European Georgia

Davit Bakradze, born 1 July 1972 in Tbilisi, was the candidate of Movement for Liberty - European Georgia in the Presidential elections, 2018. In a highly polarized political field, divided between the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) and the opposition United National Movement (UNM), he managed to come in third, with close to 11% of the votes.

Bakradze was elected in 2004 to the Parliament of Georgia for United National Movement (UNM). Before he entered the parliament Bakradze worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia from 1997 to 2002 and for the National Security Council of Georgia from 2002 to 2004.

In 2008 Bakradze became the Minister of Foreign Affairs and in the same year, he was named to lead UNM during the parliamentary elections. In 2008 and 2012 Bakradze lead UNM in the parliamentary elections, which lost in 2012 to Georgian Dream.

In 2013 Bakradze became the UNM's candidate in the presidential election, but UNM lost the elections again to Georgian Dream. An internal disagreement within UNM caused a breakaway faction in the parliament and the party Movement for Liberty-European Georgia was established. The party is led by Bakradze.

Bakradze participated for the second time in the presidential elections in 2018 and ended up third. In the second round of the election, his party supported UNM's candidate.

Source

Elections and political situation

- [Alfred Mozer Stichting: Report Assessment visit to Georgia](#)
- [BBC News Laywer claims Georgia Presidency](#)
- [Country Profile Georgia](#)
- [Civil.ge](#)
- [Elections.ge](#)
- [Electionworld.org](#)
- [Eurasia.net: Georgia prepares for new parliamentary election](#)
- [ICG: Georgia: What now? 3 December 2003](#)
- [OSCE Election Reports](#)

Corruption

- [RFE/RL Georgia: Saakashvili Raising Hopes That Corruption May Be Tackled In Earnest](#)
- [Transnational Crime and Corruption Centre](#)
- [Transparency International Corruption Index](#)

Georgia's separatist regions

- [BBC: South Ossetia](#)
- [Civil.ge](#)
- [ICG: Saakashvili's Ajara success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?](#)
- [ICG Crisiswatch September 2004](#)
- [Institute for War and Peace reporting](#)
- [Transitions Online \(March-August 2004\)](#)

Geopolitical situation

- [BBC Russia warns Georgia after threat](#)
- [CSIS: Iraq and the Caucasus](#)
- [European Commission: EU's relations with Georgia](#)
- [European Neighborhood Policy](#)
- [IIAS Newsletter, article M.P. Amineh: Rethinking Geopolitics in Post-Soviet Central Eurasia](#)
- [Transitions Online \(March – August 2004\)](#)

Economic situation and poverty

- [BBC: Russian tycoon to reform Georgia](#)
- [Civil.ge](#)
- [UNDP Georgia](#)

Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline

- [BTC](#)
- [Eddie news centre BTC pipeline construction suspended](#)
- [Friends of the Earth](#)
- [Goldman Prize recipient](#)
- [Independent.co.uk Exposed: BP, its pipeline, and an environmental time bomb](#)

Political Parties and Blocs

- [CSIS Caucasus Elections Watch](#)
- [Elections.ge](#)
- [ICG: Georgia: What now? 3 December 2003](#)

Biographies

- [RFE/RL](#)
- [Civil.ge](#)
- [The Telegraph](#)
- [Government.gov](#)