

Georgia: repression intensifies following municipal elections

Description

The municipal elections in Georgia on 4 October confirmed the ruling Georgian Dream party's stranglehold on the state apparatus, following a campaign marked by an unprecedented climate of repression and a ballot boycotted mainly by the opposition. The government, whose victory was hailed by the Kremlin, is continuing its strategy of suffocating the opposition.



Less than a year after the parliamentary elections of October 2024, the irregularities of which had been denounced by observers and the results of which were not recognized by either the opposition parties or Western chancelleries, municipal elections were held on 4 October 2025 in 64 municipalities. The results confirmed the stranglehold of the ruling *Georgian Dream party* over the entire state apparatus, following a ballot boycotted mainly by the opposition. The demonstrations held on the same day, which were marred by violence, served as a pretext for the government to pursue its strategy of repression against members of the political opposition and civil society.

A fragmented opposition and a government strategy to eliminate checks and balances

The 2025 campaign demonstrated that the Georgian political scene remains permanently fractured, characterized by a total lack of unity within the opposition, which once again proved incapable of presenting a united front. Two opposition parties, *Strong Georgia – Lelo* and *For Georgia*, decided to participate in the elections. In comparison, the eight other parties of the former “Coalition for Change” (the fragile initiative led by former Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili during the 2024 parliamentary election campaign) decided to boycott the poll. They called on their electorate not to participate in the vote. In their view, their participation would only help legitimize a government that they still do not recognize as legitimate. On the other side, *Strong Georgia – Lelo* and *For Georgia* argued that their involvement could prevent the *Georgian Dream* from consolidating its hold on the state's institutions. This new split has led to further tensions within the opposition.

At the same time, civil society organizations and opposition parties continued to come under enormous pressure from the government, which was controlled by the *Georgian Dream*. In the space of a year, the government has passed [a multitude of laws](#) to [curb the media](#), observers, and independent *think-tanks* (one of them, the *Georgian Institute of Politics*, announced on 2 October that it was suspending its activities indefinitely). In addition, during the campaign, the leaders of the political opposition were systematically targeted. Six of them, in addition to the former president and leader of the *United National Movement (UNM)*, Mikhail Saakashvili, the regime's *bête noire*, received prison sentences during the campaign and were still in prison at the time of the election.

Finally, for the first time in the history of independent Georgia, no Western observers were able to attend the elections. Although the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights received an invitation, it was sent too late to

give the Office time to organize a mission. As for the independent local observers, deprived of funding sources, they stated that they were unable to carry out observation missions during the campaign and the vote.

The victory of the ruling party and the “non-revolution”

In short, the *Georgian Dream* did not face any threat to its ‘victory’. According to the Central Electoral Commission, the election was officially won with 81.7% of the vote, against a turnout of just 40%. The two opposition parties, *Strong Georgia – Lelo* and *For Georgia*, were only able to participate in half of the constituencies due to a lack of resources and staff: the former reportedly won 6.7% of the vote and the latter 3.7%. These results further solidify the ruling party’s control over the entire state apparatus, extending from the presidential to the legislative and now the municipal levels.

At the same time, thousands of people, including those from the regions, participated in the demonstration in Tbilisi, organized on Rustaveli Avenue at 4 pm the same day. This is the epicenter of the rallies against the government that have been held every evening since November 2024, marking their 311th day of mobilization. However, the demonstration on 4 October was intended to be a breakthrough: it had been called for by the famous Georgian opera singer Paata Burchuladze, who presented it as « *a peaceful revolution* » aimed at immediately overthrowing the government.

The announced objectives appeared unrealistic, particularly in view of the heavy police and judicial pressure exerted on the demonstrators over the last eleven months. In fact, the initiative received [an ambivalent reception](#) within the opposition. Several leading figures lent their support and joined in organizing the movement, including Levan Khabeichvili of the MNU (who was detained on 11 September). The *Lelo party* adopted a more cautious stance, while Pour la Géorgie denounced an “uncertain” and possibly “violent” project.

On polling day, the rally passed off peacefully until, after the polls closed, one of the opposition members called for a storming of the presidential palace on Orbeliani Square, below Rustaveli Avenue. While most of the participants refused, a minority responded: several individuals broke down the gate and entered the palace grounds. Special forces and police were called in, using water cannon and tear gas to repel and disperse the demonstrators. Around thirty civilians and members of the security forces were injured.

Immediate use of rhetoric similar to that of the Kremlin

The following day, at a special press conference, Prime Minister Kobakhidze denounced “*an attempted coup*” supported by “*foreign intelligence services*”, implicitly Western. Using the aggressive conspiratorial rhetoric that has become the norm in official Georgian Dream speeches since 2024, Kobakhidze lashed out violently at those allegedly responsible for the demonstration, the “Collective United National Movement” (a term referring de facto to all the opposition parties). He also characterized the events as yet another failure to organize a “*Natsmaydan*” (a pejorative contraction of “*Natsis*” in reference to the *UNM* and the Ukrainian Maidan revolution).

Several of these conspiratorial elements are reminiscent of those used by the Kremlin authorities in relation to the color revolutions, particularly the Maidan revolution. Their use reflects a rhetorical rapprochement with Russian positions.

At the same time, Tbilisi is multiplying its hostile actions towards its Western partners. The President of the OSCE was fined 5,000 laris (around €1,500) on 17 October, officially for “*obstructing the public highway*”, when she published a video in support of the demonstrators on Rustaveli Avenue. On 19 October, Berlin announced that it was recalling its ambassador for consultations, following several months of tension. In September, the British and German ambassadors had been accused of interference and summoned by the Georgian authorities.

A strategy of increased repression and the specter of the suppression of the opposition

In the wake of the Prime Minister’s conference, the Ministry of the Interior opened a criminal investigation and arrested five members of the opposition and several demonstrators (57 to 25 October 2025). On 13 October, the government also introduced amendments [that toughened detention sentences and increased fines for demonstrators](#).

This strategy of repression against the opposition could become even more pronounced: on 2 September, the Commission mandated by the government in February to investigate the alleged crimes of the UNM government between 2003 and 2012 published its [470-page report](#), a relentless and biased indictment that combines accusations of a “*coup d'état*”, “*human rights violations*” and “*provocations*” that led to the 2008 war, for which the UNM is blamed. The text also accuses all the current opposition parties (and NGOs) of working against the country's national interests. It remains to be seen whether the government will use this report as a further pretext to stifle the opposition.

Thumbnail: Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on 5 October 2025 (copyright: Facebook, official page).

* Margaux Rietzler is a Russian-speaking student at Inalco specializing in the former Soviet Union. She spent nine months in Tbilisi, from July 2024 to May 2025, completing internships at the French Embassy in Georgia and then at the Rondeli Foundation.

[Link to the French version of the article](#)

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Auteur-article : Margaux Rietzler*