Election Watch for the Digital Age

Georgia

Preelection assessment

Parliamentary elections set for October 2020

Georgia's October election is expected to be highly competitive, despite recent democratic backsliding. It is the first election under a new, mixed proportional-majoritarian system, which is intended to reduce polarization and level the playing field for opposition parties. United National Movement (UNM), the former ruling party, is widely seen as the most serious challenger to the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Informal power plays a significant role in the Georgian political landscape as demonstrated by the influence of oligarchs, former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's continued leadership of Georgian Dream, and former president Mikheil Saakashvili's control of the UNM. The impact of informal power is clearly seen in the media, which is highly partisan. The October vote is likely to feature many of the challenges reported in previous elections, including the misuse of administrative resources and various forms of vote buying and intimidation.

Georgia has a score of 68 out of 100, with 100 representing the least vulnerability in terms of election integrity, on Freedom House's Election Vulnerability Index, which is based on a selection of key election-related indicators. Georgia's score reflects relatively well-administered elections; politicized institutions, including the media and judiciary; and inconsistent respect for the right to protest. The country is rated **Partly Free** in *Freedom in the World 2020,* with a score of 61 out of 100 with respect to its political rights and civil liberties; **Free** in *Freedom on the Net 2019,* with an internet freedom score of 75 out of 100; and as a **transitional or hybrid regime** in *Nations in Transit 2020*, with a score of 38 out of 100 for the country's democratic progress. To learn more about these annual Freedom House assessments, please visit the Georgia country reports for *[Freedom in the World](#)*, *[Freedom on the Net](#)*, and *[Nations in Transit](#)*.

Freedom House has identified the following as key issues to watch ahead of election day:

- **Influence operations:** There is substantial evidence that the government and other domestic and foreign political actors have carried out online influence campaigns, particularly during politically sensitive moments. Ruling and opposition parties were involved in online influence campaigns during the 2018 presidential election. More recently, in April 2020, Facebook removed hundreds of Facebook and Instagram accounts, groups, and pages affiliated with the Georgian Dream and UNM. Several influence operations have been tied to the Russian government and pro-Russian actors. Influence campaigns are highly likely during the 2020 election, but the potentially broad range of sources makes their impact difficult to predict.

- **Cyberattacks:** The Georgian government, private websites, the media, and financial institutions have been targeted by numerous high-profile cyberattacks from domestic and foreign sources in recent years. An attack in October 2019 that affected over 2,000 government and private websites was subsequently linked to Russia's GRU. Despite the Georgian government's efforts to combat hacking and other cybersecurity threats, digital security remains a potential flashpoint in the pre-election period.